MEMENTO MORI: ATTENDING TO THE DEAD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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The chapters of this dissertation examine scenes of death and dissection in American novels in the context of scientific, economic, and political changes during the long nineteenth century. Drawing on historical accounts as well as current critical interventions, I explore how writers wrestle with how the increasingly biological understanding of human life began shaping the body politic. The dead body provides an organizing principle as I develop a critical methodology for reading death in the nineteenth century against the grain of sentimentality and racial terror. By paying attention to dead bodies in genres of literature that eschew sentimentalism and didacticism in favor of satire and rebellion, I argue that the dead body can bear witness to the violence of white supremacy and capitalism, whilst also protesting these forces in material and discursive ways.

In the proto-science fiction/utopian novels of Robert Montgomery Bird's 1836 *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself,* Sutton E. Griggs' 1899 *Imperium in Imperio*, and Pauline E. Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*, serialized between 1902 and 1903, readers encounter scenes of the apparent death and dissection of Black and white protagonists. While Bird was a white physician and author writing in antebellum America, Griggs and Hopkins were Black authors writing post-Emancipation in the Jim Crow era. All three authors are united in observing how death's unruly presence resists the disciplinary technologies of biopolitics, racism, and sentimentality, and their weaponization against Black Americans. However, Griggs' and

Hopkins' utilize fiction and science to reposition death not as inevitable but as a form of rebirth which enables utopian experiments in Black freedom, Black life, and Black futures.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Philippa Chun received a B.A. Hons in English Language and Literature from the University of Oxford in 2008, an M.Sc. in United States Literature from the University of Edinburgh in 2014, and a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from Cornell University in 2023.

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INTRODUCTION

Attending to the Dead in Literature

I. “Laid to rest by a caring man”: The Stories Buried in American Cemeteries

In the summer of 2019, I visited Woodlawn cemetery in Elmira, a town in upstate New York. During the Civil War, Elmira housed a prisoner of war camp for Confederate soldiers. It was notorious for its mortality rate and nicknamed "Hellmira." The prison buildings have since been destroyed but you can still visit the cemetery where almost 3000 Confederate soldiers are buried. Those bodies were buried by the sexton of a local church, John W. Jones, a formerly enslaved man born in the south. Jones escaped from his enslaver in Virginia and traveled to Elmira where he worked a series of jobs before finding a permanent position as the sexton of Woodlawn. Jones received a set fee for burying each body. Headstones were erected in 1907 and today the thousands of white marble slabs fan out in orderly rows. Jones was known for the care with which he treated the bodies of the men fighting to keep him enslaved. He noted down each soldier's name and endeavored to return their personal effects to surviving family members. He even buried the son of his enslaver. A plaque was installed in 1997 to commemorate Jones' work. It reads:

> Between July 1864 and August 1865, 2973 Confederate soldiers were buried here with kindness and respect by John W. Jones, a runaway slave. They have remained in these hallowed grounds of Woodlawn National Cemetery by family choice because of the honorable way in which they were laid to rest by a caring man.

The plaque is effusive in its praise of Jones; he symbolizes the possibility of reconciliation – between north and south and Black and white – after the devastation of the Civil War. What the

plaque fails to mention is that Jones was a conductor on the Underground Railroad helping other enslaved people escape to freedom in Canada. His position as a sexton made him a central figure in the local community of Elmira and provided Jones with both a wage and useful cover for his activity as chief conductor, hiding people in his home until they could safely travel north.

Although erecting the plaque was an act of good will, it effaces Jones' radical politics. By emphasizing Jones' care and honor in dealing with the Confederate dead, he emerges as a sentimental figure that represents the possibility of reconciliation after the Civil War. Another memorial plaque was erected by a local school at Jones' own grave in 1997. This plaque mentions Jones' "care" for the Confederate men but also the fact that he aided 800 fugitives from slavery escape to Canada.

I open with this anecdote to show how paying attention to the dead in the nineteenth century does not always result in familiar stories about Black suffering and white violence. At first glance, the memorial to Jones' work burying the Confederate dead tells a narrative about race and power which implicitly supports the dangerous notion of slavery as a benevolent institution. Jones famously buried the body of his own enslaver's son and sent news of the death back to the man's family. However, if you make your way to the site of Jones' own grave, you encounter a more complicated man – someone who was "honorable" towards his enslavers while rescuing hundreds of enslaved people from the same fate. The story of John W. Jones indicates that sentimentalizing death obscures stories of Black resistance from below.

II. The Stakes of Reading Death: A Methodology

The chapters of this dissertation examine scenes of death and dissection in American novels in the context of scientific, economic, and political changes during the long nineteenth

century. Drawing on historical accounts as well as current critical interventions, I explore how writers wrestle with how the increasingly biological understanding of human life began shaping the body politic. The dead body provides an organizing principle as I develop a critical methodology for reading death in the nineteenth century against the grain of sentimentality and racial terror. By paying attention to dead bodies in genres of literature that eschew sentimentalism and didacticism in favor of satire and rebellion, I argue that the dead body can bear witness to the violence of white supremacy and capitalism, whilst also protesting these forces in material and discursive ways.

In the proto-science fiction/utopian novels of Robert Montgomery Bird's 1836 *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself,* Sutton E. Griggs' 1899 *Imperium in Imperio*, and Pauline E. Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*, serialized between 1902 and 1903, readers encounter scenes of the apparent death and dissection of Black and white protagonists. While Bird was a white physician and author writing in antebellum America, Griggs and Hopkins were Black authors writing post-Emancipation in the Jim Crow era. Yet all three authors are united in observing how death's unruly presence resists the disciplinary technologies of biopolitics, racism, and sentimentality, and in their weaponization against Black Americans in particular.

A handful of scholars have addressed what these texts have to say about biopolitics. Recent scholarship by Andrew Hebard has applied a biopolitical framework to Griggs' *Imperium* which I utilize later in this project. Ittai Orr and Stephen Knadler have both used biopolitical theories to investigate neurodiversity in *Sheppard Lee* (Orr) and in Hopkins' fiction (Knadler). However, there is a paucity of scholarship on how Bird, Griggs, and Hopkins address death as a scientific phenomenon and as the result of systemic violence. I engage a historicist approach to

the texts I discuss, reading each in relation to contemporaneous scientific, medical, economic, and literary theories, and the interchange between them.

These authors employ death as a contradictory literary trope which vacillates between upholding culturally dominant ideologies and challenging them in their fiction. I take a chronological approach to the texts I discuss, allowing the reader to track the development of scientific theories over time, and to witness how America's biopolitical project was reimagined by those it sought to oppress in the years between the publication of *Sheppard Lee* and the end of the nineteenth century when Griggs and Hopkins were writing. All too often, death has been interpreted in purely metaphorical terms by literary scholars. This approach is inevitable, and I do not reject it out of hand. Instead I narrow my focus to the ambiguous materiality of the dead body and its capacity to effect change in the world and impact relations between people and systems. Susanne Langer writes of the dead: "Like humans, objects can make things happen, but unlike humans, no alternative decisions are possible for them" (Langer 86).

Death in nineteenth-century literature must be approached with seriousness. It testifies to histories of ideological, systemic, and material violence that created modern America. Literature also provides us with the tools to read death against the grain of history. Genre, the traffic of ideas between science and literature, and a sense of injustice motivate Bird, Griggs, and Hopkins to do more than bear witness to historical injustices. Their novels resist, subvert, and reshape the "death-worlds" that ordinary Americans were thrust into. As Black authors, Griggs and Hopkins take on the additional burden of challenging the necropolitical conditions of Black life at the turn of the century. They create flawed utopias that confront the historical reality of Black death in order to imagine viable futures for Black life. Reading about death is often upsetting and rarely easy. I hope that this project demonstrates the insurgent power of death in literature to produce

counternarratives which restore dignity and representation to marginalized communities. I also argue that these novels provide us with tools to think critically about the politics of representation and the contemporary racial justice work.

III. Previous Scholarship and Historical Context

It is impossible to discuss death in the nineteenth century without mentioning how the Civil War inexorably changed the culture of death in America and ushered in the modern death industry. It made dead bodies simultaneously more and less visible to the nation by way of photography and mass media. In her illustrated volume on the art of the Civil War, Doranne Jacobson states that: "Photographs did their part to obliterate romantic or sentimental notions about war. What was truly new in Civil War photography was the depiction of death" (90). As the first photographed American war, graphic images of the battlefield were mass produced and made their way into homes around the country, appearing in newspapers and collected in expensive albums. One such album Alexander Gardner's seminal two-volume book *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (1865-66) includes an image of corpses on the battlefield titled "A Harvest of Death." Despite the increasingly visibility of the dead in photographs, most casualties of the war were buried in anonymous mass graves. Families were often denied the consolation of rituals like preparing their loved one's body for burial at home. The extraordinary death toll of the Civil War led to the establishment of the first national cemeteries. In her definitive book on the topic, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust writes:

> Gathered together in mass cemeteries with graves marshaled in ranks like soldiers on the field of battle, the dead became a living reality, a force in their very presence and visibility. They were also, paradoxically, a force in their anonymity. (352)

These cemeteries restored dignity and meaning to anonymous death in battle and gave the bereaved somewhere to mourn their dead regardless of whether they had a body (or body part) to bury. The neat graves lined "in ranks like soldiers" also commercialized death, birthing the modern death industry. As Greg Melville writes, "The burgeoning postwar funeral industry triggered the commodification of death just as American society in the late nineteenth century was becoming increasingly urbanized, secular, and capitalistic" (126).

Many of America's most celebrated and canonical nineteenth-century authors wrote prose and poetry about the carnage of the Civil War, including Walt Whitman, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Emily Dickinson, Ambrose Bierce, and Stephen Crane. Likewise, an immense amount of scholarship has also been produced on death and literature in this period.[1] Although I bookend this introduction with stories of the Civil War, I have chosen to focus on texts written before and after the war. I am interested in narratives that explore death outside of the carnage of wartime, instead focusing on the everyday reality of death for Americans during the long nineteenth century. The deaths that I write about in this project are rarely heroic or in service of a larger cause. They are often humorous or cynical. In choosing texts by Black and white authors written some sixty years apart, I am able to examine how biopolitical forms of governance developed across time and how they impacted white and Black communities differently; the hegemonic regime of slavery is distinct from the management of life by Black intellectuals in service of racial uplift at the turn of the century. The texts I write about examine the relationship between

[1] See Purcell, Bush, Wardi, Tuggle, and Sayre.

death, biopolitics, and science, and demonstrate how the science of race and racism develop over this period.

My work engages with existing scholarship on the interplay of death, literature, race, and biopolitics in nineteenth-century America. Historians and critics have long recognized the centrality of death to American culture in this period. As previously discussed, much of the scholarship on death has focused on the Civil War, which killed Americans on an unprecedented scale and had profound religious, social, and medical consequences. Other scholars have traced the way that anatomical sciences aided in the professionalization of medicine at the expense of the bodies of the Indigenous, Black, and otherwise marginalized (Sappol). Slavery looms large in any discussion of death, as its lethal machinery not only transformed Black bodies into disposable resources, killing millions of Africans during the Middle Passage, but cast those who survived the crossing into a state of social, legal, and civic death on American soil (O. Patterson; Holland). Finally, the genocide of Indigenous Americans continued throughout the nineteenth century and haunted the imaginations of white and Indigenous writers alike (Weinstock; Blanco).

My dissertation is in dialogue with recent scholarship in nineteenth-century studies which theorizes the body and its co-construction through literary and non-literary texts, specifically scientific, medical, and economic writing. Sari Altschuler's *The Medical Imagination: Literature and Health in the Early United States*, Emily Steinlight's *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and The Politics of Surplus Life*, and Rachel Ablow's *Victorian Pain*, contribute to my thinking on dead bodies in American literature. Altschuler's work on how nineteenth-century American fiction acts as a form of scientific experimentation offers a model for my exploration of how genre enables speculative encounters with death and the human body at various scales, from the individual to the social body. Steinlight's investigation of the relationship between the Victorian

novel and population increase draws upon biopolitical debates similar to those which animate my readings of American novels. Finally, Ablow combines medical history with readings of Victorian literary and philosophical texts to redefine the history and nature of pain and collapse distinctions between the suffering of the individual body and the social world. In examining death, I also seek to situate it as an experience whose consequences expand beyond its immediate temporal and spatial occurrence.

Most writing on death in nineteenth-century fiction interprets the dead body metaphorically, rather than asking what the inclusion of corpses, dissection, and reanimation reveals about the material conditions surrounding life and death in this period. In one of the few critical texts bringing together nineteenth-century U.S. literary scholarship and death studies, although he disavows the term "interdisciplinary" as applied to his own work, Russ Castronovo argues in *Necro Citizenship* that the dead were crucial to defining abstract ideals of citizenship in the nineteenth century. He writes:

> As both corporeal fact and political metaphor, death produces bodies whose materiality disturbs the impersonality of citizenship, but whose remove from sociopolitical life also idealizes the unhistorical and abstract nature of state identity. Death, then, structures political life in terms of aversion as well as desire. (1)

The lethal embodiment of women, Black people, Indigenous people, and the poor, placed them in greatest proximity to actual and civic death; this status became the enabling condition for the citizenship and humanity of a white American political body. This form of disembodied embodiment is particularly relevant in regard to the "living death" of slavery which denied legal rights, protections, and physical freedom to enslaved people.

A great deal of scholarship, including notable works from Sharon Patricia Holland, Orlando Patterson, Saidiya Hartman, and Christina Sharpe, has drawn attention to the precarity of Black life. These scholars emphasize the exclusion of Black Americans from civic life and legal protection as a form of social death; they conclude with depictions of how Blackness itself is constituted, in part, by its proximity to death. Sharpe describes the Black body as "the sign of immi/a/nent death," a state of life-in-death inaugurated by the Middle Passage, codified by the institution of slavery, and reinforced with lethal and ongoing racism and violence (71). Given this proximity, my work is in conversation with existing scholarship on the interplay of death, race, and biopolitics in nineteenth-century America. By applying a Black feminist biopolitical framework to the texts I study, this project tracks how both white and Black writers responded to the emergence of biopolitical governance of American life in the long nineteenth century. It also explores the role that science played in upholding white supremacy and the scientific ideas which frequently justified violence towards Black communities.

The rise of the life sciences in the nineteenth century and the development of evolutionary theory first by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and then Charles Darwin (1809-1882) meant that humans began to be conceived of as a species, part of the taxonomy of biological life. However, critics have drawn attention to the paucity of scholarship on the origins of biopower in the early Americas. Biopolitics as theorized by Michel Foucault and later Giorgio Agamben describes the regulation of populations at the species level, through a form of politics that works to optimize the life of certain groups while rendering other, marginalized groups disposable. Agamben initially determined the concentration camps of the Holocaust to be the "inaugural site of modernity: it is the first space in which public and private events, political life and biological life, become rigorously indistinguishable" (121). Since the publication of Foucault

and Agamben's work, the geographical scope and historical reach of biopolitics have expanded enormously, demonstrating its utility across a variety of academic disciplines and fields such as critical race studies, queer theory and affect theory (Chen; Puar).

Most useful for this project are historian Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and the reworkings of biopolitics by Black studies and Black feminist thinkers. Rather than the Foucauldian emphasis on Europe, Mbembe sees racism as a central technology of biopolitics whose reach extends outside of Europe and predates the events of the twentieth century. The term necropolitics acknowledges "that the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" and describes the state's willingness to kill subjects and cast them into death-worlds, such as slavery, in order to secure the sovereignty of others (Mbembe 186). Slavery, Indigenous genocide, and settler colonialism pre-date the emergence of biopolitical regimes of power but demonstrate the demarcation of groups as disposable by white European settlers to the Americas.

Black Feminist theory's engagement with biopolitics shapes my approach to the racial contours of nineteenth-century definitions of humanity, liberty, and citizenship. I am indebted to the work of scholars such as Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, and Alexander Weheliye who have all theorized biopolitics in the context of nineteenth-century America and its literature. Spillers, Wynter, and Weheliye place race at the center of their understanding of biopolitics to argue that the construction of the liberal human subject and the birth of modern capitalism required violently denying the humanity of Black people. Their revision of biopolitical theory to reflect the conditions of Black "bare life" experienced under slavery and in its wake is invaluable as I address textual moments when Black authors protest against their own dehumanization.

I interrogate what I consider to be the dominant historical paradigm for reading and writing about the dead body in nineteenth-century literature: the dead body as the object of sympathetic identification. A further extension in my project is to consider the dead body as a vehicle for the consolidation of racial identity and the transmission of racial terror. Kyla Schuller's writing on the relationship between affect and biopolitics greatly aids my examination of the political work done by genre and sentimentality during this period. She argues that sentimentality, the most popular literary genre of the nineteenth century, functioned as a technology of biopower. According to Schuller, a body's degree of impressibility – its ability to register sensations, meditate on them, and produce knowledge from them – indexed its racial identity: "racialized bodies were seen as overly excitable and functionally dead, due to the absence of the regulatory capacity to respond appropriately to their stimulations" (55).

Combining biological models of the body, notions of inheritance, and a pedagogy of feeling, sentimental literature trained its largely white readership to regulate their emotional responses in service of the project of nation-building.[2] Even texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's phenomenally successful *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), texts explicitly produced to support the abolitionist cause, positioned their white readers as feeling subjects moved to action by the suffering of enslaved Black people whose personhood was delimited by their excessive embodiment. The wounded and dying black bodies displayed in novels such as Stowe's articulate what, for Hortense Spillers, is the key distinction between freedom and slavery. Spillers asserts that "before the 'body" there is the "flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes

[2] See Shirley Samuels' edited volume *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* for a classic and enduring work of scholarship which cements the centrality of sentimentality to American literature and culture.

of iconography" (67). Non-fiction abolitionist texts such as *American Slavery, As It Is* (1839) and *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833) trafficked in taxonomies of Black pain, suffering, and death. These volumes collected white-authored and thus "authenticated" anecdotes that described cruelty to the enslaved in excruciating detail. They silenced enslaved people's voices and offered, in their place, Black bodies as visual testimony.

In response to these accounts of white violence, chapters two and three take inspiration from the work of scholar Britt Rusert. Rusert uses the term "fugitive science" to refer to the work of Black writers, scientists, and intellectuals who countered the claims of racial science by the constructing alternative epistemologies of race and the body, often outside of the segregated sphere of scientific professionalization. Although only the white physician Robert Montgomery Bird had formal medical training, Bird, Griggs, and Hopkins include white and Black doctors as characters in their novels. All three authors engage with scientific ideas but Rusert's work is particularly relevant to my exploration of how Black-authored texts utilize fiction and science to reimagine death not as the inevitable consequence of slavery and its afterlives, but as a rebirth which enables utopian experiments in Black freedom, Black life, and Black futures.

IV. Chapter Summaries

My first chapter centers on Robert Montgomery Bird's understudied 1836 novel *Sheppard Lee: Written by Himself,* written at a time of huge demographic change. I claim this northern novel as an early biopolitical text and situate it in the context of early American biopolitics. I read it alongside earlier intellectual inquiries into the problem of "surplus" bodies by thinkers such as Thomas Malthus and Benjamin Franklin to argue that *Sheppard Lee* raises concerns about the downside to population growth – an increase in mortality. I argue that the

protagonist's bodysnatching reveals a deep anxiety about how population growth, industrialization, and capitalism are starting to collapse the hitherto unassailable distinction between white and Black bodies. I conclude with the claim that death's anarchic presence in the novel unsettles white supremacist thought in unexpected ways that seem to perturb Bird, a white middle-class landowner.

Chapters two and three address two speculative novels by Black authors written at the turn of the century, some sixty years after Bird's novel was published. In the first section, I address the contemporary mistreatment of the human remains of people of color to demonstrate William Gladstone's famous claim: “Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness, the tender mercy of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loyalty to high ideals” (Quoted in Dougherty). I trace contemporary inequality towards the remains of the dead back to the nineteenth century, addressing how science and the violence of the Jim Crow era were used to terrorize Black Americans. In chapter two, I focus on Sutton E. Griggs' 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio*. Griggs was a Southerner and much of the novel is set in the American south. The novel faithfully depicts the violent racism of the period. However, I argue that Griggs stages scenes of apparent death which subvert the overidentification of Blackness with suffering. In this case, I propose that death provides an opportunity for a Black male protagonist to counter white scientific racism by using its ideas against his captors. This chapter, like the previous one, draws upon Black feminist scholarship, to consider the ethics of writing about Black death.

The third and final chapter analyzes Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio* alongside Pauline E. Hopkins' novel *Of One Blood: Or, the Hidden Self*, published serially in the *Colored American Magazine* from 1902 to 1903. This chapter traces Black women's exclusion from the masculinist

intellectual and political project of the "New Negro." Death is not an opportunity for resistance for the women of these novels who already inhabit a state of civic death. Limited by the Victorian-era ideals of True Womanhood and the respectability politics of the "New Negro Woman," there is no space for Black women in Black public and political life. I argue that the masculinist politics of the New Negro use Black women as representational, maternal figures rather than as intellectual equals. Hopkins' is critical of the exclusion of Black women from intellectual life, having been fired as editor of the *Colored American Magazine* due to clashes with Booker T. Washington over the politics of the magazine. However, Griggs' novel advocates for reproductive futurism, valuing female characters primarily for their ability to uplift the race by having children. This chapter demonstrates the limitations of death as a trope for Black female characters, particularly for those who embody the sexual trauma of slavery.

V. Conclusion: Burying the Dead

I return to the Civil War dead one more time. Arguably the most significant cemetery in the United States is Arlington National Cemetery, established in Virginia in 1864. Originally purchased in the 1700s, the 1100 acres included Arlington House and a plantation worked by hundreds of enslaved people. It was eventually inherited by Mary Custis Lee who married Robert E. Lee in the grand house. A month after Lee left Arlington to fight for the Confederacy, the property and estate was confiscated by Union soldiers. After emancipating the enslaved people on the plantation, the property became a military outpost before finally being transformed into an enormous military cemetery. This was done out of necessity (the existing burial sites were rapidly filling to capacity) but also to humiliate Lee. Lee's wife wrote in 1865:

> I learn that my garden laid out with so much taste by my dear Father's own hands, has all been changed, the splendid Forest leveled to the ground, the small enclosure allotted to his remains & my mothers curtailed & penned up by a narrow paling & surrounded closely by the graves of those who aided to bring all this ruin on their children & country. (Quoted in deButts, Jr. 318)

Happy to live in close proximity to the enslaved people laboring on her plantation, Mary Lee is horrified to discover that her family's remains are buried next to those of the Union soldiers fighting to end slavery, including regiments of Black troops.

According to Greg Melville, by the end of the Civil War the cemetery was home to 16,000 graves (134). This included almost 4000 formerly enslaved people who were buried in a segregated section at the very edge of the grounds; their grave markers were labeled "Civilian" or "Citizen" to demonstrate their newly free status (Dennee 2). Black soldiers who fought in the Civil War and later battles would be buried in segregated plots until 1948 when President Harry S. Truman issued an order to desegregate the military.

The seemingly endless, white lines of gleaming marble headstones conceal a complicated history of race: slavery and emancipation; Civil War and civil rights; segregation and integration. The cemetery demonstrates that the dead have always played a vital symbolic role in generating national myths of heroism and patriotism. Woodlawn Cemetery and Arlington Cemetery tell the stories of the dead but as importantly, they use the dead to tell stories. What stories do nineteenth-century authors want the dead to tell us?

CHAPTER ONE

"Hosts of human bodies...falling dead upon our hands":

Corpses, Capitalism, and the Problem of Self-Possession in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee*

I. Introduction

Midway through his 1836 novel, *Sheppard Lee: Written By Himself*, Robert Montgomery Bird dedicates a short chapter to one of the text's central dilemmas: how are new scientific disciplines, forms of governance, and economic systems changing the meaning and value of human life in the nineteenth century? Bird sets out a demographic thought experiment for the reader:

> According to the computation of philosophers, the population of the world may be reckoned in round numbers at just one thousand millions; of which number the annual mortality, at the low rate of three in a hundred, is thirty millions—and that without counting the extra million or two knocked on the head in the wars. Let us see what benefit might be derived from a judicious disposition of this mountain of mortality—I say mountain, for it is plain such a number of bodies heaped together would make a Chimborazo. (228)

Bird's reference to the "computation of philosophers" suggests an awareness of the ongoing debates of political economists on population growth. The passage mingles the satirical with the gothic as it summons a grotesque image of a vast pile of corpses the size of the volcano Mount Chimborazo in Ecuador. In the aggregate, individual human lives are transformed into statistics and their bodies transposed into spatial metaphors of surplus death. The global death toll is so

enormous that a visual metaphor is needed to render the new scale of population calculation intelligible.

In this passage, all references to the sacred aspect of death and any accompanying sentimental rites are entirely absent. There is no mention of a heaven or god, only the material reality of death. As the chapter continues, corpses are described as organic matter that can "be converted into objects of great usefulness and value" such as manure, oil, and even soap, the latter honor being pointedly reserved for corrupt politicians (227-228). The chapter's humor is clearly aimed at the rich and the powerful. But it also demonstrates Bird's cynical awareness that to those in power, the average citizen, dead or alive, is little more than biopower in need of extraction to enrich an elite governing class. In this chapter, I will examine how the emergence of a market economy, the fragmentation of natural history into specialized disciplines such as biology (Farber 148), and the conceptualization of humanity as a species form the backdrop to *Sheppard Lee*'s anxieties about the ability to maintain racial and class distinctions in life and after death.

Robert Montgomery Bird graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in medicine in 1827. He opened his own medical practice in the city and for a short time was a practicing physician. Yet his true calling was literature. A prolific author, he published several works while a student. After leaving medical practice, he wrote plays, novels, poetry, medical treatises, and journalism. He edited several magazines and became part owner of one, *The North American Magazine and United States Gazette*. While writing more or less continuously, Bird also returned to his alma mater to teach medicine and briefly pursued a political career.

Bird's restlessness and continued interest in medicine appear everywhere in his novel *Sheppard Lee*. As a novelist, Bird takes a scientific and satirical eye to a national body in flux.

Written during a period of enormous social, political, and economic change, including the formation of the American republic, the rise of market capitalism, and the swelling of the nation's population, *Sheppard Lee* combines generic tropes from proto-science fiction, sensationalist literature, gothic horror, satire, and the picaresque mode to reflect upon and interrogate these changes.

The novel is the "found" autobiography of its titular protagonist, Sheppard Lee, who has recently lost his land, wealth, and genteel status. While desperately hunting for buried treasure to restore his fortune, Lee dies in an accident. He discovers to his surprise and relief that he has the power to will his spirit into a recently deceased body. This revivifying power offers Lee a second (not to mention a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth) chance to revive his fortunes and return to a life of leisure, having squandered his inheritance in dubious financial schemes. As a plot device, Lee's supernatural ability provides what Christopher Looby describes in his introduction to the novel as a "map of the American society and a taxonomy of American social types and roles [...] religion, region, nation, age, condition, profession, moral constitution, race" (xxix). The novel's peripatetic plot is propelled by Lee's sojourns in the bodies of the recently deceased, but the device also permits Bird to engage in metaphysical speculation drawing directly on his medical training.

Lee soon realizes that the possession of each new body does not simply clothe his spirit in new garb; instead he takes on the characteristics and temperament of the body he inhabits. As a miser, he becomes more parsimonious; as a philanthropist, he seeks inadequately to aid those in need. Bird proffers a uniquely materialist philosophy of the self: “that a man's body is like a barrel, which, if you salt fish in it once, will make fish of every thing you put into it afterward" (Bird 209). Unlike Cartesian models of the human form, body and soul emerge as inseparable

and co-constitutive. Corporeality and its concomitant racialization appear central to the production of selfhood in a radically material understanding of identity. By the close of the novel, Lee inhabits, or perhaps steals, six bodies before finally recovering his own. The plot necessarily relies upon Lee's access to a steady supply of corpses. Although the novel begins and ends in rural New Jersey, with a dramatic excursion south to Virginia, the ease of access to corpses is a consequence of the action taking place in Philadelphia. The city – crowded, disease-ridden, riot-prone, and anarchic – appears as the key site for Bird's exploration of an increasingly diverse, modern America.

Despite the frequently satirical presentation of death in Bird's novel, *Sheppard Lee* demands that we take death seriously. By examining its effects at the level of the individual and the population, Bird responds to economic, demographic, and scientific changes which contributed to the emergence of the biological "as the key subject and agent of history" (Schuller 3). Although Black Americans, Indigenous Americans, and other minorities of color suffer the most as a consequence of this turn towards the biological, Bird details the challenges that this species-level thinking posed to ideologies of national identity and white supremacy. He cannot imagine a scenario in which an individual, Black or white, engages with the market economy and the increasing quantification of human life and does not end up dead. In the novel's final section, Lee, having succeeded in repossessing his original body, returns to his father's farm, the one he lost at the beginning of the novel as a result of poor financial decisions, speculation, and mismanagement. He is delighted to discover that in his absence his sister and brother-in-law have returned it to its former glory; they happily deliver it back into Lee's hands. No longer attempting to manipulate the market and fully in control of his property – both the "tenement" of his body and his land – the novel closes by offering a rather trite moral lesson as Lee claims to

have “learned to be grateful to Providence that it ordained me to a lot of toil, wherein I find the truest source of health, self-approbation, and happiness" (Bird 424). Content with what he has, Lee no longer desires to increase his property or his fortune and, rejecting marriage, he pledges to leave his estate to his nephew, also named Sheppard Lee.

Lee’s retreat into his pastoral idyll, his refusal to marry, and the convenient appearance of a surrogate son who shares his name finalize his complete removal from the values and forces of the marketplace. By adopting his nephew, Lee manages to reproduce himself like for like without recourse to procreation. He circumvents Malthus’ second natural law which declares that passion between the sexes will remain constant and lead to the production of a population in excess of its ability to feed itself. Unlike his father, Lee will not need to rely on death to cull his family so that he can leave them with a viable inheritance. Lee tries opting out of capitalism by refusing to profit from his land, an attempt to escape the violent congealment of capital in bodies by refusing reproduction. But this requires his retreat to an earlier and ultimately unsustainable agrarian economy, a temporary measure in the face of urbanization and modern capitalism. Lee’s return to his land does not offer a solution to these changes as much as it underlines the totalizing nature of capitalism. Like a doomsday prepper attempting to live off grid to avoid the fallout of global financial crises, Bird’s vision is a convenient fantasy of impossible retreat.

II. The Quantity and Quality of Human Life in the Nineteenth Century

From hypochondria to the theory of sympathy between the organs, recent scholarship has attended to the integral role of medical discourse and materialist philosophy in the novel. Scholars including Sari Altschuler, Justine Murison, and Ittai Orr recognize *Sheppard Lee's* value in demonstrating that literature and medicine were compatible epistemological tools for

investigating the workings of the human body for most of the nineteenth century. Critics including Peter Jaros, Jordan Stein, D. Burton Emerson, and Edward Sugden have also written about the novel's engagement with law, democracy, and market forces. I draw upon such scholarly discussion of capitalism's centrality to the text. However, I focus instead on the novel's underexplored engagement with America's rapidly increasing population, and the biopolitical processes by which people began to be managed. I argue that by examining how Bird wrestles with these coterminous developments we expand our understanding of how biopolitics functioned in nineteenth-century America, both at the edge and outside of the spectacular sites of the plantation and the colony. Such an approach illuminates the affective dimensions of rapid demographic and economic changes for those experiencing them. It also exposes how literature grapples with scientific developments that fundamentally alter how individuals and communities understand and represent themselves. By understanding population as a subject which organizes the novel, *Sheppard Lee* mobilizes genre to articulate novel ways of thinking about this new accumulation of life. I argue that the novel reveals anxiety concerning the incompatibility of republicanism with the nation's rapid growth and increasing racial diversity, the transition to understanding human life in primarily biological terms, and, perhaps Bird's greatest fear, that "a man may be more useful after death than while living" (227).

As the novel makes apparent, Bird's fears about the value of human life extend only to those granted full humanity in the nineteenth century. Considering such questions in the twenty-first century, the theorist Alexander G. Weheliye observes:

> In the context of the secular human, black subjects, along with indigenous populations, the colonized, the insane, the poor, the disabled, and so on serve as limit cases by which Man can demarcate himself as the universal human. (24)

White supremacy has historically depended upon the degradation of racialized minorities and their exclusion from the category of human. In theorizing biopolitics in the American context, both Achille Mbembe and Weheliye note that Black and Indigenous people had been treated as disposable since America's colonization (Bergner). Settler colonialism relied on Indigenous genocide for land and the establishment of slavery in the Americas and in European colonies to provide free labor. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the discourses of science and medicine established racial difference, creating racial taxonomies which justified the violence and subjugation of non-white bodies. Along with scientific and religious discourse, capitalism's commodification of human life and labor was central to the construction of race. Many of the practices of American capitalism originated from chattel slavery. Racial capitalism made the accumulation of wealth reliant upon the creation and exploitation of a racialized other (Robinson). Chattel slavery located white capital in enslaved Black bodies while denying enslaved people legal protection, rights, and full personhood meaning that, as Hartman writes, "the enslaved could neither give nor refuse consent, nor offer reasonable resistance, yet they were criminally responsible and liable" (*Scenes of Subjection* 82). The enslaved were possessions of white enslavers; they could not possess themselves as sovereign, human subjects.

Yet pro-slavery advocates were quick to argue that the enslaved labored under more favorable conditions than many poor whites living in urban, industrialized areas. Pro-slavery advocates pointed to the dangerous working conditions and long shifts that working class laborers endured in the cotton mills of Great Britain. In an article on child labor and the British industrial revolution, Carolyn Tuttle states that "children as young as five and six years old worked for twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week without recess for meals in hot, stuffy, poorly lit, overcrowded factories to earn as little as four shillings per week." Parliament began to

pass bills such as the 1833 Factory Act which banned children under the age of nine from working and mandating maximum shift lengths for child workers ("1833 Factory Act"). Abolitionists made the same connections between slavery and labor rights but as Eric Williams writes in his foundational text, *Capitalism and Slavery*, capitalism in Great Britain "depended upon the slave-grown cotton of the United States, equally connected with slavery and polluted with blood" (152). Industrialization led to dehumanizing labor conditions for the poor who found themselves working in brutal, dangerous conditions. However, it also provided the opportunity for solidarity between white workers and enslaved people. In 1862, mill workers in Lancashire voted to refuse to refine cotton picked by enslaved Americans in an act of transatlantic, interracial solidarity (Rodrigues).

Reading *Sheppard Lee* in the context of economic changes, including the emergence of market capitalism, I argue that the inescapable presence of dead bodies in the novel registers Bird's ambivalence as to the growth in population, commerce, and the seeming fungibility between the two in the nineteenth century. The novel is concerned with the flipside to both population *and* economic growth – in terms of the corpses produced and the violence of capitalism. Lee's voyage via various bodies, facilitated by his convenient proximity to corpses at every turn, allows Bird to communicate the affective shock of seeing the body not as a sacred vessel but rather a vehicle for the transmission of capital. Similarly, Bird observes that family structures are increasingly reducible to nodes in a network of financial transactions.

Black bodies had long been subject to processes of violent quantification – from the assignation of financial value to human life by slavery to the three-fifths compromise of 1787. What Bird finds so disturbing is that as population increases and market capitalism becomes further enmeshed in both the public and private spheres, white bodies are increasingly subject to

the same violent reduction of identity to capital long experienced by Black Americans. Examining *Sheppard Lee,* I argue that despite the racializing violence of biopolitics and capitalism, the ideology of white supremacy fails to guarantee the freedom or safety of white land-owning men such as Lee who superficially resembles Bird, another white land-owning, educated northerner. That is not to say that Lee is subject to anything close to the level of violence and oppression faced by Black characters in the novel, or that Bird himself did not benefit enormously from his whiteness. What I do suggest is that even the most hegemonic systems of racial oppression such as white supremacy are vulnerable to being undermined by the scientific and economic discourses that constitute them.

This chapter not only seeks to contribute to the small but growing body of work on biopolitics in nineteenth-century American literature, it also invites scholars to take the dead seriously in material ways rather than reading them only as figurative motifs or for their potent symbolism. Death is omnipresent in the novel. It must be, as the plot relies on access to a fresh supply of dead bodies. But where do they come from? In Bird's lifetime, the population of Philadelphia doubled because of rapid urbanization. Cities swelled as America underwent a market revolution which saw a largely agrarian economy transform into a febrile version of modern capitalism. At the same time, Philadelphia became home to one of the largest populations of free Black Americans, placing free Black and white bodies in ever closer proximity. Urbanization increased enormously from the 1830s onward (Boustan et al. 4). Immigration, poor sanitation, and overcrowding led to disease epidemics and increased mortality rates in cities. Periodic outbreaks of yellow fever continued to kill Philadelphia's residents during the first half of the nineteenth century as did serious epidemics of other diseases including Asiatic cholera. One yellow fever epidemic occurred in 1832, only four years before the

publication of *Sheppard Lee*. The presence of dead bodies in the text attest to the very real dangers of urban life with its high rates of infant mortality and frequent outbreaks of epidemic diseases. As the crowding of bodies increased so did the death toll.

I focus on corpses as much, if not more so, than the protagonist of *Sheppard Lee* or the novel's cast of eccentric living characters. Dead bodies do not simply provide a useful plot device for Bird's experiments in Jacksonian America, nor are they used in notably metaphorical ways. As I argue in my introduction, dead bodies act as sites for the contestation of ideologies of race, class, gender, capitalism, and most importantly, the human. For Bird, the dead body is simultaneously the object of disciplinary forces that produce medical and racial knowledge – the novel features a scene in which Lee as an enslaved man is dug up from his grave and electrocuted as part of a galvanic experiment – and an anxiety-inducing palimpsest that exceeds the meanings imposed upon it. The excessive meaning generated by death is registered by the novel's uneasy stylistic mingling of satire, the gothic, and the didactic, which attempt to bring order to death's chaos.

Bird's overwhelming focus on death and his satirical approach invite us to read mortality in the context of the social-historical forces which govern life and death in this period and also through literary genre. The use of satire reflects Bird's rejection of sentimentality as a literary genre, invoking sentimentality instead as a biopolitical regime, to draw upon Kyla Schuller's theorization of "sentimental biopower," which I will later discuss. The vast numbers of dead bodies in the novel become an anarchic presence. At times, corpses simply bear witness to the fatal violence of slavery, white supremacy, and the technologies by which certain groups are rendered disposable. But at other moments, the presence of the dead emerges an unsettling reminder to white readers that they are unable to remove themselves from the reaches of

capitalism and biology. In *Sheppard Lee*, white bodies are just as vulnerable to violence and death as Black ones challenging the epistemological basis of race and racial subordination which secured white supremacy.

III. Race and Surplus Life

Various scholars have examined the influence of rapid demographic change on narrative form in the nineteenth century. For example, Emily Steinlight analyzes how the Victorian novel responded to the explosion in "surplus life" during this period. She argues that Victorian writers such as Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens used fiction to grapple with Britain's economic, political, and physical landscape as understood through the lens of demographic change and the ideas of political economists including Harriet Martineau and Thomas Malthus. In *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Malthus predicted that "positive checks" to growing populations such as starvation and war would occur unless population size could be curbed through "preventive checks" such as delaying the age of marriage or limiting procreation. Yet the idea of a nation's population surpassing its ability to produce food seemed a distinctly European problem to most Americans. The continent's vastness, the seeming endlessness of its frontiers questioned the central premise of Malthus' argument – that there was not enough land to support industrializing nations – and few scholars have attended to American literature in light of Malthus' argument despite his own reliance on early American demographic calculations.

Malthus' formula for population increase was based on an eighteenth-century essay written by Benjamin Franklin who, unlike Malthus, responded with enormous optimism to the demographic changes occurring in America. From 1700 to 1750, the population of the nation

more than quadrupled. By 1800, the population, at least those considered worth counting,[3] is estimated to have been around 5,300,000. Franklin's essay "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind and the Peopling of Countries" (1751) relies upon metaphors drawn from the natural world, indicative of how natural history was put to ideological use to naturalize racial and ethnic hierarchies. Franklin compares Englishmen to fennel, evoking the "planting" metaphors that were used to naturalize the doctrine of *vacuum domicilium* during the early colonial period:[4]

> There is in short, no Bound to the prolific Nature of Plants or Animals, but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each others Means of Subsistence. Was the Face of the Earth vacant of other Plants, it might be gradually sowed and overspread with one Kind only; as, for Instance, with Fennel; and were it empty of other Inhabitants, it might in a few Ages be replenish'd from one Nation only; as, for Instance, with *Englishmen*. (156)

In this passage, men, plants, and animals reproduce in the same way, their expansion checked only by competition over natural resources. By introducing Englishmen to a land "empty of other Inhabitants," Franklin evokes the erasure of Indigenous American and enslaved peoples' claims to land via settler colonialism. In fact, Franklin goes further, describing a world scrubbed of all non-white inhabitants and waiting to be repopulated in a fantasy of global white supremacy. Although Franklin ultimately concedes to the stubborn existence of non-white inhabitants in the essay, he concludes by suggesting that the exclusion of all "Blacks and Tawneys" might increase

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[3] Predictably, Indigenous Americans were excluded from the census.

[4] For one such example, see John Cotton's sermon "Gods Promise to His Plantation" published in 1630 and which, like many contemporary Puritan rationales for the colonization of America, draws upon 2 Samuel 7:10: "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more" (*Bible).*

“the lovely White and Red” population of America, an early expression of a biological understanding of population management and national identity (152). Franklin’s preference for colonization by white European immigrants, those who resemble himself, is expressed as a natural human sentiment shared by all races, further obscuring racial ideology beneath natural law.

Much of Franklin’s excitement at the prospect of population increase rests upon a utopian vision of white racial homogeneity bolstered by a sense of the enormity of the North American continent which will necessitate "many ages to settle [it] fully” (152). For Franklin, what makes America so uniquely suited to population increase is its size, the availability of cheap land, and the high wages paid for labor (hence Franklin’s distaste for slavery on purely economic grounds), all of which enable men to start a family earlier than most Europeans and to produce more children. He calculates that population of America must double every twenty years and it is this figure that Malthus seized upon later in his more pessimistic calculations.

The rejection of Indigenous claims to the land and the genocide of Indigenous Americans by white European settlers must be understood as the beginning of what would later become a uniquely American form of biopolitics. Such a form was perhaps most fully realized with the coterminous development of slavery and capitalism, aided by racial science and what Alys Eve Weinbaum refers to as the *slave episteme*: "the thought system, brewed up and distilled over the course of four centuries, that initially enabled and continues to subtend the racialization of (re)production" ("The Slave Episteme" 4). Put simply, if biopolitics means governing a population as a species to maximize the survival of the nation, with the efficient extraction of capital from that population determined to support it, new technologies and metrics were required to maximize this success in the nineteenth century.

Literary scholar and historian Molly Farrell has written extensively on population discourse in early American colonial writing, and how it was shaped by and put in service of settler colonialism. Farrell emphasizes how death has always been central to understanding populations. In colonial America, the publication of mortality bills in local newspapers was one of the first ways that small, isolated communities could understand themselves in collective terms (Farrell 206-7). These texts gave rise to a set of *imagined communities*, to use Benedict Anderson's term, whereby towns built identities through a comparative framework of biological data. The health and prosperity of one town could be quantified by comparing the number of people killed by epidemic diseases there to the mortality rates of another nearby town. As Farrell concludes "the popular bills of mortality circulating throughout the Anglo-American colonies are, in a sense, necropolitical visions of a social multitude [...] Through vacancy and death, the vitality of a city becomes visible" (207).

The first national census occurred in 1790 under the direction of then Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson. The historian James H. Cassedy describes how demographic data was used by politicians such as Jefferson and George Washington to bolster the recognition of America as a significant actor on the world stage in military and economic terms (217). Demographic data gave the American republic a new way of understanding and binding together its constituent members using data which could be measured, compared, and quantified. Nineteenth-century American economists, although greatly influenced by British classical economic thought, found it easy to dismiss Malthus' ideas by reiterating the vastly different problems faced by populations in Europe and America. For American politicians, there was strength in numbers, which makes Bird's pessimistic attitude towards population growth all the more unusual.

Using population change as a lens for reading *Sheppard Lee* illuminates how concepts such as personhood and humanity are ontologically redefined in response to enormous social, scientific, and economic changes, in tandem with processes of urbanization and industrialization. The use of statistics and other methods of quantification such as morality bills to manage populations were not novel to the period, but their usage intensified dramatically as the century drew on. Simultaneously, the development of geology, evolutionary theory, statistical sciences, and the introduction of the concept of "deep time"[5] all contributed to a shift in the understanding of human life and history, as theological knowledge shifted in favor of conceiving of human life in primarily biological terms.[6]

Tracking population as a means of conceiving of national identity is one marker of the marriage of population management and politics in North America. The aim of settler colonialism is always to appropriate land and resources through dispossessing its Indigenous inhabitants. The doctrine of *vacuum domicilium* justified the theft of Indigenous land by European settlers. Likewise, the deliberate genocide of Indigenous peoples secured natural resources and land to build colonies. The establishment of slavery and the legal doctrine of *Partus sequitur ventrum* enabled the extraction of free labor from enslaved Black Africans.[7] Settler colonialism and slavery are both examples of the control or destruction of the bodies of

[5] The development of geological sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth century led to a new understanding of the history of the earth which displaced both Christian notions of the earth's age and human history itself. The geologist, Charles Lyell revealed the earth to be several hundred million years old as opposed to the mere thousands that theological texts had previously calculated.

[6] For a more detailed investigation of the "biological turn" of the nineteenth century and its consequences for theories of race, see Cristin Ellis.

[7] The legal doctrine of *Partus sequitur ventrum* was established in Virginia in 1662 but soon spread to other colonies and determined that the legal status of children followed that of their mother, meaning that children born of enslaved women were themselves given enslaved status.

people of color in North America, diminishing their claims to humanity through racial taxonomies.

In the nineteenth century, epistemologies of race blended scripture, science, medicine, sentimentality – any and all discourses that could be used to distinguish white from Black and Brown flesh. Bird engages with various forms of the exercise of biopower against bodies, from graverobbing to procure Black corpses for a medical school to his paternalistic representation of slavery as a benevolent institution intended for the protection of uncivilizable Black minds and bodies. However, what makes Bird's vision so unusual is that *Sheppard Lee* reveals how the biopolitical governance of populations began to impinge on the sense of security that white supremacy afforded to a northern middle class. If biopolitics relied upon racial hierarchies cultivated by racial capitalism, what did it mean when the logics of bodies as capital and property began to impact white lives?

Middle class white men such as Bird could take comfort in their own humanity, a state of being secured over several centuries by the construction of racial taxonomies, the vicious exploitation of slavery, the thanatopolitics of Indigenous genocide, and the extraction of labor from those rendered disposable and politically invisible by the social death of slavery. Weheliye takes up Sylvia Wynter's Black feminist project to challenge exclusionary definitions of "Man," an identity whose existence necessitates the subjugation of a racialized, gendered underclass denied their full humanity. Useful here is Weheliye's explication of "bio-economic man" which builds upon Sylvia Wynter's existing work:

> The idea of “bio-economic man” marks the assumed naturalness that positions economic inequities, white supremacy, genocide, economic exploitation, gendered subjugation, colonialism, “natural selection,” and concepts such as the free market not in the realm of

> divine design, as in previous religious orders of things, but beyond the reach of human intervention all the same. (24)

As Weheliye notes, the secularization of American society during the nineteenth century, aided by the rise of the biological sciences and evolutionary theory, did not diminish the exploitation of minoritized subjects. Instead, the new framework of identity defined subjects in biological terms by their position on a racial hierarchy of impressibility, proximity to whiteness, and civilizational ability, and in economic turns by their success in generating and retaining capital, or in the case of the enslaved, their reduction to capital. Throughout the novel, this redefinition of human life solely in biological and economic terms becomes more and more totalizing with each of Lee's deaths.

IV. "Mountains of Mortality:" Using and Abusing the Dead

Sheppard Lee's progress through the novel relies upon dead bodies which Lee, despite his protestations to the contrary, appears to locate with relative ease. In a chapter titled "In Which It Is Shown That A Man May Be More Useful After Death Than While Living," Lee meditates on the varied and philanthropic uses to which dead bodies could be put (Bird 227). The most obvious of these uses is dissection, a practice Lee becomes all too familiar with by the end of the novel as doctor practitioner and as the corpse to be practiced upon. Tiffany DeRewal has written on how Protestant rhetoric was put in service of medicine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Post-mortem dissection was proffered to the poor as a way to continue to serve God after death. DeRewal interprets Lee's bodysnatching as a form of resurrection and argues that medicine did not necessarily lose its authority when it drew upon religious doctrine,

counter to Foucauldian accounts of this period which link secularism to the professionalization of medicine and the consolidation of its institutional power and status.

This chapter is Bird's most overt statement about the relationship between population growth, death, and capital. I read this meditative digression from Lee's misadventures as symptomatic of Bird's contempt for the sentimental performativity of mourning and the quantification of human life on a planetary scale. Satirical and disturbing in equal measure, the chapter condemns the wasteful practice of burying the dead and instead makes a case for their conversion "into objects of great usefulness and value" such as candles for streetlights (227).

Lee's account of the use value of dead bodies is about as macabre as you would expect of a story about reanimating corpses. He laments that of the "eighty and ninety thousand men, women, and children having given up the ghost in the natural way that very day," most would be consigned to "miserable holes in the earth" excepting those unfortunates whose bodies would be taken for the purpose of medical education as Lee's corpse later is (227). Bird describes an alchemical process discovered by the "French and Italian Philosophers" which can turn blood into iron. Lee states: "the conversion of blood into iron, would be peculiarly applicable in the case of soldiers too distinguished to be cast into corn-fields; and, indeed, nothing could be more natural than that those whose blood we buy with gold, should pay us back our change in iron" (230). Blood, gold, iron, flesh – each of these materials possesses capital which is converted between the living and the dead, the organic and the inorganic, human flesh and cold iron in an endless, desperate cycle. Lee uses satire to expose the cynical deployment of young men to their deaths during war as an example of the disposability of white lives. In doing so, Bird critiques both nineteenth-century biopolitics and the entire project of nation-building. Whether purchased with gold or blood, the colonization of America and the consolidation of power in European

colonies depended on drawing a line between bodies that mattered and those that were expendable. Ultimately, Lee decides it would be better for mankind “to enrich the soil from which they draw their sustenance,” turning the American landscape into a cemetery, its soil soaked with the blood of the colonized and the colonizer (228).

Of course, Bird's mountain of mortality is disingenuous. We know that marginalized populations, the enslaved, Indigenous Americans, and other minorities, were more likely to end up “enriching the soil” than white American citizens. All identifiers except sex and age are stripped away from the dead by Bird in his undifferentiated pile of deracinated bodies. However, in quantifying population on a global scale, Bird turns our attention away from the nation as the most significant political structure towards the biopolitical governance of mankind as a species. As the nineteenth century progressed, political economists, statisticians, natural historians, physicians, race scientists crafted epistemologies that reified the centrality of biology to political life. Whether humans were one species, or several remained hotly debated by theologians and scientists alike, but enacting biopolitical governance did not require its subjects to reach a consensus. The most spectacular technology of biopolitics in the United States, slavery, was used to extract labor from Black people that, as Hortense Spillers persuasively argues, were reduced to the status of “flesh,” a state that precedes the body and forms “that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography" (67). This flesh was unencumbered by the trappings of whiteness or humanity, and denied the protections afforded by its political recognition.

The ideology of white supremacy should offer comfort to middle class white men such as Bird who were protected by an abstract notion of citizenship which wasn't predicated upon the lethal hyper-embodiment inflicted upon non-white peoples. However, Bird’s novel suggests that

nineteenth-century capitalism's extractionist logic did not stop at the bodies of the enslaved but began to extend itself to the laboring bodies of white Americans. None of Lee's encounters with the marketplace come close to replicating the horrors of slavery, save for Lee's decision to reanimate the body *of* a slave which I shall discuss later on. Yet beneath the novel's satirical tone, chapters such as this indicate Bird's anxiety in the face of the increasing quantification of human life and white bodies. Not only does the vision of an ever-rising pile of the dead inspire panic in Bird, but it also places pressure on the category of citizenship and the human. What unites mankind now is the individual's ability to die, a more constitutive marker of humanness than any moral or spiritual quality. Furthermore, Bird's decision to engage with death on a global scale as well as on an individual and national scale, renders the particularity of the sexed and racialized body illegible, undermining the hierarchy of race and gender that racial sciences and white supremacist ideology were intended to uphold.

V. Vehicles of Capital: Bodies and the Logic of the Market

Bird's novel also investigates the relationship between population and capital on a more domestic scale. How is capital, and its transmission within kinship structures through patrilineal inheritance, altered by the increasingly mathematical representation of communities? It is necessary to consider the impact of enormous economic shifts of the period to fully understand Bird's concerns. During the 1830s, money became increasingly abstracted in the form of bank notes, shares, and credit. John Larsen observes in his study of the market revolution in America that capitalism and its values became entrenched in the lives of ordinary people (3). Several scholars read *Sheppard Lee* as a critique of the newly emergent market capitalism. Matthew

Rebhorn and Edward Sugden both observe that no matter the circumstances, each one of Lee's encounters with the marketplace results in financial and bodily ruin.

I agree with Sugden's argument that Lee's own disembodiment reflects the tension between the nascent market economy's movement towards financial abstraction and the inescapable reality of capitalism's violent, material effects. However, I expand upon this scholarship by addressing the intersection between family, inheritance, and the transmission of capital on a smaller scale within Lee's own family. The novel reveals that the domestic sphere does not offer shelter from the quantification of human life or the reaches or the market. Lee's childhood and financial situation are outlined briefly in the second chapter of the novel. The chapter culminates with another pile of corpses; only this time, the bodies belong to Lee's siblings. Lee's father is introduced as a respectable farmer "in very good circumstances" (Bird 9). Bird himself grew up in similar circumstances; according to an early biographer, Bird's parents "came of large and stable families that had lived on their Delaware lands for generations" (Foust 1). However, when his father died of an aneurism after losing his entire fortune to bankruptcy, Bird's mother and his six siblings were left with nothing. To survive, the family separated and "the older boys were obliged to go where necessity led them" (6). Bird was lucky. He was sent to live with a wealthy relative. However, his family never lived under the same roof again. In his depiction of the Lee's family, Bird seemingly drew upon his own experience of the vicissitudes of fate.

Despite Lee's father's comfortable circumstances, his prosperity is threatened by the "disproportionate increase in the agents of consumption, — his children multiplying on his hands almost as fast as his acres" in language that evokes both Franklin's fennel metaphors and Malthus' concerns about the relationship between land and population (Bird 9). The chapter in

question describes the death of all but one of Lee's siblings and is steeped in the language of the marketplace. Hence its economic register runs counter to the sentimental tone that typically accompanies the deaths of children in nineteenth-century literature.

The vocabulary of "agents" and "consumption" creates linguistic remoteness from the realities of infant mortality, a common occurrence in this period. Consequently, the language of grief and loss is replaced with the vocabulary of accounting which I argue upsets the fiction that the domestic sphere was ever inoculated from market logics. Lee's father despairs at seeing his wealth diminished by his need to support a wife and eleven children. Here, I quote the passage in its entirety as its morbid humor is key to the transposition of the Malthusian relation between supply and demand to the microcosm of the family unit:

> But fate sent my father relief sooner and more effectually than he either expected or desired: nine of the eleven [children] being removed by death in a space of time short of six years. Three (two of whom were twin sisters) were translated in the natural way, falling victims to an epidemic, and were buried in the same grave. A fourth was soon after killed by falling out of an apple-tree. My eldest brother, then a boy of fourteen years old, upon some freak, ran away from home (for he was of a wild, madcap turn), and, getting into an oyster-boat, made a voyage into the bay, where he was lost; for, having fallen overboard, and not being able to swim, a clumsy fellow, who thought to save him in that way, clutched him round the neck with a pair of oyster-tongs, and thereby strangled him. Two others were drowned in a millpond, where they were scraping for snapping-turtles. Another, who was the wag of the family, was killed by attempting to ride a pig, which, running in great alarm through a broken fence into the orchard, dashed his brains out against a white-oak rail; and the ninth died of a sort of hysterical affection,

> caused by this unlucky exploit of his brother; for he could not cease laughing at it, notwithstanding its melancholy termination, and he died of the fit within twenty-four hours. (9-10)

The passage soon descends into absurdity as Bird kills off Lee's siblings in increasingly farcical ways. Several of his siblings die in the "natural way" from disease – and the term "translation" suggests a transition from one mode of existence to another, anticipating Lee's philosophizing on the possible uses of people after death. However, most of the family die in utterly bizarre circumstances: whilst riding a pig, of laughter, strangled by oyster tongs. Perversely, these deaths are the key to Lee's adult prosperity. As each siblings dies the number of mouths that Lee's father must feed and the number of shares his estate must be divided into upon his death decrease.

In Malthusian terms, as the negative checks on the family's "population" increase so do the quantities of resources, land, and wealth available to Lee's father, his surviving sister, and Lee himself:

> Being one of the youngest children, I grieved but little for the loss of my brothers and sisters; nor was I able to appreciate the advantage which, in a worldly point of view, their death must prove to me. My father, however, perceived the difference; for, having now so few to look after and be chargeable to him, he could with great propriety consider himself a rich man. (10)

Lee's father recognizes that the capital available to Lee has increased in direct proportion to the number of sibling fatalities. Nine of his eleven children are no longer "chargeable" to his account as dependents or creditors; Lee's father can now afford to send what is now his only son to Princeton. In a distinctly unsentimental mode, Bird does not respond to death with tears but with

laughter. The deaths of children do not perform a didactic or moralizing function in Bird's narrative and the passage's use of humor directs attention away from the cultural and personal significance of loss in religious and affective terms. Lee's unnamed siblings are mere ciphers in a narrative experiment in how death creates opportunities for social mobility. In fact, when viewed through a biopolitical framework, these deaths are not tragedies but financial boons to those who survive.

Bird critiques an antebellum culture which makes the deaths of certain groups advantageous to the consolidation of the wealth of others. He also rejects sentimentality's supposed civilizing function and mourning's performance of middle class gentility. Death is central to the expression of bourgeois values and the rites of sentimentality in this period. Karen Halttunen writes that "mourning provided the greatest opportunity to experience deep and lasting sentiment" and was accompanied by an industry of etiquette manuals, clothing, and flagrant consumerism to signal the mourners' social status (134). In contrast, Lee "grieves but little" for his family. His inability to mourn not only breaks with the sentimental treatment of death in nineteenth-century literature and culture, but it also strikes at the heart of sentimentality's biopolitical regime whereby the suffering of others refined the sympathy of observers. In her reading of Malthus, Schuller writes:

> Bound together into an organic whole through impressibility, a population must sacrifice its poor members for the wealthier's evolution of higher emotional faculties on account of witnessing, and sympathizing with suffering. Malthus thereby makes the civilizing process as a whole reliant on the suffering and death of its "redundant" members. (96)

By failing to be moved by the suffering of his siblings, as well as the deaths of those whose bodies he exhumes, Lee opts out of a sentimental regime that uses the deaths of loved ones to secure the social status and civility of surviving family members.

Nonetheless, for all the novel's apparent anti-sentimental rhetoric about the matter, Lee's wealth comes at the expense of his siblings' lives. This outcome underscores the relationship between embodiment and the consolidation, or dispersal, of wealth via patrilineal inheritance. Chad Luck writes about the relationship between property and material self-possession in nineteenth-century America:

> ...the sensate body [...] is absolutely crucial to our understanding and enactment of property practices, and only by accounting for these corporeal and affective components will be we begin to appreciate the experiential scope of ownership. (8)

Possession, property and the perceived fungibility of the human body and capital animate *Sheppard Lee*. Even as, in the nineteenth century, slavery's system of racial capitalism assigns numerical value to Black bodies, Bird fears that white bodies, those supposedly granted full humanity according to ideologies of liberal humanism and white supremacy, are vulnerable to the same violent logic.

Attributing financial value to bodies through inheritance might stand out as inconceivable when considered in comparison to the violence, dispossession, and social death wrought by slavery. Yet there are enough similarities regarding the quantification of human life on both a planetary and domestic scale to trouble Bird. The novel repeatedly asks: What does it mean to possess the bodies of others, through ownership, indebtedness, or the material act of robbing graves? How do individuals retain property if, as Malthus claims, human demand outstrips

supply? And what happens to the expectations and traditions of inheritance during the tumultuous transition to a market economy?

In the short chapter discussed above, familial relationships are reduced to a network of capitalist transactions: money is immortal but its corporeal possessors are not. According to Luck, historians describe the changes in the notion of property from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries as a "*trajectory of abstraction*" (10). According to his view, if in the eighteenth century, property was equated with land, in the nineteenth it came to be recognized "more as an abstract set of intangible rights often associated with entirely nonphysical assets" (24). However, as Luck observes, this narrative doesn't account for the ways that embodiment and bodies remained integral to understanding property and possession throughout the nineteenth century. Slavery involved possessing bodies denied material and legal self-possession. Each time Sheppard Lee resurrects a corpse, he takes possession of a body but also its property, wealth, and debts. Yet wealth doesn't protect him from increasingly powerful economic forces. Time and time again, the novel critiques the fantasy, shared by all of the identities Lee assumes, that wealth is a shield against material suffering.

Each body that Lee inhabits – rich and poor, Black and white – is harmed by its interaction with the marketplace. The first body Lee reanimates belonged to Squire Higginson, a retired brewer. Lee-as-Higginson is initially delighted by his newly acquired wealth but is soon driven to the brink of suicide by the pain of "the rich man's disease" (gout) and a wife he loathes. In his next corpse, that of penniless dandy I. Dulmer Dawkins who died by suicide due to his enormous debts, Lee- enjoys the attention of the opposite sex but also that of Dawkins' myriad creditors. He fails to secure a wealthy wife and, chased by those creditors for money he doesn't have, a glorious idea strikes Lee "like a blaze of sunshine" (Bird 193). He will animate the body

of a misanthropic miser Abram Skinner to access the "vast wealth of the deceased" (194). Lee-as-Skinner quickly regrets this when he meets Skinner's two sons, Ralph and Abbot. Driven to the brink of madness by Skinner's emotional neglect and refusal to share his wealth, Ralph died by suicide to avoid a prison sentence and Abbot dies rehearsing the murder of his father. All three men, Lee, Ralph, and Abbot, want the wealth that Skinner possesses, and all three men end up dead.

Before Lee can shuck off Skinner's "casing," he must find another body. He mistakes a drunken man for a corpse and stuffs his remaining valuables into its pockets before attempting to reanimate it. Realizing his mistake too late, the man departs with Lee-as-Skinner's remaining money stashed in his coat. Their exchange exemplifies the ambiguity concerning possession and property during the nineteenth century:

> "You villain!" said I, running after him, "give me back my property."
>
> "I'm a free man," said the sot; "I'm no man's property." (235)

Lee uses the word property to refer to his belongings, but the robber interprets it to mean his own person, speaking "with the indignation of a freeborn republican" (235). This confusion between property as objects, property as self-possession, and property as the possession of another's body under conditions of slavery, demonstrates the linguistic and phenomenological slipperiness of abstract and embodied notions of property. Lee presumes he can take ownership of the robber's corpse. However, when the robber wakes, he transforms from object to subject and from corpse to man. The robber possesses himself once more, regaining his legal right to "liberty" as a white male American citizen.

The robber is lucky to escape. Lee is a man who resurrects and a "resurrection man," a euphemistic term used to describe grave robbers in this period. Before he comes across the

corpse of philanthropist Zachariah Longstrong, Lee-as-Skinner decides to steal one the old-fashioned way:

> I resolved to run to one of the medical schools, make my way into its anatomical repositories, and help myself to the best body I could find; for, indeed, I was in such a rage of desire to be released from my present tenement, that I did not design to stand upon trifles. (232)

The cemeteries of Philadelphia's poor Black residents were the most vulnerable to the violation of grave robbers. Until Pennsylvania passed the Anatomy Act in 1883 which required medical schools and hospitals to acquire bodies legally through the state, poor white and Black Philadelphians lived and died in fear of grave robbers and there were frequent protests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The only bodies that medical institutions could use prior to the passage of the Act belonged to executed criminals and those who died by suicide, and demand far outstripped supply. Given that The University of Pennsylvania trafficked in stolen bodies, it is likely that Bird personally dissected an illegally obtained cadaver while at medical school there.[8]

The buying and selling of bodies was another example of the totalizing reach of the market. The commodification of human life and death had been occurring since the first enslaved Africans were brought to American soil. But dying could make you even more vulnerable to the market's predations, particularly if you were poor or Black. In another Philadelphia novel, *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall* (1845) by George Lippard, published less than ten years after *Sheppard Lee*, grave robbing features prominently. Luck observes that grave robbing appeals to Lippard as it "thematizes the ever-expanding reach of capitalist expropriation;" it was

[8] See next chapter.

the perfect trope through which to protest the exploitation of the laboring classes (230). Bird is similarly invested in critiquing capitalism as evinced by Lee's violent encounters with the market which occur regardless of whether he is penniless or enormously wealthy. But unlike Lippard, body snatching isn't just a theme in *Sheppard Lee*, it is a supernatural plot device that blurs the boundaries between self-possession, possessing another, and being possessed, calling into question the idea that anyone, Black or white, truly owned themselves. Slavery birthed capitalism and codified racial difference in order to justify its treatment of people as objects. Yet far from the slave-owning southern states, Lee takes possession of white bodies which are objectified, robbed of their freedom and possessions, and discarded without a second thought. Despite the horrors of slavery and the centuries of violence it sanctioned, it was ultimately a profit-making venture. Racial differences were taxonomized and race emerged as a biological state based on observable, phenotypical traits to construct racial hierarchies.

With the expansion of capitalism and the entrenchment of market logic in the first half of the nineteenth century, white people found themselves afraid of capitalist exploitation, financial crises, and "that market forces might reduce them to the position of a beholden slave" (Luck 230). Bird is no abolitionist. Yet *Sheppard Lee* uses Lee's powers of resurrection to convey the affective shock that, while race was put in service of capitalism, capitalist exploitation did not discriminate along racial lines as the illegal market for buying cadavers aptly demonstrates. The birth of modern capitalism in the nineteenth century and the increasing authority of the marketplace in shaping everyday life frightened many white Americans who found themselves unable to escape the technologies of biopower or the violence of capitalism. Misguided optimism drives Lee to inhabit a parade of bodies in pursuit of the fortune which will bring him happiness

and security, only to experience pain, suffering, and death. Whether Lee is in possession of wealth or is, himself, made a possession through slavery, he suffers.

VI. Civilization and Paternalism in the South

Lee finds himself literally enslaved after Lee-as-Longstraw's death. In the body of Tom, an enslaved man in Virginia, the novel traffics in the well-worn, paternalistic arguments used to defend slavery as a benign institution, best suited to the specific physiology and civilizational deficits of Black people. Lee-as-Tom finds himself on a plantation, but his experience there is pure pro-slavery propaganda. The institution is stripped of its violence and degradation and described as a life of bucolic contentment and idleness. Lee-as-Tom's master is kind, his life is serene, and to Lee, it sure beats toiling as a free white man in New Jersey (Bird 340). The indolent, pampered Lee-as-Tom encounters violence solely at the hands of the enslaved community. In fact, everything is going extraordinarily well for Lee-as-Tom until he stumbles across an abolitionist pamphlet. Because Lee's ability to read survives his transition to Tom's body, Lee-as-Tom disseminates the pamphlet's contents to the enslaved community. He inadvertently radicalizes, and racializes, himself and the other enslaved people on the plantation and together they stage a violent rebellion against their white enslaver and his family. In the "tenement" of Tom's body, Bird presents Black minds as impressionable, childlike, and extremely susceptible to the influences of others. Until he stumbles upon the pamphlet, Lee-as-Tom is the happiest he has ever been. As Matthew Rebhorn observes, "Bird's previous characters were driven to distraction by their capitalist desires, their effort to increase their capital, and their attempt to maintain their capital," yet Lee-as-Tom is "content because he is under no illusion that he is not a slave to the market" (267).

Lee-as-Tom's contentment signifies his recognition that the capitalist economy circumscribes his life. It also reveals Bird's scientific racism. *Sheppard Lee* is rarely a sentimental book, yet it portrays slavery in sentimental terms and situates Tom within a racial hierarchy that used sensation as a biological marker of an individual's sensibility and aptness to claim citizenship. Schuller persuasively argues sentimental literature functioned as a technology of biopower by forging an affective bond linking author and reader, reader and character, and in doing so binding disparate and geographically distant bodies into a social whole, in much the same way that the mortality bills constructed a social body in terms of sickness and health. When Lee animates Tom's body to escape Longstraw's lynching, he decides slavery is preferable to death, stating "[...] If thou art dead, my sable brother, yield my spirit a refuge in thy useless body!" (Bird 326-7). Is this Lee or Lee-as-Longstraw the abolitionist speaking?

The appeal to a "sable brother" evokes the famous abolitionist slogan that first appeared on Josiah Wedgwood's 1787 medallion: "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" The image and slogan function as sentimental entreaties to the sympathy of white abolitionists. The slogan appeals to interracial kinship and the existence of an identity shared by both enslaved Black people and free whites. However, in imploring the implied viewer to recognize his humanity, the enslaved figure defers to the logic of the white Western category of the human. The slogan does not attempt to dismantle a category expansive enough to encircle both enslaved and enslaver and created in the image of the white liberal subject. Abolitionist appeals to sentiment strengthened racial hierarchies. Sentiment separated Black bodies from white ones by contrasting the former's "fixedness" in time with the latter's relative plasticity and developmental potential, at the level of the individual and the race. In other words, Black people were doomed to a permanent state of temporal stasis, an evolutionary dead end.

According to Schuller, a body's degree of impressibility – its ability to register sensations, meditate on them, and produce knowledge from them – indexed its racial identity: "racialized bodies were seen as overly excitable and functionally dead, due to the absence of the regulatory capacity to respond appropriately to their stimulations" (55). Lee-as-Tom's "happiness in slavery" seems set to continue indefinitely until he comes across the insurrectionary pamphlet. Unable to properly regulate his response to the pamphlet's sensational content, he leads a violent uprising against his enslaver in a matter of days. In doing so, Bird dramatizes the need to keep enslaved communities in a state of ignorance and illiteracy, lest their impressibility led them to impulsive and violent acts. Lee-as-Tom's journey from happiness to execution is a lesson and a warning. Securing the safety of the American social body at its most vulnerable, here personified by the two white sisters who throw themselves from a building rather than fall victim to the violence of Lee-as-Tom and his co-conspirators, requires ontologies of race and technologies of feeling which valorize whiteness at the expense of Black lives.

Lee-as-Tom is executed for his role in the uprising. His corpse is buried but only until night fall when doctors dig him up for dissection. Digging up Lee-as-Tom and the bodies of two more enslaved men, Scipio and Sam, the doctors perform galvanic experiments on all three. As the bodies jerk spasmodically, we witness a gruesome and familiar spectacle of Black suffering. However, the totalizing violence displayed in this scene is destabilized by the medical exploitation of Lee's original white male body towards the end of the novel.

VII. Conclusion: Anatomical Culture or Death on Display

Before Lee is kidnapped and brought to Virginia on account of being identified, quite accidentally, as an abolitionist, he finds out the fate of his original body. Prior to the events of

Virginia, Lee-as-Longstraw is told by his kidnappers that Sheppard Lee's corpse has fallen prey to grave robbers:

> His body subjected to the knife of an anatomist, his bones scraped, boiled, bleached, hung together on wires, and set up in a museum, while his spirit was wandering about from body to body, enduring more afflictions in each than it had ever mourned even in that unlucky original dwelling it was so glad to leave! (Bird 317)

The list of verbs used to describe articulating Sheppard Lee's skeleton – "scraped, boiled, bleached, hung" – are grimly efficient. Sheppard Lee's body has been sold, butchered, and strung back together like a macabre puppet. Discussing the popularity of motifs such as the anatomist, the dead body, and the medical museum in gothic fiction from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, Laurence Talairach writes that "the medical museum ideas relating to normality and becomes therefore a significant locus to test the shapes and meaning(s) of monstrosity" in gothic fiction (137). Anatomical museums and displays increased as pathological anatomy grew as a discipline in the eighteenth century (136). Exhibiting diseased body parts assisted in dehumanizing the body by separating it into disparate parts. It created a visual display which sorted specimens into one of anatomical two categories: normative and pathological. The image of Lee's bleached skeleton, stripped of all markers of sex, class, and race, exemplifies the increasing commodification of the human body as medicine was professionalized. In dissection literature, the figure of the skeleton asks how much medicine can reveal about the workings of the body and reinforces the objectifying, penetrative power of the medical gaze which Foucault describes in *The Birth of the Clinic*.

Lee does not end up in a medical museum. Instead, he is transported south where he ends up in the body of Tom. After escaping from Tom's body into the body of physician Arthur

Megrim, Lee-as-Megrim is taken to an anatomical exhibition to see "proof of the strides that science is making" (Bird 399). At the exhibition, he encounters a display of preserved body parts, including a head with "no appearance of death about it whatever, the lips and cheeks being quite ruddy, and the eyes open and bright, though fixed" (400). Combining elements of the Victorian freakshow and medical education, these exhibitions gave the public the opportunity to gaze with enjoyable terror at the human body in all its wondrous variation.

Finally, Lee-as-Megrim sees an exhibit of a mummified body dressed like a roman soldier and has a shocking realization:

> A murmur, with twenty or more faint shrieks from the females present, attested the admiration with which the spectators caught sight of this wonderful triumph of skill and science; but I—heavens and earth! what were *my* feelings, what was *my* astonishment, when I beheld in that lifeless mummy my own lost body! the mortal tenement in which I had first drawn the breath, and experienced the woes, of life! the body of Sheppard Lee the Jerseyman! This, then, was its fate—not to be anatomized and degraded into a skeleton, as the vile Samuel the kidnapper had told me, but converted into a mummy by a new process, for the especial benefit of science and the world. (406)

The passage equivocates as to whether Lee's identity is located in its current tenement, Megrim's body, or in Lee's original, now mummified, body. At times, Lee-as-Megrim speaks definitively of "*my* feelings" and "*my* astonishment" at seeing the body, referring to "its fate" in the third-person so as to distance Lee-as-Megrim from the horrifying sight of Lee's old eyes "fixed in a set unnatural stare" (405). At other points in the passage, Lee-as-Megrim uses the first person "I" to refer to his old body – "in which I had first drawn breath" – implying his identification with the mummy. The transitions between "I," "my," and "it" evoke the metaphysical uncertainties about

identity and materiality which have propelled Lee into so many other bodies yet left him so unhappy.

Lee manages to reanimate his mummified corpse despite worries that the procedure will have damaged it. When he succeeds, all hell breaks loose. "Indescribable was the terror produced among the spectators by this double catastrophe—the death of their townsman, and the revival of the mummy" reads the novel, transforming a scene of horror into one of amusement and chaos (407). The exhibition's scientific underpinnings and philanthropic aims are made a mockery of when the new process developed by the man who stole Lee's body, Dr. Feuerteufel, seems not to have worked on Lee and he is left chasing him around the room. Talairach writes that:

> Oscillating as they do between the medical world and Victorian consumer culture, the exhibited remains constitute a subtle invitation to engage with medicine, its practice and its symbols, perhaps warning us not to act as uncritical consumers of morbid pathology. (167)

The exhibition's failure and Lee's treatment act to gently chastise the crowd for their consumption of Feuerteufel's unethical and commodified human bodies. The scene also serves as a reminder to the novel's readers that in reading *Sheppard Lee*, we too are also enjoying the thrill of the sensation novel's gothic generic and thematic tropes.

The novel uses grave-robbing, Lee's powers of resurrection, and scenes of dissection to argue that the corpse is a marketable commodity. That white and Black bodies are equally at risk of being dissected points to tension in the scientific community between the belief in the existence of physiological distinctions between races and the inconvenient truth that death transforms us all into bits of matter. It also reveals that Lee's ability to avoid dissection multiple times makes him a symbol of individual resistance to the violence of the marketplace and the

disciplinary technologies of science. Bird's materialist philosophy of self emphasizes the importance of self-possession and the unique qualities of every human life. By contrast, capitalism insists on the fungibility of bodies and the biopolitical turn privileges the health of the nation over the health and happiness of its individual components. In the next two chapters, I analyze scenes of dissection in Black literature in which writers try to redefine the meaning and political possibilities of the dead body outside of medicine's appropriation of the corpse as a scientific object. What happens when the anatomist's scalpel makes its way into Black hands?

Chapter Two

How to Care for the Dead: Dissecting Racial Stereotypes in Sutton E. Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio*

I. Introduction: Curating the Dead

"Penn must give back the remains of those who suffered and were exploited while alive, and disturbed and disrespected in their death." - Muhammad, Abdul-Aliy

Two scandals have rocked The University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (commonly referred to as Penn Museum) in recent years. Both shine a spotlight on the politics and ethics of caring for the dead. Both center on the mistreatment of the postmortem remains of people of color. The first scandal concerns the infamous 1985 MOVE bombing. The Philadelphia police department – under the leadership of Frank Rizzo, former Mayor of the city and a man "committed to suppressing Black activist groups and demonstrations for civil rights through the use of overwhelming police power" (Tucker Law Group 15) – launched a violent attack on MOVE, a radical Black organization that had frequently clashed with the police over racism and police brutality. The Philadelphia Police's bombing of the residence of MOVE members killed eleven people, including five children, and the subsequent fire destroyed 61 homes in a predominantly Black neighborhood in West Philadelphia, leaving more than 250 people homeless. The shocking discovery that the remains of two of the children killed in the bombing had been retained by Penn Museum for over 35 years came to light after the curator of the museum, Professor Janet Monge, used them in a recording of a practical demonstration for a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) offered by

Princeton. The language Monge used to describe these remains,[9] combined with the absence of consent from surviving family members to retain these bodies, let alone use them as teaching aids, led to widespread outrage. Monge's actions have raised far-reaching ethical questions about curation and the retention of human remains.[10] There have also been direct appeals from individuals personally affected by the MOVE bombing. Mike Africa Jr., born in the prison where his parents spent 40 years, asks poignantly in the documentary about the bombing *40 Years A Prisoner* (2020): "[How] would they feel if somebody got one of their babies and studied it? Think about that for a second — somebody just burned the baby up and now they put it in a drawer."

Mike Africa Jr.'s words cut to the heart of contemporary racial injustices in America. The juxtaposition of "babies," "put in a drawer," and "studied *it*" (my emphasis) speaks to the legacy of nineteenth-century racial science, which created the conditions for the contemporary treatment of Black people as objects of study by academic and scientific institutions regardless of the wishes of surviving family members or the cost to Black communities. The remains of the bodies of the two girls, Delisha and Tree Africa, that Penn Museum retained were labelled "B-1" and "G" (Bishara). This further indignity attests to the casual instrumentalization and dehumanization of communities of color. It evokes the anonymous fragments of bodies in the nineteenth-century medical collections which were discussed in the previous chapter. This sad story demonstrates a

[9] The video lectures on Coursera have been removed from the site but in one of them, Monge refers to the remains of one of the MOVE victims as "juicy" - a comment she defends but which has received enormous criticism from anti-racist activists, academics, and surviving relatives of the MOVE bombing victims. Monge defends this comment as being appropriate within the context of physical anthropology. The body is never identified in the video. More information is available in the Tucker Law Group (TLG) report.

[10] The independent investigation was only published last year, and the situations is ongoing. Monge is currently suing the University, claiming unfair demotion, bullying from a former graduate student, and unfounded accusations of racism. See TLG report and Giordano.

lack of concern for the dead victims of state-sanctioned murder and their surviving kin on the part of a highly regarded academic institution.

The second scandal unfolding at Penn Museum involves Samuel George Morton's collection of 1300 or so skulls. As the report writes:

> This MOVE remains controversy is also occurring at a time that the University of Pennsylvania and other universities are facing an international reckoning and scrutiny over their complicity in the invention of scientific racism by university physical anthropologists in particular, and how they promoted and benefitted from it through their collections and exhibits. (TLG 45)

Samuel George Morton received medical degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Edinburgh. His collection of skulls provided the data set for one of the most influential books of scientific racism of the nineteenth century. Morton's *Crania Americana*, published in Philadelphia in 1839, is described as a "transatlantic sensation" by historian James Poskett in his global history of phrenology during the long nineteenth century (83). Robert Montgomery Bird corresponded with Morton and the two collaborated on a scientific pamphlet when Bird was a medical student and Morton a physician and mentor to Bird (Altschuler, *The Medical Imagination* 126). Given the relationship between Morton and Bird, and Bird's overt expression of the cultural fears surrounding the body's exploitation after death in *Sheppard Lee*, it becomes virtually impossible to acquit Morton of charges of gross ethical misconduct. The aforementioned riots against graverobbing in Philadelphia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicate that the public were horrified by the theft of the dead. In *Sheppard Lee,* Lee expresses terror at the thought of being anatomized. When he comes face to face with his own

mummified body, his "instinctive dislike and horror" at meeting Doctor Feuerteufel is more than justified by the doctor's barbaric treatment of Lee's remains (406).

Morton's work, lavishly illustrated with lithographic plates of the skulls in his collection, attempts to empirically categorize mankind according to five capacious "varieties" (or races) using skull measurements. Morton borrowed his taxonomy from Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) who divided mankind into the Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay, American, and Ethiopian Races, with subcategories within each grouping. Morton reached the predictable conclusion that Caucasians possessed the largest brain cavity and Ethiopians the smallest, extrapolating ideas about intelligence, man's origins, and the dismal futures foreseen for the "lesser" races from his disputed skull measurements.[11]

In the preface to the first edition of *Crania Americana*, Morton describes his project as ongoing. He thanks George Gliddon, Egyptologist and polygenist, for the "singular zeal" with which he acquired skulls for his work, and issues a plea for more specimens:

> But in order to accomplish this object, a very extended series of crania is of course indispensable; and the author therefore respectfully solicits the further aid of gentlemen interested in the cause of science, in procuring the *skulls of all nations*, and forwarding them to his address in this city. (Morton V)

The provenance of Morton's skull collection remains incomplete and partial, gathered in a period when, as *Sheppard Lee* notes, the burying grounds of the poor, people of color, those convicted of crimes, and other marginalized communities were regularly plundered by doctors and scientists. The historian Ann Fabian writes in *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* that Morton was aware that graverobbers provided many of the skulls in his

[11] For insight into the debate over Morton's scientific practice, see Gould and Lewis.

collection; Specimens were procured from battlefields, burial mounds, and even executions (4). Altschuler describes how both Morton and Bird graduated with medical degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and collaborated on anatomical research (*The Medical Imagination*). They likely learned anatomy from stolen cadavers. As Fabian acknowledges, "collections of human remains are filled with bodies of men and women who [...] died far from the communities they might have expected to protect their corpses, to usher them out of one life and into a next" (5). *Sheppard Lee*'s protagonist is lucky enough to end up back in his own body despite its mummification, returning to his old life and home. It would be centuries before the individuals in Morton's collection would rejoin their communities around the world.

Influenced by recent debates over the validity of Morton's scientific method and conclusions as well as an increased awareness of the importance of decolonizing museums and archives, the University has begun the process of repatriating skulls, aided by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). According to the University, around 100 skulls from Morton's collection have already been returned to "Native American groups" and in 2021 (Monge 37), the Morton Cranial Collection Community Advisory Group issued a report advising that the skulls of Black Philadelphians be buried in a historic Black cemetery. They recommended that a memorial raised in a public ceremony to commemorate the injustices suffered by the free and enslaved Black Americans whose bodies were retained by the museum for hundreds of years.

For every skull or body that is repatriated to its rightful community, there remain many more of Morton's skulls whose origins and identities have been lost in the intervening years. The MOVE bombing scandal and the ethical problem of Morton's collection reveal the enduring mistreatment of people of color in the nineteenth century and now. The two crises are part of a

larger reckoning with the ethics of caring for and displaying human remains, particularly those remains whose provenance is uncertain, that belong to victims of state-sanctioned violence (whether slavery or police brutality), and which have been used to uphold colonial practices of curation which promote dangerous untruths about race, white supremacy, and human difference.

II. Bodies in the Archive

In the spring of 2022, I found myself in the uncomfortable position of gazing into the eye sockets of a human skull when I visited the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania. The skull is mounted on a base bearing the inscription, "Alas Poor Yorick," revealing its original use as a theatrical prop in nineteenth-century performances of Shakespeare's *Macbeth.* According to the library catalog, the skull was a gift from the father of Philadelphia physician, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, and used by actors including Edwin Thomas Booth (1833-1893), Charles John Kean (1811-1868), Edwin Forrest (1806-1872), and other leading thespians. Edwin Forrest produced and acted in several of Bird's plays including *The Gladiator* (1831) and *Oralloossa, Son of the Incas* (1832), both of which were first performed at the Arch Street Theater in Philadelphia. The skull further unsettles the relationship between fact and fiction in Bird's literary output, providing a material reminder of the all too real corpses that Bird's medical education and literary career depended on. The names of the actors who used the skill are listed in the library catalog but, more disturbingly, you can read them on the skull itself. Across the coronal suture – the line on the top of the skull that joins the parietal bones and frontal bone – actors carved their signatures into the bone in an act of possession, overwriting the identity of the skull's owner who remains unknown.

I hope that this skull was not stolen from a community which mourned him or her; I could not find answers to these questions in the archive. The skull's presence exemplifies the ease with which human remains can be stolen, desecrated, and commodified.

Fabian writes that "stories that begin with death and burial give us some new ways of investigating the disparities and inequalities that dogged individuals in their lives and followed them into graves or onto collectors' shelves" (3). I open this chapter with a discussion of the ethics of curating human remains to emphasize what many others before me have argued: the dead continue to haunt us. Until we confront the injustices suffered by the most disenfranchised Americans, those whose bodies were and are instrumentalized in the production of scientific ideas, justifying their social, economic, and racial subordination, we are doomed to repeat the violence enacted on children like Delisha and Tree Africa.

The next two chapters center on Black authored texts published at the close of the nineteenth century. They protest the unlawful killings, violence, and segregation experienced by Black Americans after Reconstruction's failure to make good on its promises of reparations, rights, and equality for *all* Americans. The two case studies I discuss shine a light on how academic institutions remain complicit in epistemic violence, although I should note that the University of Pennsylvania is not unique in its problematic retention of misappropriated bodies. These bones attest to histories of white supremacy - how the violence wrought in its name kills in spectacular and quotidian ways. Racial disparities in mortality rates mean that Black and Indigenous individuals die younger and at a higher rate than white individuals. In 2019, the Black mortality gap meant that one in five Black Americans died earlier than their white American counterparts (Flagg). The contemporary deaths of Black Americans due to systemic

racism are a consequence of the displacement, enslavement, and historical trauma of America's origins in settler colonialism, Indigenous genocide, slavery, and racial capitalism.

In both chapters, I examine writing by Sutton E. Griggs. Black intellectual, author, and activist, Griggs was writing at a time when Black Americans faced violence in the form of lynching, Jim Crow laws, and hostility from whites in both the South and the North. Griggs employs death, science, and medicine in his fiction to attack rather than support scientific racism and to bear witness to the lethality of white supremacy. At the same time, his fiction offers strategies to deploy against anti-Black racism that remain powerfully relevant in the contemporary fight for racial justice embodied by protest movements such as Black Lives Matter. Racism of all forms, including police brutality and health disparities, is the most visible and haunting reminder of the precarity of Black life in the nineteenth century and now.

Here, I argue that Griggs's speculative fiction subverts what initially seem to be familiar tropes of Black suffering and death. His novels force readers to interrogate their own complicity with, and tacit resignation to, the logic of white supremacy that equates Blackness with suffering. Griggs challenges the complacency of white allies but also creates spaces for imagining, however briefly, how fictional representations of Black death might enable experiments in Black rebellion and renewal.

III. The Fiction of Pauline Hopkins and Sutton E. Griggs

In chapters two and three, I discuss the work of two Black intellectuals, Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933) and Pauline Hopkins (1859-1930). This chapter centers on Griggs' novel *Imperium in Imperio* (1899). The final chapter examines this novel alongside Hopkins' *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self* (1902-3). Before I turn to Griggs whose work is the focus of this chapter, I will

briefly discuss Griggs and Hopkins together to demonstrate the resonances between their work, how they use death and unfeeling to theorize about Black emancipation, and the scientific and political contexts that informed their writing. I then turn to *Imperium in Imperio* to read scenes in which death enables resistance to white supremacy, race science, and sentimentality. Finally, I examine how Griggs' novel challenges contemporary scientific theories about sympathy, racial difference, and hereditary theory. In doing so, I draw upon recent scholarship by Kyla Schuller and Christine Yao theorizing feeling as a biopolitical regime in the nineteenth century and "unfeeling" as a tactic of defiance in the face of racial violence.

Griggs and Hopkins write about death in politically and rhetorically subversive ways. Death works to undermine contemporary scientific beliefs about white superiority and to posit new futures for Black Americans at a time of crisis. Both authors also placed enormous value in the ability of literature to bind Black Americans together and create racial uplift. Griggs started his own publishing company, Orion Press, which is understood to be among the first "black-owned secular publishing companies in the United States" (Chakkalakal and Warren 2). Hopkins wrote novels, plays, and journalism, and was an editor of *The Colored American Magazine* (1900-1909) for several years, publishing fiction and essays alongside W. E. B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington.

Despite their differences – Hopkins lived on the East Coast for most of her life while Griggs was a Southern Baptist pastor – both shared similar concerns about the future for Black Americans. In light of political and civic disenfranchisement, they utilized the speculative genre in their fiction to ambiguous ends. The utopias they envision do not offer respite from the contemporary horrors of extrajudicial violence, terror, and their effects on Black communities. As Ida B. Wells writes in *The Red Record,* her exhaustively researched pamphlet on lynching

published in 1895, “Can you remain silent and inactive when such things are done in our own community and country?” (234). Hopkins does not directly address lynching in *Of One Blood* as Griggs does in *Imperium in Imperio* – although she does in other novels, notably *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900) – but her focus upon the sexual violence of slavery, its legacy of intergenerational trauma, and the novel's depiction of multiple deaths attests to Hopkins' recognition of the ongoing psychic and material suffering of Black Americans, unalleviated by slavery's abolition or Reconstruction.

Like Bird, but to very different ends, Griggs' and Hopkin's novels feature white doctors who fail to recognize the vitality of the Black body in front of them. They features scenes of the imminent dissection of a Black individual by white doctors whose anatomical desires are thwarted by the phantasmagoric resurrection of the previously (or seemingly) dead body. Both authors use states of insensibility, unconsciousness, and dissociation to theorize about the past, present, and future of Black life: these states can be read as indicators of trauma but also as tactics of resistance to, or escape from, white violence.

I argue that these speculative novels employ death in a variety of strategic and discursive ways to imagine utopian institutions of enormous power from governments to kingdoms. These are helmed by Black rulers and politicians and exist beyond the reach of American governance and white supremacy. However, these flawed utopian projects face an ambiguous future at the end of both novels. Black lives have been sacrificed in their creation. The Black characters who escape the violence of the scalpel and the noose die before the conclusion of these novels. Despite Griggs and Hopkins' investment in excavating usable theories of race from the bodies of the dead, they recognize fiction's limitations in confronting real violence. As Ida B. Wells concludes in *Southern Horrors* (1892), another pamphlet she wrote documenting the

extrajudicial violence of lynching, the best defense against such crimes was armed resistance:

> The lesson this teaches and which every Afro-American should ponder well, is that a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give. (XX)

Griggs' and Hopkins' fiction was written at a time when the lynching of Black Americans was at an all-time high. Their work bears witness to the pervasiveness of death in Black American life and articulates the difficulty of recuperating it within literature. Hopkins and Griggs exemplify the determination of Black authors to not simply record this violence but to reveal the ideological frailty of white supremacy, and, for a brief moment, the vulnerability of white bodies to Black justice and the blade.

IV. The Ethics of Writing about Black Death

"How does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?" - Saidiya Hartman ("Venus in Two Acts" 11-12)

Writing about the historical and contemporary deaths of Black Americans is fraught with ethical concerns. As the previous chapter demonstrates, visual and narrative representations of violence against Black bodies do not prevent racist violence. If any racial sympathy is stirred up by Bird's depiction of the lynching and dissection of Tom-as-Lee, it is swiftly quashed by the fatal rebellion of the enslaved community. The deaths of Lee-as-Tom's enslavers reaffirm the brutality of the enslaved rebels and the need for the institution of slavery to check this latent violence. As much as the dissection horrifies Lee-as-Tom, Lee is more disturbed by seeing his

own mummified body. By returning to it at the novel's close, Bird suggests that for all of capitalism's violence against white bodies, Black bodies are far more vulnerable. Sentimental identification with the suffering of the marginalized does not guarantee justice, reparations, or concrete anti-racist action on the behalf of white Americans. Worse than inaction, the representation of images of pain and suffering – whether illustrations of scarred bodies anthologized by abolitionists in the nineteenth century or grainy cellphone footage of the extrajudicial police killing of Black Americans in the twenty-first – risks retraumatizing the communities most afflicted by racial terror. In the wake of a pandemic that has disproportionately killed and sickened people of color at a rate 0.8 to 2.1 times higher than white people (CDC), can writing about death in the context of Black literature, history, and lives be anything other than harmful? As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the relationship between Blackness and death is already overdetermined within the American cultural imaginary. Too often, it is a foregone conclusion, another child's body left in a box on a shelf.

In reading fictional scenes of death and violence toward Black characters in novels written during a historical period of extraordinary anti-Black violence, I am conscious of a responsibility towards the dead, fictional and real, who animate this chapter. I write for a reader who does not need reminding of the horrors of lynching or require explication of the brutal details of such crimes. I write for a reader who is able to recognize both the pervasiveness of death in the lives of Black Americans at the turn of the twentieth century and the ongoing resistance of Black communities through activism, scholarship, literature, and joy.

By focusing on death in Black fiction, I risk aligning myself with the afropessimism of scholars such as Frank B. Wilderson III who writes: "Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness: Blackness *is* social death: which is to say that there was never a prior meta-moment of plenitude,

never equilibrium: never a moment of social life. Blackness, as a paradigmatic position [...] is elaborated through slavery" (102). The finality of this statement – that Blackness *is* slavery – is curiously ahistorical. The assertion forecloses solidarity across racial lines and ignores the myriad, interrelated histories of genocide, enslavement, and colonization of racial and ethnic groups around the world. The statement is a theoretical and political dead end, existing outside of time and space, refusing to recognize anything about Blackness other than abjection.

In 2020, the same year that Wilderson's book was published, sociologist Dana R. Fisher published data from her forthcoming book that confirmed that the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests were the most ethnically and racially diverse mass protests in US history ("The Diversity of the Recent Black Lives Matter Protests"). My work is inspired by the potential for solidarity these protests represent and by calls for collaboration across racial lines as elaborated by Black feminist theorists such as bell hooks. hooks writes of Black women's exclusion from the second-wave feminist movement:

> Though I criticize aspects of feminist movement as we have known it so far, a critique which is sometimes harsh and unrelenting, I do so not in an attempt to diminish feminist struggle but to enrich, to share in the work of making a liberatory ideology and a liberatory movement. (49)

This possibility of a shared liberatory anti-racist movement mobilized against gendered and economic violence drives my interest in addressing Black death in turn of the century literature. It requires caution and humility on my part to avoid instrumentalizing this history. Taking a critical approach to death in Hopkins' and Griggs' writing means respecting the seriousness with which they approached the subject. Death is at once material fact and versatile symbol in their novels. It enables the explicit protest of anti-Black violence, provides a strategy for undermining

scientific racism, and offers a capacious trope for envisioning utopian futures for Black Americans.

V. *Imperium in Imperio*: "On the Dissecting Board"

Hopkins and Griggs aim to challenge, reclaim, and retheorize contemporary medicine and race science in their work. Perhaps it is not surprising that monstrous white doctors feature heavily in both novels. For most of the nineteenth century, medical practitioners used scientific authority to justify the subjugation of enslaved and free Black communities. Famous medical practitioners such as Samuel George Morton, Louis Agassiz, and Josiah Nott were all members of the American School of Ethnology. All were proponents of polygenesis and scientific theories which inscribed racial difference in the body and the mind. Within this scientific milieu, doctors and medical students in the north and south regularly experimented on enslaved people. Medical schools offered to treat the enslaved for free, providing a stream of bodies for students to practice upon (Savitt 334). More notoriously, southern physicians frequently performed experimental procedures on enslaved victims under the pretense that Black patients could not feel pain (Pernick 155). The physician J. Marion Sims repeatedly performed experimental surgery on enslaved women without the use of anesthesia in an attempt to repair fistulas, only beginning to treat white women after perfecting his technique at the expense of the suffering of Black women.

Even in death, Black people were not safe from medical experimentation as *Sheppard Lee* aptly demonstrates. The Black corpse, Michael Sappol states, "served as an iconic representation of *matter*." (2) It reinforced the boundary between the white physician as the authoritative producer of knowledge and the Black body as the object of study.

Griggs and Hopkins complicate this racialized paradigm of white subject/Black object at the site of its final inscription - the dissecting table. For Black authors, the figure of the white doctor enables a critique of the flimsy foundations of race science, articulates the continued commodification and unspeakable eroticization of the Black body post-Emancipation, and demonstrates how racism can be weaponized against white bodies in even the most hopeless situations. In using Black corpses to counter white medical hegemony, Hopkins and Griggs also force readers to interrogate their own complicity with – and tacit resignation to – the inevitability of Black death and white dominance.

In his introduction to the text, Cornel West declares *Imperium in Imperio* to be the "first major political novel written by an African American" (xvi). It documents the lives of two Black intellectuals, Bernard Belgrave and Belton Piedmont. The novel opens in 1867 with the depiction of their early lives and follows the two men into adulthood when their paths diverge due to the differential treatment each receives according to his skin color and class. Light-skinned Bernard enters the echelons of the Black elite as dark-skinned Belton ends up falsely accused of murder. However, the men are reunited when Belton invites Bernard to become part of a secret Black shadow government with plans to annex Texas to create a Black nation state. The two men represent opposing philosophies of Black emancipation in light of Reconstruction's failure – revolution versus assimilation – and the novel ends ambiguously, as the Imperium teeters on the brink of bloody insurrection.

It is Belton's body which ends up on the dissection table, but he does not go quietly. A variety of incidents, misunderstandings, and experiences of virulent racism contribute to his eventual lynching midway through the novel while he is working in segregated Louisiana. Prior to his demise, Belton falls victim to Jim Crow Laws, the existence of which he only becomes

aware of when he inadvertently violates them. These laws enforce the rigid segregation of whites and Blacks, and Belton quickly attracts the attention of local whites as he struggles to adjust to the loss of the rights and freedoms he enjoyed while living in the north. Belton's inability to acknowledge the Veil, which W. E. B DuBois' 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk* would formulate a few years later, which irrevocably separates him socially and ontologically from the white community further condemns him in the eyes of hostile locals. Ultimately, Belton's sincere and well-intentioned, albeit naive, desire to build relationships of solidarity across racial lines seals his grisly fate.

Belton's commitment to racial uplift is what drives him south. Mid-way through the novel, Belton has become demoralized by life in New York City and the paucity of intellectually stimulating jobs available to an educated Black man like himself. He accepts a teaching position in Louisiana as head of a small Black college that has been forced to hire a Black replacement after legislation is passed barring white people from teaching at Black educational institutions. Arriving in rural Louisiana to begin his new position, Belton is made aware, in a series of increasingly threatening incidents, of the area's strict adherence to the spirit of Jim Crow laws, rigorously enforced despite the frequent absence of any *actual* legislation. He is thrown out of a first-class train coach that is unofficially reserved for whites. He orders and pays a meal in a restaurant, only to be arrested when he innocently sits down at a "whites only" counter. After a night in prison and a fine for vagrancy, he finally escapes to the nearby town of Cadeville where the college is located. Although Belton continues to experience racism there – events which "sank like molten lead into his heart" (101) – he feels empowered to challenge the racial orthodoxy of the Jim Crow south within the seemingly safe confines of the Black college he works at.

One morning, after Belton has been lecturing students on the importance of electoral participation, the father of a student bursts into his room in a state of panic. Scared for Belton's life and the safety of his students after hearing Belton has been encouraging them to vote, the old man narrates to him the story of Reconstruction's failure to protect local voting rights. To conclude, the old man tells the graphic tale of the murders of two brothers who were lynched for casting ballots in the last presidential campaign. Belton sensibly, if regretfully, decides to abandon his political ambitions. Several uneventful years pass until Belton holds a graduation ceremony for students, inviting the preacher of a popular white church to speak to his students. A few days after the event, at the invitation of the preacher, Belon attends a Sunday service at his church. What follows could have been ripped almost verbatim from the pages of Wells' anti-lynching journalism. *The Red Record* lists the deaths of three Black men lynched in 1892 because they "were saucy to white people" (73). Belton's crime? The grievous offence of helping a young white lady with her hymn book during the church service. This indiscretion makes Belton the target of a lynch mob instigated by a white physician, Dr. Zackland.

Zackland had marked Belton for death years prior when he was first observed arriving in Cadeville. Disembarking from the train, Belton is "...a fine specimen of physical manhood. His limbs were well-formed, well-proportioned and seemed as strong as an oak. His manly appearance excited interest wherever he was seen" (Griggs 99–100). This lavish praise of Belton's physique is not qualified with reference to race; this opinion is shared by Black and white folks alike. Dr. Zackland however is the physical antithesis of Belton. The description of Zackland's appearance verges on parody in its villainous overtones. He is described as, "a thin, scrawny looking man with a long beard, very, very white" (99) whose eyes "followed [Belton] cadaverously" (100). Zackland has already laid claim to Belton's body for dissection, observing

to the postmaster that he is "the finest lookin' darkey I ever put my eye on" in language grimly reminiscent of a slave auction (100).

The description of the two men plays into the white subject/Black object paradigm that the act of dissection makes tangible. However, Griggs' soon subverts such expectations. Belton is degraded by Zackland's use of the dispassionate, objectifying vocabulary of the scientist. Belton becomes a "specimen," and a "body to dissect," a walking corpse-in-waiting to the doctor's anatomizing gaze (100). However, the ambiguous picture painted of Zackland opens itself up to a variety of different readings. The descriptor "very, very white" has no clear syntactical object. Does it refer to the doctor's beard? The white supremacist ideology he represents? Or does it imply something more subversive - that in excess, *whiteness* signifies a form of racial or civilizational degeneration? This scientific theory was highly contested at the turn of the century. It was promoted by scientific racists such as Herbert Spencer, the sociologist and Lamarckian most closely associated with Social Darwinism. Theories of inheritance, eugenics, and civilizational collapse were not confined to white supremacists. These theories were surprisingly malleable at the turn of the century; they were theorized by white and Black intellectuals and scientists in service of opposing ideologies such as white supremacy and racial uplift. Griggs and Hopkins invest significant intellectual energy in reorienting eugenics and hereditary theory away from its weaponization by white orthodox practitioners. Later in the novel, Belton leaves his wife Antoinette after she gives birth to a white child, reuniting with her only after the child has grown "a shade darker than his father" making its Blackness visible (171). In the next chapter, I address the promise and limitations of Griggs' and Hopkins' fictional retheorization of racialized scientific schema.

To return to Belton and Zackland, in this scene, Griggs is not co-opting the science of race but writing against it. His description of Zackland – who "followed [Belton] cadaverously" – subverts the regimes of scientific racism by comparing a white doctor to a corpse rather than the Black man who he intends to dissect. The descriptions of both men draw upon anatomical language to identify whiteness with perversion and debility and Blackness with strength and vitality. Zackland is a gothic grotesque who stoops to look more "keenly" at Belton, the "specimen" he is physically helpless to obtain and must recruit an entire lynch mob to capture.

The lynching proceeds in predictably horrifying fashion. The white mob hangs and then shoots Belton. The conclusion seems grimly inevitable. Yet miraculously, Belton survives. He is unconscious but very much alive as his body is carried to the dissection table: "Dr. Zackland came to the table and looked down on Belton with a happy smile. To have such a robust, well-formed, handsome nigger to dissect and examine he regarded as one of the greatest boons of his medical career." (106) Here, Zackland's professed concern that he obtain Belton for "the interest of society" and the advance of medicine are revealed as smokescreens for darker, more psychological urges (105). Zackland is not searching for knowledge; he seeks a trophy. His whiteness is insufficient consolation for physical weakness, age, and his distasteful appearance. The description of Belton's "robust, well-formed, handsome" body is charged with eroticism and desire (106). In reference to the enslaved body, Saidiya Hartman writes: "The fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion" (*Scenes of Subjection* 21). Zackland desires Belton's body. He is envious of his appearance and the attention he attracts. Yet the doctor

cannot *be* Belton nor admit to his envy, such is his absolute investment in white supremacy and the privilege his whiteness affords him. But he can, as Hartman states, use Belton's body as a possession through which he can assert his power. Dissecting Belton's corpse will secure Zackland's place in the racial hierarchy, burnish his reputation as a physician, and inscribe his dominion into the flesh of the object he craves.

More disturbingly, the lynching scene and the doctor's hunger for Belton's "handsome" body take on more overt sexual implications in light of Belton's experiment in New York prior to travelling south to Cadeville. In New York City, Belton decides to disguise himself as a Black woman "to find out just what view the white people are taking of the Negro" and "what precautionary steps the white people were going to take" to deal with the growing numbers of "malcontents and insurrection breeders" left without employment due to segregation (91). Although not referenced explicitly within the book, Plessy vs. Ferguson was passed by the Supreme Court in 1896, declaring that segregation by race did not violate the U.S. Constitution. Homer Plessy's case reached the Supreme Court after he was charged in 1892 for violating a law in Louisiana. The law mandated the racial segregation of railway carriages and Plessy was arrested after deliberately boarding one reserved for whites. Griggs is almost certainly responding to Plessy vs. Ferguson by narrating an incident virtually identical to Plessy's experience. Belton enters a rail carriage reserved for whites in Louisiana only to be ejected not only from the carriage but from the train itself to land in the mud. The scene emphasizes the humiliation and lack of rights which characterized life for Black communities under Jim Crow.

After his time in New York City, Belton fears that the humiliation, unemployment, and dispossession of Black people caused by segregation will ultimately lead to a race war. In the previous chapter, Belton goes undercover in an effort to "find out just what view the white

people were taking of the Negro" (91). Employed as a nurse and disguised as a "healthy, handsome, robust colored girl, with features rather large for a woman but attractive just the same," Belton finds the white man is "utterly ignorant" of the lives of Black people and worse, that the Black man is "not an object for serious thought" (92). What his experiment and disguise reveal are the daily threats of sexual harassment, assault, and rape faced by Black women. Belton's own situation escalates to a dangerous extent when a group of white men, believing he is female, make a "bold and daring plan of kidnapping and overpowering [him]" (93). Thankfully, Belton evades this assault, but it ends his nursing career and his brief time masquerading as a Black woman. Whether disguised as a woman or presenting as a man, Belton finds himself in situations where his life and bodily autonomy are threatened by white men. However, as Marlene D. Allen observes, it is impossible to acknowledge the sexual threat to Black men posed by white men in this period or during slavery:

> Griggs does not reveal how Belton escapes from his white would-be rapists because he cannot even speak about the implications of this homoerotic moment in the text, one which reveals black male bodies are just as vulnerable to sexual assault as black female bodies were. (41)

Although unspeakable within *Imperium in Imperio*, sexual abuse and its consequences for Black Americans haunt both Griggs' and Hopkins' writing. Here, as in *Of One Blood,* the sexual violence faced by Black women and men is text and subtext. However, for Griggs, unlike the lynching scene and its aftermath, Belton's near escape is not a suitable showcase for masculine stoicism, cunning, and intelligence in the face of danger. Despite being unable to articulate the threat of male rape in this instance, Griggs draws attention to the gendered contours of racial

violence without representing it on the page, another instance of his ability to critique violence against Black women without pandering to the voyeurism of white audiences.

VI. Resurrection as Retaliation

Belton is lynched because he overestimates the humanity of his white neighbors. Suitably enough, Zackland is undone by his relentless quest for recognition by his white peers. If his interest in Belton had been driven by genuine scientific curiosity, Zackland may have escaped with life. Instead of beginning the dissection immediately, Zackland waits for the arrival of his fellow doctors so that he can display "one of the greatest boons of his medical career" to an appreciative audience (Griggs 106). By now, Belton has regained consciousness but decides it "best to feign death" (106). He is outnumbered and unarmed in the presence of Zackland and the three men who lynched him (106). Zackland begins to cut the skin on Belton's head, but he remains motionless. Finally, Zackland is satisfied that Belton is dead, "or he would show some sign of life," but not before sticking a needle in Belton's hand: "This was done, but while the pain was exceedingly excruciating, Belton showed no sign of feeling. "You may go now," said the Doctor to his three attendants, "he is certainly dead." (106) Ironically, Belton's ability to suppress pain and to feign his own death allows him to escape. Zackland places a knife on the table next to Belton and then leaves the room for a few moments. Upon his return, Belton waits until Zackland's back is turned to leap up, knife in hand. Such is Zackland's alarm that: "at the sight of the dead man returned to life [...] he was too terrified to act or scream, and before he could recover his self-possession Belton plunged the knife through his throat." (107) Belton then throws the body on the dissection table, covers it with a sheet, and leaves a note pinned to the corpse that reads, "DOCTORS: I have stepped out for a short while. Don't touch the nigger until

I come. "ZACKLAND."" (107). He succeeds in killing his (attempted) murderer, substituting their corpse for his own, and escaping virtually unscathed.

The simplicity and brevity of the scene and the unexpected pleasure of witnessing Belton not only survive but enact revenge on his "killers" underscores the dissident force of Griggs' use of genre as a mode of critique. Griggs combines elements of gothic horror, sensationalist literature, and farce to challenge the commodification of Black bodies for material and psychological ends. He ridicules scientific racism and teaches readers to challenge their own complicity with a notion of Blackness predicated upon suffering. The very real pain and danger Belton faces makes for relentlessly grim reading. But when juxtaposed with Zackland's oblivious confidence in Belton's demise, the doctor's hubristic decision to delay dissection so he can bask in the glory of his peers' approval lends absurdity to the passage. The farcical tone of the passage is heightened by the dramatic irony of the final showdown between the two men. We know Belton is alive, making Zackland's reaction of genuine horror at the corpse's seemingly supernatural resurrection all the more comedic. The contrast between the animated corpse and Zackland's terror undermines the villain's power: "The animated skeleton, like the corpse [...] aims at frightening the villains and leading them to confess their crimes" (Talairach 46). The scene's humor is increased by the knowledge that when the other doctors arrive, rather than the body Zackland considered a triumph of his career, they will discover the doctor's own corpse on the table along with Belton's comically understated note. Zackland's professional failure is complete. He cannot even discern the living from the dead, a task that does not typically require medical training yet lies firmly beyond Zackland's grasp.

Our surprise at Belton's survival is a reminder from Griggs that anti-Black racism, like any groundless ideology based on self-deception and reality distortion, is not immune to critique.

Belton's actions are a rejection of appeals to common humanity predicated almost entirely on the idea of individual feeling acting as a catalyst for sentimental recognition across racial lines. Belton's decision to place his faith in the promise of a white minister – taking his "kind invitation" to attend church at face value and acting chivalrously towards a young woman – demonstrates an almost fatal misunderstanding of the legal and civic norms of the segregated south. Belton doesn't realize until it is almost too late that any sense of humanity shared between himself as a Black man and the white congregation is a fiction of his own making. In a further twist of the knife from Griggs, Belton is "elated over this invitation" by the preacher and "kindly" aids the young woman during the service (103). Yet to the white congregation and local residents, Belton is a problem to "fix", a "n****" to discipline, a dead and bloodied symbol intended to terrorize the Black community (104). If sentimental appeals to common feeling offer no basis for safety, why not use the object status foisted upon Black bodies *against* white oppressors?

Belton's decision to feign death and show "no sign of feeling" are necessary to his survival. However, lack of sensation deployed as a strategy of survival and resistance by Black people signifies the failure of Harriet Beecher Stowe's appeal to feeling - that if individuals were to *feel right* about the injustice of slavery, somehow sentimentality would act to bind and heal the nation. Pretending to be dead is in one sense the ultimate rejection of the regimes of science, sentimentality, and the displays of emotional regulation necessary for Black Americans to be considered fully human and worthy of compassion, legal rights, and protection against violence.

VII. Painful Feelings in the Long Nineteenth Century

Before I turn to *Of One Blood* and its own depiction of Black resurrection, I will provide some critical context to Griggs and Hopkin's interrogation of the liberatory potential of sympathy for Black Americans. To understand why Black authors chose to develop alternative strategies of resistance and community building, I turn to scholarship on the limitations of feeling as an abolitionist strategy, its weaponization against people of color, and the use of science and sensibility as an index of the evolutionary potential of various races. Again, I draw upon scholarship by Kyla Schuller that theorizes sentimentality in the long nineteenth century as a form of biopower, as well as the work of Xine Yao on the "sexual and racial politics of unfeeling not as oppression from above but as a tactic from below" (3). Schuller and Yao both reject sentimentality's affective politics of humanitarian reform which is predicated upon universal sympathy granted to minoritized subjects through the recognition of their suffering bodies. Black Americans, according to Yao, "do not have the luxury of being unsympathetic without forfeiting the provisional acceptance of their capacity for affective expressions and, therefore, the conditional acceptance of their humanity" (4). White people determine the legitimacy of the feelings of people of color, typically as a means of authorizing violence and denying the humanity of these communities. Even when used by abolitionists and purported white allies of Black Americans, appeals to sympathy often reinscribed racial difference at the level of affect. Sympathetic feeling became evidence of the refined sensibilities of white bodies while affirming the fatally embodied, evolutionarily stalled state of Black bodies. In light of these ideas, Hopkins' and Griggs' decision to employ death and insensibility as polyvalent figures capable of generating new and conflicting meanings allows both authors to wrestle with the complexity of envisioning utopian futures born from a history of racial trauma.

From Martin S. Pernick to Joanna Bourke, historians and literary critics draw upon literature and historical archives to define nineteenth-century American culture as a "culture of pain." The technological advances of the Civil War saw death and injury on a hitherto unimaginable scale while medical innovation in developing new anesthetic techniques made pain seem conquerable for the first time in human history. Evolutionary theory turned pain into a condition of being, experienced by man and animal alike, while sentimental fiction sought to combat slavery through the representation of ever more violent scenes of Black bodies in pain. Yet the question of what pain *was*, and what purpose it served, remained impossible to answer. The carnage of the Civil War, evolutionary theory, and the discovery of anesthesia tested the Christian orthodoxy of pain as "a sign of divine election [...] individually rewarding as well as socially productive, since it serve[d] as a touchstone for the community to come together" (Constantinesco 13). Why would God allow such suffering to take place? Why would he permit generations to suffer before the discovery of anesthetics? And if pain is intended for man's moral education, then why do animals suffer?[12] Knowing that suffering is universal does not aid in its alleviation. Sympathy as a means of bridging the gap between sufferer and witness emerges is fatally limited in its humanitarian capacity because racial difference determines the affective capacities of each individual.

In *Imperium in Imperio,* Griggs rejects what Karen Halttunen describes as the "pornography of pain" proffered by humanitarian reform literature which relied on graphic depictions of Black suffering to elicit sympathy from its readers. According to Halttunen,

[12] Darwin was particularly perturbed by this question, writing: "A being so powerful & so full of knowledge as a God who could create the universe, is to our finite minds omnipotent & omniscient, & it revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of the lower animals throughout almost endless time?" (*Autobiography* 90)

"Anglo-American humanitarianism first appeared in a culture of sensation, which assigned great importance to the role of the senses, and developed within a culture of sensationalism, which tended to treat pain as alluring, exciting, and ultimately obscene" ("Humanitarianism" 318). In reform literature, graphic violence was intended to elicit an emotional response, both titillating and horrifying, with the intent of arousing the reader to act. Abolitionists compiled anthologies of suffering such as *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839) whose subtitle attests to the centrality of vision – of *witnessing* – to its humanitarian function and the requirement that the reader re-witness through imaginative identification.

Griggs description of Belton's lynching draws attention to the political and legal disenfranchisement of Black Americans. It also testifies to the tenacity of the novel's protagonist. Writing for a largely Black audience, Griggs did not need to convince his readership of white Americans' capacity for cruelty. The only mention of physical pain in the scene occurs when Belton is lying on the dissection table and Zackland cuts and pricks his skin to ensure he is dead. Despite the pain being "exceedingly excruciating," Belton neither winces nor shows any "sign of feeling" (Griggs 106). In doing so, Griggs not only demonstrates Belton's stoicism and bravery, but he also alludes to contemporary debates over the biopolitics of race. As referenced earlier in my analysis of *Sheppard Lee,* Schuller argues persuasively that during the nineteenth century "race [...] crystallized as a relative index of the body's degree of impressibility" (55). Racialized bodies such as Lee-as-Tom's could experience sensations but not regulate them, leaving them at an evolutionary dead end. Lee-as-Tom's inability to regulate the feelings stirred up by an abolitionist pamphlet leads to the ill-fated rebellion against his enslavers which culminates in his death by execution. Lee-as-Tom's *unimpressibility* is what places him on the dissection table. An individual's capacity for sympathy and impressibility determined whether he or she was capable

of evolutionary progress and contributing to civilized society. Black bodies were deemed insensate and less delicate than white bodies. As discussed in the previous chapter, Black Americans were subject to medical experimentation, denied anesthesia, and believed to have thicker skin than whites. Such beliefs in the insensibility of Black bodies were not confined solely to virulently racist pro-slavery advocates. Pernick describes how "even [many] opponents of slavery propagated the belief that Blacks did not feel as much pain as did whites," citing abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, and her belief that sensibility to pain was dulled in Black bodies thanks to the divine intervention of a compassionate Christian god (156).

Griggs uses the dissection scene to undermine the notion that Black people were immune to pain or evolutionary progress. Belton bravely endures pain in order to trick Zackland into believing he is dead. Belton's impressibility – his ability to receive sensations, process them, and act accordingly – allows him to mask his suffering in order to escape. Where Zackland sees "no sign of feeling," the reader sees stoicism, intelligence, and Belton's ability to respond to danger by indulging in, and ultimately undermining, scientific theories that reduced Blackness to a state of "pure corporeality that prevents the self-possession necessary for legal rights" (Schuller 54). Belton's ability to manipulate or repress his responses to stimuli and his vulnerability to pain mark him as civilized, casting doubt on the any notion that race indexed a body's impressibility.

VIII. Conclusion

Unlike Sheppard Lee and Tom, Belton survives his attempted murder. However, *Imperium in Imperio* suggests that the threat of dissection continued to instill dread in Black Americans some sixty years after Bird published *Sheppard Lee*. Griggs's disruption of the paradigmatic example of U.S. anti-Black racism – a symbol of white modernity looming over the

dead body of a race without a future – is only temporary. By the end of the novel, Belton has been successfully executed, by members of the Imperium this time, and laid to rest. He escapes the indignity of dissection but falls victim to the ideological violence of the Black shadow government that allows members to resign through "death alone" (Griggs 170). The novel begins and ends with the account of one of Belton's executioners, Berl Trout, a narrative structure that casts doubt on both the legitimacy and future of the Imperium. It seems that Griggs felt certain of the enormous potential of Black Americans such as Belton, possessed of intelligence and wit, but less sure as to how to secure a viable future for the race. The ambiguity of the novel's ending does not lessen the force of Griggs' attack on race science's deadly and deadening authority. Belton's miraculous survival and his eventual death testify to the dangers of ideological complacency to white *and* Black Americans, a sobering if recursive lesson.

This is not the only lesson we take from Griggs's fiction. I opened this chapter with a discussion of the dead bodies haunting academic institutions. I believe that the fictional dead can be our guides as we pursue the elusive stories of the lives and deaths of the people excluded from historical accounts but buried in physical archives. Novelists like Griggs help us to see what is at stake when we come face to face with the dead. He reminds us that how we treat the deceased – particularly the anonymous bodies most vulnerable to being strung up as skeletons and placed on shelves – can provide us with opportunities to break the cycles of ideological and institutional violence that have ended such lives and desecrated their bodies. Death need not be the end of hope.

Chapter Three

The Living Dead: The New Negro Woman, Representation, and Racial Uplift in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood* and Sutton E. Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio*

I. Introduction: Dead Women

In her groundbreaking text on death and femininity in Western culture, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, Elizabeth Bronfen states that "Femininity and death cause a disorder to stability, mark moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication produces a recuperation of order, a return to stability" (xii). Black authors such as Hopkins, whose novels frequently centered on the white male control of Black female bodies, had the difficult task of reclaiming the Black female body from both racist stereotypes *and* the constraints of the New Negro movement's deployment of virtuous Black femininity as a symbol of racial progress. *Of One Blood*'s female "mulatta" protagonist, Dianthe Lusk, embodies the traumatic history of the sexual abuse of Black women. She is also an artist and the heir to a royal African dynasty. Dianthe spends much of the novel in states of living death, either unconscious or in a cataleptic trance, before she is murdered by her white captor at the end of the novel.

Following Bronfen's model, I approach *Of One Blood*'s treatment of female death as an attempt to "revise the canon, to represent the topos and trope of feminine death differently" even as the text, like those Bronfen analyzes, sits "uncannily between a disavowal and an affirmation of the dominant image repertoire; hovering between cultural complicity and critique" (395). Dianthe's presence in the novel is framed by scientific and historical discourses which disempower women by transforming them into objects of male professional and sexual conquest. When Black and white medical practitioners encounter Dianthe unconscious in a hospital bed, they are fascinated by her mysterious medical issues and aroused by her passive femininity. In

her pioneering feminist study of early Black women's fiction, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist,* Hazel Carby identifies the appropriation of women's bodies as a recurring topos in Hopkins' novels. Carby writes of Sappho, the sexually abused heroine of Hopkins' *Contending Forces,* that:

> The only possible future for [Sappho's] black womanhood was through a confrontation with, not denial of, her history. The struggle to establish and assert her womanhood was a struggle of redemption: a retrieval and reclaiming of the previously colonized. (144)

Hopkins' Black heroines are either unable or unwilling to disavow their experiences of sexual trauma. To do so would mean ignoring the continuity between the historical abuse of Black women under slavery and their ongoing exploitation as justified by patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies. Hopkins' impossibly ambitious goal of reimagining Black existence was driven by her belief that literature could be a powerful tool of racial uplift.

As a novelist and magazine editor, Hopkins dedicated her work to showcasing Black talent, culture, and history, but as Hanna Wallinger notes, her "feminist ideals sometimes collided with her race allegiance" (8). Or put another way, Hopkins' feminist writing and political ideas were often dismissed by her male colleagues at the *Colored American Magazine*. The utopia Hopkins imagines in *Of One Blood* is necessarily incomplete and unsatisfying. According to the critic Amber Foster, the novel attempts to craft a future for Black Americans that appeals to "both biblical prophecy and Western notions of progress to suggest a symbolic return to a glorious African past" (54). However, these "Western notions of progress" lead Hopkins into what scholar Martin Japtok terms the "Darwinist Trap" which he defines as "Making the "worth" of a people dependent upon technological and cultural accomplishments [...] following the same quasi-Darwinian logic that served nineteenth- and twentieth-century

imperialists to "justify" their ventures" (403). Similarly, Jalondra A. Davis argues that the critical characterization of Afrofuturism as a progressive genre obscures how, in *Of One Blood,* "escape from the racial past reproduces a gendered and epistemic violence towards the subjects that occupy that past" (9). Although critics including Melissa Asher Daniels are more forgiving towards Hopkins' utopian vision, it remains a contradictory site which valorizes an ancient lineage of pure African blood while arguing for in favor of the theory of monogenesis - the idea that all races are descended from one common ancestor making the human race *of one blood*.

This chapter argues that dead woman can act as agents for political change in the hands of Black authors like Hopkins writing at the height of a Black intellectual project that conceived of women in purely biological terms, safely confining their sexually vulnerable bodies to domestic spaces. Hopkins's novel, like Griggs', is not entirely successful in challenging the subordination of Black female agency to the project of Black liberation. However, Hopkins' deliberate deployment of the trope of the (un)dead woman offers a powerful rebuttal to the New Negro's political disenfranchisement of women. Dianthe may not survive the novel, but she is pivotal to the novel's critique of gendered violence. Having frequently published on death in nineteenth-century America, the literary critic Dana Luciano reframes the melancholy politics of *Of One Blood* as generative of Black futures, writing:

> Foregrounding the revivification of the (living) dead as a means of addressing the physiological, psychic, and cultural wounding that marked African and Anglo American subjectivity at the turn of the century, *Of One Blood's* bicontinental, transhistorical narrative performs an act of critical memory that both reframes the notion of melancholia and resituates the possibilities for African American community. (149-150)

Building upon Luciano's framework for reading death against the grain, I argue that by analyzing Hopkins' implementation of the surprisingly malleable dead woman trope, it crystallizes into a "pointed critique of the New Negro's appropriation of the female body" and an equally potent rejoinder to Griggs' vision of an exclusionary masculine utopia in *Imperium in Imperio* (Kassanoff 176).

II. Hopkins' Generic Bricolage

Of all the similarities between *Imperium and Imperio* and *Of One Blood*, one of the most striking is that each dedicates a chapter to a Black character's resurrection from the dead. A closer look at these apparent reanimations demonstrates not only the oddity of such reanimations but another anomaly: how Black women's racial uplift through literature is stymied. Less surprisingly, both texts display the gendered narrative conventions of nineteenth-century fiction and the biopolitical burdens placed upon Black women at a time when miscegenation, racial science, sex, and the cult of "true womanhood" were fiercely contested discourses. Published serially over the course of two years, Hopkins' novel, like Griggs', is invested in making the traumatic history of Black Americans usable during a turbulent historical moment defined by anti-Black violence, social and scientific Darwinism, and the failure of Reconstruction's promises. Like Griggs, Hopkins strays away from the realist mode in favor of fashioning an alternative Black utopia, choosing to draw upon a variety of genres, including the adventure novel, what Susan Gillman terms the "American race melodrama" ("The Occult" 222), and the romance. Yet despite their utopian leanings, both Hopkins' and Griggs' visions of a future Black America are foreshortened by the inheritance of slavery's sexual trauma and the challenge it poses to past, present, and future Black kinship as overwhelmingly represented by Black

women. Death does not offer liberation for these figures. Female characters are already socially dead or are doomed to die according to the literary and cultural norms of "the cult of True Womanhood" (Welter). Their main function is to embody the possibilities for the reproductive futurism of the Black race (Edelman).

Pauline Hopkins' fourth and final novel, *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self* (serialized 1902-3), is the sensational story of Reuel Briggs, a light-skinned Black medical student at Harvard, who joins an expedition to Africa in the hopes of discovering the ancient city of Telassar in Ethiopia. Not only does he rediscover the city and confirm the Biblical primacy of the Black race – according to the book the races are "descended all from Ham" – he takes his seat as the long-awaited ruler of this magnificent civilization and promises to restore the Black race to its original righteous, glory (Hopkins 100). The story, like its title, is an argument for monogenesis which draws upon novel turn of the century sciences such as archaeology and psychology in its Pan-African quest to imagine a livable future for Black Americans from Biblical history and science. Scholars have written about Hopkins' engagement with science (Japtok; Stevenson; Schrager; Gillman, "The Occult"), empire and the disapora (Dworkin; Fraser), and the novel's study of the traumatic sexual legacies of slavery and miscegenation (Gillman, *Blood Talk*; Lam; Horvitz). Reuel falls in love with Dianthe Lusk, an ethereal figure described by JoAnn Pavletich as the limit case for the possibilities and dangers of the tragic mulatta trope for African American fiction and racial uplift.

Dianthe, a Black woman unwittingly passing as white, is engaged to Reuel. While Reuel is on the trip to Africa which will reveal his royal ancestry, his close friend, Aubrey Livingstone, conspires to murder his own fiancée, Molly Vance. Making it look like an accident, Aubrey kills Molly and uses mesmeric powers to force Dianthe to become his lover. Thinking Dianthe dead,

Aubrey weds Queen Candace in Ethiopia and takes the throne of the ancient civilization of Telassar. At the end of the novel, Dianthe, Reuel, and Aubrey are revealed to be siblings, all descended from a white enslaver and an enslaved woman, Mira. The incestuous rivalry between Reuel and Aubrey terminates with Dianthe's murder by Aubrey. When Reuel returns to America, he uncovers Aubrey's plot. The prime minister of Telassar, Ai, forces Aubrey to die by suicide as penance for his crime. Conscious of the racism of the US where the Black man "is counted less than other mortals" and freed from any romantic or familial obligations, Reuel returns to Ethiopia to take the throne as the long-awaited King Ergamenes (Hopkins 129). By his side sits Queen Candace, the woman he had married after being told by letter of Dianthe's first, fictitious death. The plot contains many popular nineteenth-century literary tropes drawn from sentimental literature, melodrama, and the passing novel. Babies are switched at birth, hidden histories are revealed, Black characters pass as white, and the novel's final revelation exposes blood kinship between characters assumed to be of different races to one another. The novel bears all the hallmarks of the sensational race melodrama as inflected through the sentimental marriage plot, the adventure novel, and the novel of racial uplift.

III. “The most marvelous thing to watch is the death of a person”: Reviving Sleeping Beauty

Of One Blood and *Imperium in Imperio* engage a further complexity in that each contains a scene in which a seemingly dead Black character awaits dissection by white doctors only to miraculously return to life. By comparing Belton's resurrection to a similar scene involving Dianthe in *Of One Blood,* the gendered limitations of death and rebirth as narrative tropes become apparent. Reuel has already encountered Dianthe twice before he sees her body lying in

a hospital bed: once as a ghostly vision and once as a member of the Fisk singers whom Aubrey and Reuel both see in concert. Reuel finally meets Dianthe face to face when he is summoned to the hospital after a train accident. Upon arrival, a nurse tells him of a woman rescued from the wreckage:

> She shows no sign of injury, but the doctors cannot restore her to consciousness. Doctor Livingston pronounces her dead, but it doesn't seem possible. So young, so beautifully. Do something for her. (Hopkins 27)

Despite his renown as a student, "a recognized power in the medical profession," Reuel's career is limited by race and his poverty. Although he has been declared an "authority" in brain diseases, he is warned upon arrival that even he can do nothing to restore the young woman.

Bronfen argues persuasively that the beautiful female corpse was a consistent trope of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature and culture. Talairach, too, describes the overdetermined meaning of the female corpse in gothic literature which beguiled viewers even as it repulsed them:

> Often portrayed as on the boundary between life and death, dead women were stereotypically white and pure – immaculate – in their eternal sleep. [...] These Sleeping Beauties hovered uncannily between stereotypes of virginal femininity (safely protected from temptation by death) and corpses hosting mysteries likely to escape an anatomist once decomposition started. (85)

Dianthe certainly embodies mysteries, not least of all the truth that she is Black. By mentioning her beauty, the nurse hopes to inspire urgency in Reuel. However, her comment also highlights the aesthetic qualities of the dead woman who appears to those around her to be both white and pure. In this sense, Dianthe's corpse embodies the sort of passive and defenseless femininity so

valorized in women in the nineteenth century. Waiting to be uncovered, her lifeless body is eroticized as the object of scientific knowledge which bolsters Reuel's scientific authority.

Aubrey Livingston, the representative figure of orthodox white science in the novel, remains, at this stage, Reuel's best friend. As physicians, Livingston and the other white doctors at the hospital represent the highest attainments of western medicine. Meanwhile, Reuel has not yet obtained his medical degree, putting him at a professional and racial disadvantage among the medical staff. Livingston tells Reuel that he too will be unable to help Dianthe, the unknown woman, as she is "already cold and stiff" (27). Other physicians chime in with similar verdicts, including the head physician on duty who shouts in irritation that rigor mortis has already set in, exasperated by Reuel's seemingly impossible quest to revive Dianthe (29). Despite Reuel's known authority in diseases of the brain, he is in a weak negotiating position thanks to the intersection of race and class. His determination to prove that the woman is alive further imperils his authority, leading several around him to smile, for "malice and envy, from Adam's time, have loved a shining mark" (30). Not only do the white physicians expect to see a Black student brought low, but they also hope to see their mistrust in a Black student's scientific ability vindicated.

Unbeknownst to those present, Reuel has been working on a solution to one of the greatest, perhaps *the* greatest, problems to afflict humanity:

> Advancing far afield in the mysterious regions of science, he had stumbled upon the solution of one of life's problems: *the reanimation of the body after seeming death.* (29)

Fearing ridicule from his white cohort and error in his findings, Reuel has not disclosed his discovery to anyone. Yet when faced with a life or death situation, he decides the time has come to reveal his ability to bring the dead back to life. Like Sheppard Lee's mummified body, Dianthe

certainly *appears* dead. She is described as "lifeless," "cold," with "icy, livid hands," and a "motionless" heart (29, 30). By the time Reuel is examining her, "the characteristics of death were still more pronounced" (31). In drawing upon genuine scientific theories, Hopkins situates Dianthe's catalepsy in relation to "the numerous medical works published in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which attempted to distinguish real from apparent death, and to define the end of life clinically" (Talaraich 173). The physicians surrounding Reuel mock his invention by drawing attention to the "characteristics of death" displayed by Dianthe (Hopkins 31). Reuel replies:

> "Where death has been due to causes which have not impaired or injured or destroyed tissue formation or torn down the structure of vital organs, life may be recalled when it has become entirely extinct, which is not so in the present case. This I have discovered by my experiments in animal magnetism." (32)

Reuel espouses a theory of mortality that equates death with the destruction of the body's tissue and organs. If these remain intact, then a body can be returned to life using Reuel's method.

Reuel's theory echoes those espoused by Bird in *Sheppard Lee*. Bird's attention to the lifelike appearance of Sheppard Lee's mummy, "for all the world looking entirely like a living being," and the galvanic experiments performed on Lee-as-Tom are also contributing to the same debates about what death is and when it occurs (Bird 405). *Sheppard Lee* tells readers that the results of the galvanic experiments were published:

> On the whole, the phenomenon was considered curious and wonderful; and an account of it having been drawn up by the doctors, and headed "Extraordinary Case of the Effects of Galvanism on a Dead Body," it was printed for the benefit of scientific men throughout the world, in a medical journal, where, I doubt not, it may be found at this day. (375)

Like *Sheppard Lee's* subtitle, "Written by Himself," this reference to a published medical case aids in the novel's pretense that it was a true story, a popular literary trope since the eighteenth century. More importantly, *Sheppard Lee* and *Of One Blood* demonstrate the traffic between literature and science during this period and how medical writing manipulated popular literary tropes to convey their mastery over scientific knowledge (Talairach 175).

Like Belton in *Imperium in Imperio*, Dianthe is facing postmortem dissection, the fate of the destitute and marginalized who died alone or whose families were unable to afford to bury them. As discussed in the previous chapters, Black communities were targeted by medical schools and grave robbers. Although Dianthe has not been killed for the purposes of securing her corpse for medical use, as is the case with Belton, dissection was considered an act of desecration in a historical period still dominated by Christian beliefs about death and the afterlife. The medical assistants are hovering nearby "ready to transport the body to the operating room for the post-mortem" and only Reuel can save Dianthe from this "awful fate" (31, 30).

Reuel's scientific practice combines elements of mysticism, the occult, and the turn of the century's New Psychology. The novel begins in Reuel's small, gloomy apartment as he reads a book called *The Unclassified Residuum* by one M. Binet. M. Binet refers to the French psychologist, Alfred Binet, whose books *Animal Magnetism* and *On Double Consciousness* were both published in English around the time Hopkins was writing. *The Unclassified Residuum* is a quotation from an essay by William James, an American psychologist. As Joshua Lam summarizes, "Like Binet, James had a long-standing interest not only in the phenomenon of second personality made famous by Binet, Janet, and Charcot, but also in psychical research" (478). Reuel, like Hopkins, does not distinguish between Western science and his more unorthodox practices in *Of One Blood*.

Hopkins is invested in the potential of these new sciences, orthodox and otherwise, to counter scientific assertions of white supremacy which placed Black Americans in a subordinate position. African spiritual and occult practices are also prominent themes in the second part of the novel when Reuel travels to Ethiopia. More than once, the dead communicate with the living, blurring the lines between history and the present moment. As Susan Gilman observes, "the novel thus twins rather than opposes Euro-American science and African spiritualism, offering different traditions or systems of the occult as the syncretic meeting ground between the two civilizations" ("The Occult" 72). Throughout the text, characters of various racial identities enter trance states, use psychic powers to exert control over others, and see visions of events distant in time and space. Dianthe's deathlike state, the "mesmeric affinity" between her and Reuel, and his ability to rouse her from her trance exemplify the novel's mixing of Western science, Black spiritualism, and supernatural phenomena.

Reuel's technique for reviving the dead is the result of his research into animal magnetism, also known as mesmerism; according to Reuel, as long as the structures of the body remain intact, it can be restored to life. Animal magnetism was first theorized by Anton Mesmer and popularized during the nineteenth century. One of its central tenets was that life is sustained by an invisible, universal magnetic fluid, what Reuel refers to as "volatile magnetism" or a "subtile magnetic agent" that enters the body through respiration (Hopkins 32, 33). Reuel has created a powder to restore the "seeming dead" back to life. He describes his findings and treatment to the doctors present but they are quick to dismiss his theories as unscientific. The head physician, Dr. Hamilton, expresses the orthodox view that, "We leave such assertions to quacks, generally, for the time of miracles is past" (33), and indeed, mesmerism's influence began to wane towards the end of the century. However, Dr. Hamilton is soon forced to recant

when, after being treated with Reuel's powder, Dianthe not only moves but is able to respond to Reuel's questions. She is not fully recovered. She has no memory of who or where she is nor of any events in her life prior to her revival: "the complete restoration of her faculties would depend upon time, nature, and constitution" (35). Despite this miraculous occurrence, stark differences between Belton's heroic leap from the resurrection table and Dianthe's gentle awakening become apparent, revealing how gender circumscribes Black agency.

Dianthe's revival enhances Reuel's authority in the eyes of his white medical colleagues. His scientific prowess and expertise is confirmed in front of a skeptical audience as he enacts the seemingly impossible. But Dianthe's role in her resurrection is negligible. She exists as a vessel for the demonstration of Reuel's untested theory, a guinea pig who can neither decline nor consent to his experimental treatment. The doctors congratulate Reuel, but Dianthe is treated as a test subject rather than a person. As she sleeps, she is secretly observed and touched by doctors who enter the room "noiselessly...gazing upon the sleeper with awe, listening to her breathing, feeling lightly the fluttering pulse" (35). Throughout the remainder of the chapter, Reuel and the other medical staff emphasize Dianthe's psychological vulnerability. Upon awakening, the third person narration, limited to Reuel's perspective, compares Dianthe to a child; he is overcome with emotion at the thought of her total dependence upon him (34). Dianthe is brought back to life but remains reliant upon strangers' charity for her basic needs, such as food, but also for the restoration of her memory and with it her selfhood.

Mesmerism's scientific credibility was already declining by the beginning of the twentieth century, but during the nineteenth it captured the imaginations of writers in Britain and the United States including Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Margaret Fuller, and Harriet

Beecher Stowe.[13] However, mesmerism's literary usage reflects its ambiguous reception as a theory and as a scientific practice. As Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne observe in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism,* as an unorthodox science often practiced in domestic and public spaces, mesmerism was attractive to those who by virtue of race, gender, or class were excluded from the elite, closes spaces of orthodox scientific learning (7-9). However, mesmerism could also reinforce existing social hierarchies as it gave the mesmerizer almost total control over his or her subdued patient:

> Much of the literary interpretation of nineteenth-century mesmerism envisaged a male mesmerizer, invariably insidious and foreign, making passes over the body and manipulating the mind of a young and passive female. (8)

Reuel's miraculous resurrection of Dianthe exemplifies the gendered and racialized conventions of mesmerism in literature. Reuel, a Black medical student, uses his powers of animal magnetism to restore Dianthe to consciousness in front of a skeptical audience of white male physicians. Here, as throughout the novel, Dianthe will succumb to the mesmeric powers of men, becoming the object of their romantic and sexual desire. Unfortunately, mesmerism allows Aubrey to keep Dianthe captive against her wishes and force her into marriage with him. "As the eroticized object upon whom Reuel and Aubrey practice their unethical feats of mesmerism, Dianthe Lusk represents a fundamental problem in the text" according to Jennie A. Kassanoff (173). Her eventual death will be at Aubrey's hands as he reenacts the racialized sexual violence of slavery that his slave-owning father inflicted on Dianthe's grandmother and mother. Despite mesmerism's role in reviving Dianthe from her coma-like state, it is also used to kill her, raising

[13] For more on mesmerism's influence on U.S. culture and literature, see Doty and Ogden.

troubling questions about free will and the gendered dynamics of alternative sciences such as mesmerism.

IV. Embodying Slavery's Trauma: Feminine Passivity and Male Control

Several critics have read Dianthe's deathlike state after the train accident and her later trances as symptomatic of the repressed trauma of sexual assault and slavery. As Brian Norman writes in *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature*, "when scholars approach the female corpse, psychoanalysis and deconstruction have been the go-to theoretical apparatuses because they get at the intertwined structures of social power and symbolic representation" (5). In this vein, Deborah Horvitz reads *Of One Blood* as an exploration of the vulnerability of Black women and girls to hysteria and its symptoms, countering the idea of hysteria as solely a white woman's disorder. She argues that Hopkins was familiar not only with the work of James and Binet but also with Sigmund Freud's work on hysteria. Further, she asserts that Hopkins understands "the behavior and symptomology of hysteria as expressions of the very specific trauma inherent in the political and familial histories of black women: rape and incest perpetrated by white men" (Horvitz 245). Both Dianthe's mother, Mira, and her grandmother, Hannah, were raped by Aubrey Livingston's father. Dianthe unwittingly marries one of her brothers, Reuel, and is forced into marriage by another, Aubrey.

Reuel does not share his brother's violent intentions towards Dianthe but he is complicit in Aubrey's dehumanizing treatment of her. Earlier, I quoted Lawrence Talairach on the appeal of the lifeless body's "virginal femininity" which is permanently secured by death. Rather than protect Dianthe's chastity, Dianthe's cataleptic state and susceptibility to mesmeric influence ultimately lead to her sexual abuse by Aubrey. Towards the end of the chapter, after Dianthe is

asleep but cured of her previous comatose state, Aubrey suggests to Reuel that they begin searching for Dianthe's family. Almost immediately, the two men decide against it. Both have fallen in love with the childlike, beautiful Dianthe and conspire to keep her in ignorance of her true identity and family. They withhold any information they have of her racial origins and recent employment. This decision turns out to have fatal consequences for Dianthe who "falls into complete submission to masculine mandates" and is forced "to accept the passive subjectivity forced upon her by the novel's men" (Kassanoff 173). Dianthe is alienated from her identity, the Black community, her kin, and the truth of her genealogy, including the fact that she is "of one blood" with Aubrey and Reuel. That Aubrey would do this is unsurprising. He represents the worst crimes and excesses of slavery and the ongoing violence of the Jim Crow era. Reuel's participation is more tragic and harder to understand. Until arriving in Ethiopia, Reuel has been hiding his racial identity for most of his life, attempting to pass as white. His behavior attests to white supremacy's power to push people of color into hiding their true identity, even willingly severing ties with their own racial origins and each other.

Reuel's shameful decision sets in motion the novel's "drama of unwitting incest" which "dramatize[s] the consequences of slavery's genealogical disruptions" as Shawn Salvant contends in his discussion of Hopkins' use of the incest plot (661). Salvant argues that Hopkins in part resolves the problem of incest in *Of One Blood,* and Reuel's attraction to his own sister, by substituting Dianthe for Candace as his bride. Candace is the "virgin queen" who lives in Telassar (Hopkins 130). She chooses "her successor at intervals of fifteen years" from a group of virgins living in their own court. This remains their home until, if, they are chosen by Candace to take on her name, duties, and husband. Candace represents both sameness and difference. She is

a physical replica of Dianthe according to descriptions of both women, but she is unburdened by a tainted blood relationship to Reuel.

Due to her suffering and her embodiment of racialized sexual trauma, Dianthe is frequently positioned in proximity to death. When Reuel first sees her perform, she is a "lovely phantom" (Hopkins 15). He next meets her in the hospital where she lies in a state of apparent death - she is "cold and stiff" until awakened by Reuel (27). Finally, separated from Reuel, thinking him dead, and facing a lifetime of violence under Livingston's influence, Dianthe is "like marble" with a "cold gaze," her mind "weakened by hypnotic experiments" (171, 167). By contrast, Candace is a cipher, a beautiful woman unburdened by a history. Earlier in the novel, when Reuel meets Candace, he is already engaged to marry Dianthe. Yet the novel repeatedly places the two in relation to each other, describing Candace as "the same height as Dianthe" with "the same well-developed shoulders and the same admirable bust" (137). Like Dianthe, Candace is described as a "Venus;" the two women are empty vessels to be given meaning and an identity through their relationship to male authority. Dianthe is rendered mute and powerless by her traumatic symptoms, her ignorance of her own identity, and Aubrey's power over her. Likewise, despite having the title of queen, Candace is a placeholder, a monarch in title only, a virgin plucked from nameless obscurity to reign for fifteen years. After this time, she gives up her name, title, and power to be replaced by the next Queen Candace, another anonymous virginal queen-in-waiting.

Salvant states that the union between Reuel and Candace "resolves incest's dialectic between the categories of the natural and unnatural, thus neutralizing incest's prescribed cultural and moral meanings" (674). This marriage rescues Reuel from the moral and social consequences of his previously incestuous desire for Dianthe by displacing it onto her surrogate,

Candace. However, restoring the moral purity of the sibling relationship between Reuel and Dianthe comes at the expense of Dianthe's life. There is no place in the novel for a character like Dianthe who represents the ongoing consequences of the disruption of Black kinship relations under slavery. Dianthe is ignorant of the knowledge that would allow her to reckon with her personal sexual trauma and the collective trauma of slavery. Isolated, sexually assaulted, and denied an identity, Dianthe must die because, in a sense, she has always been dead.

While Reuel is in Africa, discovering his illustrious heritage, Dianthe has been pressured into marriage with Aubrey Livingston. She is grieving the false news of Reuel's death and Aubrey's influence, mesmeric in nature, has left her "quiescent in his hands" (166). Aubrey is willing to murder his best friend to gain Dianthe as a wife, sending his Black servant Jim Titus on the trip to Ethiopia with the intent that he kill Reuel. Fortunately for Reuel, he survives. However, Aubrey manipulates Dianthe with misinformation, the use of mesmerism, and by withholding her identity from her. Dianthe becomes desperate to "escape the chains which bound her to [Aubrey]" (173). She is trapped by a white man as his possession in a situation that mirrors the horror of her mother's enslavement by Aubrey's father (173). Aubrey describes Dianthe as a "beautiful picture presented to his view" and compares looking at her to "pouring over a poem that he has unexpectedly stumbled upon, losing himself in it, until it becomes, as it were, a part of himself" (167, 40). Both of these descriptions objectify Dianthe as a passive *objet d'art* whose meaning and curation, whose very identity, will be determined by Aubrey, the white son of a southern enslaver in an uncanny echo of the anatomist's privileged ability to read the female body as a text.

Dianthe finally discovers her identity after a quasi-mystical encounter with Hannah, her grandmother who had been enslaved by Aubrey's father, Livingston Sr. She is greeted by

Hannah singing a "funeral chant commonly sung by the Negroes over the dead" which gestures towards Dianthe's social death and the inevitability of her actual death, which is predestined by the literary conventions of the tragic mulatta and the unspeakable historical and present-day abuse she experiences. Aubrey has already "polluted [Dianthe's] existence" by making her an unwitting adulterer and by his multiple attempts to murder Reuel (170). Dianthe's quandary becomes even more tragic when she is told by Hannah that she is her granddaughter. Hannah was raped by her enslaver, giving birth to a daughter named Mira. Hannah's other children were all stolen from her and sold, leaving only Mira. Hannah's enslaver had a son, Aubrey Livingston Sr, who according to Hannah "took a shine" to Mira, raping her and leaving her with three children: Aubrey Jr, Reuel, and Dianthe (176). Not only were Dianthe's mother and grandmother raped by their white enslavers, but Dianthe also discovers that Reuel and Briggs are her brothers. Dianthe almost collapses upon hearing this, and Hannah assumes she is dead. It is "better so" that Dianthe is dead, says Hannah, than to live knowing her true history (177).

Horvitz observes that Aubrey "literally inscribes the "master" plot on/in Dianthe's body when he rapes her" in a perverse effort to "reify his cultural/historical and paternal/Oedipal link with his father, who signifies racism and patriarchy" (254). As a result, Dianthe embodies the worst cruelties of, and fears surrounding, slavery and its aftermath. The full horror of Dianthe's situation – her unwitting incestuous relationship with both of her brothers, her family's history of sexual trauma and broken genealogies, the implication that Dianthe herself has been the victim of sexual violence,[14] and her forced marriage to the son of the man who raped her mother –

[14] I agree with Deborah Horvitz that Hopkins' intends to suggest that Dianthe may have been the victim of sexual assault: "By assimilating the discoveries of the prominent contributors on the subjects of trauma, hysteria, repression, and mesmerism - William James and Alfred Binet directly, Janet and Freud indirectly - Hopkins invites this speculation" (252).

places Dianthe beyond the realms of redemption and reintegration into society according to the narrative strictures of sentimentalism and the trope of the tragic mulatta. Although her actual death is neither heroic nor recuperative, Dianthe's living death allows her to address "concerns about political ventriloquism, inactive citizenship, posthumous legal rights, and racial blood memory" (Norman 7). Slowly dying at the end of the novel, Dianthe is finally reunited with her ancestors as the "dying daughter of the royal line" (Hopkins 186). It is her relationship with Aunt Hannah and Mira, which I will address at the end of this chapter, which finally frees Dianthe from her dispossession at male hands. These characters offer an alternative model of kinship which recuperates Dianthe's representative potential and puts it in service of revolutionary political ideals of racial uplift.

V. The New Negro and True Black Womanhood at the Turn of the Century

At the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Black intellectuals considered it vital to construct a new identity which represented the achievements, talents, and progress of the emancipated race. They wanted to signal a break with the captive, subservient figure of the Black man toiling under slavery. Thus, the concept of the “New Negro” emerged as a symbol of and tool for racial uplift. It represented a new collective and individual identity for Black Americans, embodying a contested ideology of racial uplift. In addition, it was the figurehead for an intellectual, cultural, and political movement intent on replacing negative, racist stereotypes with positive images of Black economic success, artistry, and pride. Unlike middle class white women, who were pushing back against the notion of True Womanhood, Black men and women had a vested interest in associating Black women with the idealized attributes of feminine sexual

chastity, purity, and domestic morality which together "spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman" (Welter 152).

As I will later discuss in detail, *Imperium in Imperio's* female characters are models of idealized true Black womanhood - virtuous, pious, humble, and dedicated to racial uplift. Significantly, Griggs' female portraits echo the iconography of the "New Negro Woman," a term coined in 1895 by Margaret Murray Washington, writer, clubwoman, and wife of Booker T. Washington. Martha Patterson discusses the conflict between Pauline Hopkins' literary interrogations of the New Negro Woman and Margaret Murray Washington's celebration of the figure in her own writing:

> Margaret Murray Washington's work suggests that as black women perform dominant middle-class identities—becoming New Negro Women—they not only inspire their mates to embrace a bourgeois production ethic, but they inspire white Americans to recognize their fitness for inclusion in such national rhetorics of progress. (M. Patterson 51)

Hopkins, like Margaret Murray Washington and the fictional Antoinette and Viola of Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio*, was a clubwoman herself and promoted many of the same bourgeois values, including Black female propriety as a means of racial uplift, which the New Negro Woman represented. However, Hopkins' tenure as editor of the *Colored American Magazine,* a periodical which depended upon Booker T. Washington's support and influence, was plagued by the tension between Hopkins' more radical politics and his more conservative, assimilationist views.

In her biography of Hopkins, Wallinger frequently returns to the political and editorial disagreements between the two figures which eventually led to the termination of Hopkins' role as editor of the *Colored American Magazine*:

> Since Booker T. Washington was a very controversial figure, provoking wholehearted approval or bitter disapproval, [Hopkins] could not avoid taking sides [...] she did so, often indirectly, and tried to prevent an open conflict, but lost her position as editor despite her caution. (71)

Hopkins' literary career demonstrates that despite success as a writer and editor, the male chauvinism of many "elite" figures placed limits upon women's participation in intellectual and creative circles and as part of the larger project of racial uplift and the New Negro movement. Wallinger notes that Hopkins' success was limited as she "lacked the financial backing, political influence, and right gender that would have ensured a longer career" (94). Since gender is also a limiting factor in accessing financial support and gaining entry to the formal and informal male space of politics and networking, ultimately, Hopkins' career in the world of Black print suffered because she was female.

Hopkins addresses the problems faced by Black women creatives through the figures of Dianthe and Candace in *Of One Blood*; each woman embodies the literal and figurative "dead ends" powerful and creative women faced at the turn of the century. Several scholars of Hopkins' work, including Deborah Horvitz and Elizabeth Ammons, suggest that "there is no emancipation anywhere for the Black woman artist" (Horvitz 255). Neither Griggs nor Hopkins can envision a future for Black Americans without addressing the contested issues of blood, miscegenation, representation, and biology. Despite the often radical potential of Griggs' political imagination, his female characters, specifically Antoinette Nermal and Viola Martin, remain firmly within the

bounds of the New Negro Woman's vision of respectable Black womanhood. In contrast, Hopkins uses her writing to problematize the limitations and dangers of this narrow depiction of Black women which denied them access to the public sphere, making them voiceless symbols of New Negro ideology rather than agents of political change.

Dianthe, Candace, Antoinette, and Viola in *Of One Blood* and *Imperium in Imperio* represent the difficulty of envisioning a future for Black women in literature and in Black society more broadly. The intellectual project of constructing a novel identity for Black Americans, the New Negro, which would break with the racist stereotypes of the past produced a masculine, heroic figure which was inaccessible to Black women and excluded them from public, political life. Despite her desire to critique such constraints, the literary conventions of sentimentality forced Black women writers like Hopkins to navigate a literary landscape predicated on sentimental notions of femininity and Black True Womanhood. Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio* demonstrates even less concern for the role of Black women in its proto-Black nationalist political project. I argue that the absence of Black female agency in these turn of the century novels of racial uplift reveals the masculinist character of the New Negro project, its reduction of female agency to biology, and the difficulties of salvaging death and resurrection as usable literary tropes and themes in writing about Black women in this period, particularly for female authors such as Hopkins.

VI. Gendering Utopia: Biopolitics, Maternity, and the Future of the Race in *Imperium in Imperio*

"He feared death no more than the caress of his mother, when he felt that death was to be suffered in behalf of his oppressed people." - Sutton E. Griggs (134)

Like Hopkins in *Of One Blood,* Griggs' novel is deeply invested in issues of miscegenation, racial uplift, and uncovering hidden bloodlines. Antoinette and Viola, as well as Belton, dramatize slavery's legacy of broken genealogies, fractured kinship, and sexual violence. *Imperium in Imperio* is considered by many critics to be a proto-Afrofuturist text, but I agree with Melissa A. Wright's assertion that to imagine a future for African Americans, Griggs' novel "requires that one first recognize how the unspoken and un-representable losses of the past repeat in the present" (33). *Imperium in Imperio*'s reckoning with slavery's trauma is less sensational than that of Hopkins' *Of One Blood*, and is often overlooked by critics who are more interested in parsing Griggs' politics - Is he a radical? An assimilationist? Neither? Rather than add to the substantial literature on Griggs' political leanings, I focus on how Griggs understands women's role in liberatory Black political movements. I argue that miscegenation and slavery haunt the novel, foreclosing Black women's political aspirations and placing their role firmly within the domestic sphere. According to the diktats of the New Negro Woman, Antoinette and Viola's sole contribution to the project of racial uplift is to ensure the reproduction of the next generation of Black Americans; they must embody "moral motherhood." The two women function as symbols of Black female virtue and are tasked with securing the biological future of Black America by sublimating their own desires to the political goals and ideologies of the New Negro.

Women play a minor role in Grigg's *Imperium in Imperio*. They play no role at all in the novel's Black shadow government, the Imperium. Griggs' inability to imagine female participation in governance and political life attests to the limitations of his own utopian

imagination as well as the often representative function of women in literature during a period defined by the ideology of the New Negro.[15] As Anne Stavney articulates in her discussion of the politics of maternal representation during the Harlem Renaissance, Black women writers recognized the co-construction of race and gender and resisted their own reduction to "a symbolic representation and strategy for attaining black political powers" (54). Black women writers not only challenged racist ideas about Black womanhood but also resisted their own misrepresentation in the media. Black male intellectuals and authors overwhelmingly used Black women in politically strategic ways rather than welcoming them as equal participants in the struggle for racial progress. As Stavney writes, Black male leaders valorized motherhood and made it coterminous with ideal Black womanhood:

> A better baby meant a better mother; a better mother meant a better race. Moral motherhood demonstrated political intention. (540)

By politicizing motherhood and making Black women responsible for the morality of the race, the rhetoric of true Black womanhood confined women to the domestic sphere and made motherhood their ultimate calling. Kassanoff declares:

> It is not surprising then that the black maternal body functioned as the site of significant New Negro intervention. As Fortune and others argued, miscegenation had historically been perpetuated by white men on the unwilling bodies of African American women. New Negro intellectuals consequently sought to exercise a new control over the reproductive capacities of those bodies. (172)

[15] Henry Louis Gates Jr and Gene Andrew Jarrett demarcate this roughly 40 year period in the title of their seminal anthology *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*.

This control justified excluding women from Black political and intellectual life. Confined to the domestic sphere and tasked with upholding moral purity, middle class Black women found themselves trapped in a Victorian era ideal of femininity that white middle women, as emblematized by the controversial figure of the New Woman, were attempting to escape. By examining the representation and function of the two main female characters in *Imperium in Imperio,* we gain insight into the construction of Black true womanhood and the role of women in the Black biopolitical imagination of the period.

The ancillary roles that women play in Griggs' novel and the Imperium are immediately obvious. The only women characters of any real substance, Antoinette Nermal and Viola Martin, are defined by their romantic entanglements with the novels' two male protagonists, Belton and Bernard respectively. Exiled from the political machinations of the Imperium and Black public life, educated middle and upper class women like Antoinette and Viola must choose between domesticity or one of a handful of "respectable" professions such as nursing or teaching. Bernard encounters Viola at "a reading circle composed of the brightest, most talented young men and women" of Norfolk, Virginia, and when Belton meets Antoinette, she is working as a teacher at the school in Richmond where Belton is to be employed (Griggs 69). In her examination of the category of motherhood during the Harlem Renaissance, Stavney describes two illustrations that appeared in the first edition of *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, the era-defining anthology of African American literature and visual art published in 1925 and edited by Alain Locke. The sketches of "The Librarian" and "The school teacher" are referred to as "types" and represent the limited professional roles which, like motherhood, allowed Black women to demonstrate the "traits of true womanhood in a professional setting" (Stavney 551). Despite the beauty, wit, and intelligence of both Antoinette and Viola, we encounter them at the apex of their professional

and intellectual careers. The women are introduced through the perspectives of the male protagonists who position them primarily, and almost entirely, as objects of romantic interest.

Antoinette and Viola's individuality and characterization are secondary to their representative function. They embody the most beautiful, talented, and esteemed women of their race and the perfect helpmates for Belton and Bernard, the intellectual and political leaders of the novel. Antoinette is "famed throughout the city for her beauty, intelligence, and virtue" (Griggs 79), and Viola is "a universal favorite," "highly educated" (71), and of "exquisite beauty" (70). Here Griggs' prose struggles to differentiate between the two; they are both "famed" and esteemed for their beauty. They are not individuals but composite figures of superlative Black True Womanhood, symbols rather than characters. Both Antoinette and Viola emerge as "types" of Black female moral leadership, which is revealed by Griggs' stress on their image and appearance. The use of highly visual language emphasizes their representative function, much like the sketches in *The New Negro* mentioned above. Antoinette is "of medium height, and for grace and symmetry her form was fit for a sculptor's model" (79) and Viola's similarly "perfect form" means that according to Bernard's friend:

> Her picture is the only Negro's picture that is allowed to hang in the show glasses of the white photographers down town. White and colored pay homage to her beauty. (70)

These two descriptions emphasize the symbolic status of Antoinette and Viola. They are icons of virtuous Black femininity, possessing beauty that is at once exceptional in nature and easily recognizable according to the New Negro movement's female iconography. Antoinette and Viola are both art objects constructed by and for a male artistic gaze. Antoinette is "fit for a sculptor's model," positioning her as a passive muse for another's creative labor (79).

The nineteenth-century Black female sculptor, Edmonia Lewis, is famed for constructing images of Blackness which challenged visual stereotypes. In her essay on Lewis, Kelli Morgan describes how her sculpture *Forever Free* (1867), which depicts the emancipation of two enslaved people, poses a "figurative challenge to the tragic mulatta trope" by using white marble to create the statue (71). This expensive material was associated with white classical statuary but Lewis' "Black Feminist Visuality aggressively converts neoclassical styles to confront her audiences' prejudices" about Black women in art and Black women artists (84). In contrast, Antoinette's image is sculpted by Griggs' alone. Likewise, Viola's photograph hangs in white photographers' studios, but she did not create the image which presumably generates profit for white businesses. Griggs dedicates a large part of Viola's introduction in the text to her dark-skinned beauty but by making her the sole exception to normative white standards of beauty, he reifies the logic of racially coded aesthetic hierarchies which pathologized visual signs of Blackness. Over and over again, Viola's beauty emerges in spite of her dark skin, rather than because of it; upon seeing Viola for the first time, Bernard remarks to his friend: "I really did not know a dark woman could look so beautiful" (Griggs 70).

In her examination of the aesthetics of the New Negro Woman, Treva B. Lindsay describes the contested and fraught meaning of skin color within Black communities who often internalized white standards of beauty:

> Although pre-Emancipation enslaved and freedwomen struggled against the devaluation of their darker hues, the privileging of white skin imparted lasting effects on African American beauty culture and intra-racial class and color politics. (97)

For many young women, lighter skin was associated with elite status and modernity. It created distance between the New Negro Woman of the twentieth century and the dehumanizing

portrayals of enslaved Black women in the antebellum era. In literature too, the light-skinned tragic mulatta is described as a sexually desirable figure whose "transgressions allow both black and white readers to participate in a voyeuristic fantasy of interracial interaction" (Sherrard-Johnson 15). However, dark-skinned Black women were significantly less likely to be depicted as romantic heroines, in no small part due the centuries of white pathologization of dark skin and facial features visually coded as Black. Overall, Viola is the exception that proves the rule that Black beauty was typically associated with lighter skin tones. Furthermore, the photograph of Viola hanging in white photography studies, along with the "perfect" forms of both women, evoke the history of photography as the key visual technology of race science and racial categorization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Imagining Viola's photograph surrounded by a sea of white faces brings to mind Louis Agassiz's infamous daguerreotypes of enslaved Black men and women, taken in 1850, and used to create racial typologies and assert the superiority of the white race (102 Wallis).

Some of the visual language used by Griggs, such as "type" and "form," is symptomatic of the generic conventions of the romance genre. However, given how little Antoinette and Viola say or do in the novel, the descriptions of the two women are all the reader has to go on. Viola and Antoinette enter the novel as love interests to Belton and Bernard, and their actions are confined to the domestic sphere. However, the consequences of their actions influence the plot significantly. They dramatize two irreconcilable visions of racial uplift: Black separatism and assimilation. The same contested discourses of blood, kinship, and the future of African American life which animate *Of One Blood* drive the intellectual machinery of Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio.* Unlike Hopkins, who draws attention to the problem of women's exclusion from the New Negro movement without offering a concrete solution, Griggs does not critique women's

lack of political power. In his novel, women are catalysts for male political action but become dangerous when they seek to interfere directly with the project of racial uplift.

VII. Black Blood, White Skin: Securing a Future for Black America

After Belton meets Antoinette, he begins courting her. Until this point, Antoinette has been uninterested in dating but their mutual romantic quickly becomes apparent. Within the space of a single chapter, Antoinette is introduced as a new character, courted by Belton, and engaged to be married. The chapter is pure sentimental romance, from Belton's declaration that Antoinette is an angel to their engagement on the lawn of Antoinette's home "with the pure-eyed stars gazing down upon them" (85, 86). Together, Belton and Antoinette represent the ideal New Negro couple and Griggs adopts a sentimental tone to emphasize Antoinette's humility, chastity, and sense of propriety. Antoinette longs to tell Belton her feelings, but "Of course it was out of the question for her to volunteer to tell him she loved him" (83). Educated yet modest, passionate but aware of the behavior appropriate to a bourgeois middle-class woman like herself, Antoinette is the embodiment of Margaret Murray Washington's New Negro Woman.

Belton is desperate to marry Antoinette, but his financial situation prevents him from doing so:

> His salary was small, being only fifty dollars a month. He had not held his position long enough to save up very much money. He decided to start an enterprise that would enable him to make money a great deal faster. (87)

The novel makes no mention of Antoinette's salary as a teacher. It is either too insignificant to mention, or Antoinette has given up work to become a housewife. In either case, Antoinette's life as a teacher is never referred to again. Now that she is married, her professional life ceases to be

relevant to the novel's plot or the project or racial uplift. Her new role is to be a good wife to Belton. The narrative rapidly speeds up as we learn that after a year of battling racial discrimination to work in politics, Belton reluctantly takes a job as a stamping clerk at the Post Office for only ten dollars more than his original teaching salary. A year later, the couple finally marry. However, two years after their marriage, Belton loses his job as a clerk for refusing to support the congressional campaign of the Postmaster's friend due to the candidate's known racism. So begins Belton's picaresque quest for meaningful work, detailed in the previous chapter, which culminates in his narrow escape from a lynch mob.

Throughout this period, Belton visits Antoinette infrequently. He disappears so mysteriously that the people of Richmond become suspicious of his intentions towards his wife. Rumors begin to spread that Belton's latest departure from Richmond is "an attempt at deserting his wife, whom he seemed unable to support," which seems less farfetched than Belton's real reason for leaving - to disguise himself as a woman to work undercover as a nurse in New York City (91). Throughout all of Belton's escapades, Antoinette endures her poverty "smilingly and cheerfully" (93). She never doubts that Belton will one day live up to his youthful promise nor questions her decision to marry him. Antoinette supports her husband wholeheartedly: "Not one sigh of regret, not one word of complaint escaped her lips" (93). The Antoinette we first met, renowned throughout Richmond for her intelligence, has been reduced to a mute, submissive representation of Black True Womanhood.

Belton responds to the news that Antoinette is pregnant with reservations. His excitement about a child is tempered by his shame at being unable to lift his family out of poverty. His mood worsens as Antoinette's pregnancy progresses. When Antoinette finally gives birth to a healthy baby boy, Belton emits a "terrible shriek" upon seeing the child:

> The color of Antoinette was brown. The color of Belton was dark. But the child was white! (94)

Along with the rest of Richmond, Belton assumes that "his failure to properly support [Antoinette] had tempted her to ruin" (94). The white child cannot be Belton's offspring given his dark skin: the baby boy must be the result of an adulterous affair between Antoinette and a white man. This double humiliation – his wife's adultery and her choice of a white partner – is almost too much for Belton to bear. He immediately abandons Antoinette and the baby and retreats back to his childhood home to take comfort in its symbolic maternal embrace.

The birth of the white child causes enormous pain to Belton, but it also signals a rebirth of sorts in the form of a renewed commitment to "righting of the wrongs of his people" (95). He renounces his individual happiness in service of racial uplift and the Black community and moves to Louisiana where he escapes being lynched only to be put on trial for murder after killing Zackland. Belton is saved from execution at the eleventh hour by Bernard who makes an impassioned case for Belton's life. These various tragedies – Antoinette's adultery, the violence of the Jim Crow South, escape from death by lynching and by execution – "burn[ed] all the remaining dross out of Belton's nature" to leave him stronger and better prepared for the trials still to come (107). In the speech that saves Belton's life, Bernard mentions the strength of Belton's Christian beliefs which is borne out by his Christ-like patience in the face of white violence. His continued physical and emotional suffering and his commitment to serving Black Americans are strengthened with each tragedy he survives.

For Antoinette, however, the tragedy of her white child exiles her from Belton, her Black community, and even her faith. There is no room for a fallen, treacherous Antoinette in the romantic relationship that Belton's "glowing imagination, with love as the supervising architect,

had constructed" (83). From her first appearance in the novel, Antoinette functions as a representation of idealized True Black Womanhood. Kate McCullough writes: "As the cultural repository of all the white bourgeois lady's denied sexuality, the stereotype of the black woman was seen as the true woman's direct opposite, her Other, thus disqualifying the black woman from occupying the space of virtuous Victorian lady" (22). Having proven the white stereotype of Black promiscuity to be true, it is unsurprising that Antoinette is now considered a traitor to her race and her sex by the Black community. Belton's love for Antoinette endures but she is symbolically dead to him:

> Tenderly, he laid the image of Antoinette to rest in a grave in the very center of his heart. He covered her grave with fragrant flowers, and though he acknowledged the presence of a corpse in his heart, 'twas the corpse of one he loved. (95)

This textual description of the "image" of Antoinette's corpse functions like a postmortem photograph (Ruby). It was not uncommon during this period for families to pay to have their recently deceased loved ones photographed. The dead were posed as if sleeping and usually surrounded by flowers or personal belongings. Given the expense of photography, it was often the only image of a deceased child or relative that a family owned. By imagining Antoinette in a grave covered with flowers, Belton kills Antoinette so that he can preserve her in a prelapsarian state, without child and without sin. Once again, Antoinette is reduced to a visual motif until she can be redeemed by her child's miraculous transformation later in the novel.

Viola's tale is perhaps even more tragic. Despite her obvious attraction to Bernard, her conflict over marrying him is alluded to early in the couple's courtship. Viola and a friend joke enigmatically about Viola's surprising wariness towards Bernard as a romantic partner:

> A mulatto girl stepped up to Viola and with a merry twinkle in her eye said: "Theory is theory and practice is practice, eh, Vie? Well, we would hardly blame you in this case."
>
> Viola earnestly replied: "I shall ask for no mercy. Theory and practice are one with me in this case."
>
> "Bah, bah, girl, two weeks will change that tune. And I, for one, won't blame you," replied the mulatto still in a whisper. (Griggs 72)

That the friend Viola is talking to is described as "mulatto" hints at Viola's unspoken reservation about Bernard - that he, too, is mixed race or "mulatto." As will later be revealed, Viola's investment in Black uplift requires maintaining the purity of the "negro" bloodline. Her friend believes that Bernard's good looks, fame, and reputation will overcome Viola's hitherto abstract commitment to racial purity. Viola's refusal to separate her political beliefs from her personal decisions seems a surmountable obstacle in the face of genuine romance. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Viola's friend is herself mixed race which doesn't appear to perturb Viola. Half a dozen of Viola's friends delight at Viola's "catch," as they "smother her with kisses," belying Viola's ominous declaration that she expects "no mercy," suggesting a future sacrifice of some kind. Viola is set apart from her friends as serious-minded and politically engaged, spelling trouble for her relationship with Bernard.

A few chapters later, we discover the true depth of Viola's commitment to the Negro race. When Bernard returns to Viola after successfully defending Belton against the charge of murder, he is at the "acme of fame" (110). Unexpectedly, Viola responds to Bernard's proposal with "a loud, piercing scream" and then faints (111). Sadly for the couple, Viola announces with detachment that she cannot marry Bernard. When he assumes she has pledged her love to another, Bernard's masculinity is threatened. He vows to kill the man who is preventing their

union until Viola states dramatically, ""Would you kill God?"" (113). The cause of Viola's pious determination not to marry Bernard is discovered a day later when her death by suicide is revealed. Viola leaves behind three letters which explain the finality of Viola's fatal rejection of Bernard. Before her death Viola had come into possession of a book which convinced her of the necessity of maintaining the purity of the Black race:

> That book proved to me that the intermingling of the races in sexual relationship was sapping the vitality of the Negro race and, in fact, was slowly but surely exterminating the race. It demonstrated that the fourth generation of the children born of intermarrying mulattoes were invariably sterile or woefully lacking in vital force. It asserted that only in the most rare instances were children born of this fourth generation and in no case did such children reach maturity. This is a startling revelation. (118)

The book, *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*, was an actual book published in 1867 by southerner John H. Van Evrie. The text, as Wright notes, "draws a direct analogy between miscegenation and political integration, conflating sex with politics through the dual signifier of "amalgamation"" (42). As early as 1897, DuBois was arguing that races, rather than individuals or groups, were the driving force behind history and human progress in his essay published that year, "The Conservation of the Races" (Hebard 60). However, Viola goes further than DuBois and rejects Black institutions in favor of Black separatism and Black sovereignty.

Viola correctly diagnoses the American desire to expunge the white race of Black blood as argued by the book. However, Viola's interpretation of the book upends its white supremacist aims. Viola feels a divine duty to forego marriage with a mixed race man, break up "all courting couples of mulatto people," and to "persuade the evil women of my race to cease their criminal conduct with white men" (Griggs 118-9). Viola's biopolitical determination to maintain the

purity of the Black race demonstrates the inextricability of reproductive politics and national politics. Her suicide is a fatal consequence of putting her Black eugenicist beliefs into practice, as she so portentously declared upon first meeting Bernard. For Viola, her commitment to her race requires her to sacrifice her own life and forsake her own happiness with Bernard.

Viola's posthumous wish is that Bernard will continue her fight and "dedicate [his] soul to the work of separating the white and colored races" (119). Her sacrifice, like Antoinette's "crimes," provides the political motivation for Bernard. Grief-stricken and willing to do anything for Viola, he takes up her fight and declares he will end amalgamation. Bernard rejects the moral overtones of Viola's request, instead "refram[ing] race conservation as a biopolitical problem in need of broadly conceived institutional practices that aim to regulate the relations between racialized populations" (Hebard 71). Yet in order to do so, Bernard must ignore the inconvenient fact that he himself is the product of a mixed race coupling; he is descended from a white senator and a Black servant. He discovers this shocking news in adulthood when his father finally reveals his identity to Bernard. According to Wright, it is here that the novel "stages the moment at which *the law of Partum sequitur ventrem* is proven obsolete, in which the lost father is thrust suddenly before Bernard in a flash of uncanny identification" that is essential to overcoming slavery's overdetermination of Black identity (39). Belton's grandfather was an unmarried governor (the State which he governed is censored in the text) and the "father of a child whose mother was a servant connected with his father's household" (Griggs 63). Adopted by Bernard's father and his first wife, they raise the child as their own until the senator's wife dies when the girl is 17. His wife's death makes the senator realize that the girl "loved [him]; not as a father, but as she would a lover;" the senator is finally able to confess that he had "for some time" been in love with his stepdaughter (63). The girl initially turns down the senator's offer of marriage due

to the stigma of such a union. She eventually relents and the two move to Canada then Europe. However, the shame of being perceived as an adulterer causes Bernard's mother to leave the senator. She departs with her young son in tow, leaving Bernard safely ignorant of his father's identity. The description of Bernard's genealogy, like Viola's final wish, elides the sexual abuse of Black women by white men during slavery. The word "servant," commonly applied to enslaved people, grants Bernard's grandmother an agency which she did not possess.

Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1861) wrestles with the impossibility of consent for enslaved women. At the age of fifteen, Jacobs begins a sexual relationship with a white bachelor and friend named Mr. Sands in order to escape the sexual predations of her enslaver, Dr. Flint. Jacobs states that "there is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you" yet the stigma of giving birth to a child out of wedlock is felt deeply by Jacobs (54). She directly addresses the issue with her white readership, anticipating that her allusions to sexual abuse will shock them. She pleads that her "virtuous reader" put herself in the place of the suffering and desperate enslaved girl forced to make a dreadful decision to survive (55). However, Jacobs' frequently confesses to feeling shame due to her behavior through statements such as: "The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day." Jacobs' repeated apologies are a means of protecting herself against accusations of sexual impropriety from her white readership and of pushing back against the trope of the hypersexual "Jezebel." But her distress also speaks to how consent and sexual agency are contested terms in the context of relationships between white men and Black women, particularly under slavery. Jacobs turns down the marriage proposal of a free Black man she genuinely loves in recognition of the fact that he will never be able to protect herself or any

children they might have. She chooses a sexual relationship with Mr. Sands only so she can escape the cruelty and sexual threat of her enslaver Dr. Flint.

Griggs is silent on the issue of Bernard's grandmother's relationship. Even if the anonymous "black servant" did choose to enter into a relationship with her enslaver, slavery voids the notion of consent. Saidiya Hartman writes of Jacobs' narrative:

> Outside the shadow of the law, compulsion eclipses choice, as neither right nor protection secures the line between consent and nonconsent. [...] The line between something akin to choice and nonconsent is permeable and uncertain because an absolute distinction between them cannot be sustained in the context of slave relations. (*Scenes of Subjection* 109)

Griggs does not confront the violence that frames Bernard's mother's birth or the knowledge that his mother, born before the abolition of slavery, was groomed by her older white parental figure. Bernard's father wants Bernard to fight against the "infernal race prejudice" that ruined his own relationship (Griggs 64). However, his father chooses his career over the struggle against racism "because it would be suicide" for him to publicly acknowledge Bernard as his child. He means this quite literally as he later adds "I shall certainly kill myself if I am ever exposed" (66). Bernard's father laments that he cannot claim Bernard as his own son, emphasizing that he is directly related to the governor and other white political luminaries. The contributions of the Black female side of Bernard's inheritance go unnamed. Bernard's mother, Fairfax, is also muted. She appears solely in a letter to Bernard that begs him to trust his newly discovered father. Wright states:

> Like most of the female characters in the novel, Fairfax also plays a very small role within the plot. Perhaps in this scene though above all others, the mother is reduced to a vessel - not only of biological reproduction, but patrilineal inheritance as well. (39)

Fairfax, like Viola and Antoinette, is primarily valued for her reproductive abilities, specifically, her ability to produce a male heir. Her reduction to a "vessel" in the novel is the cost of securing Bernard's political future.

Griggs also fails to interrogate the beliefs that led to Viola's suicide. By ending her life, Viola tragically ends her own family's bloodline. Viola cannot imagine a political role for herself that is not tied to reproducing the next generation. Her death prompts Bernard to declarate war against the United States, giving him a sense of political urgency and purpose just as Antoinette's "crimes" do for Belton. Griggs suggests that women were of most help to racial uplift in their capacity as wives and mothers: "The heart of man will joyfully consent to be torn to pieces if the lovely hand of woman will only agree to bind the parts together again and heal the painful wounds" (Griggs 59). Women are relegated to the private, individual work of restoring male strength for the battle against white supremacy. They can never be soldiers in their own right: "The containment of the Black mother, in Griggs' novel at least, represents both a hope for a beyond of slavery, and the history of planter rape, but is also made the condition for Black male (social, economic, and political) enfranchisement." (Wright 39)

VIII. Resisting the Policing of Representation: Recovering Black Motherhood

As biopolitical governance continued to expand and become the dominant mode of managing a nation's inhabitants, the focus on population evinced in *Sheppard Lee* becomes part and parcel of everyday life for Americans. Schuller describes the beginning of the twentieth

century as a period of transformation from sentimental biopolitics to modern, "scientific" biopolitical regimes that focused entirely on the health of the population, with little concern for the individual's malleability or civilizational capacity. The nascent science of genetics and hereditary theory, along with social Darwinism, declared certain individuals beyond salvation. Griggs himself declared that only a "Darwinian field of political battle" would create the conditions for racial progress (quoted in Hebard 74). Eugenics, a term that refers to the manipulation of populations to achieve desirable inherited traits, included the implementation of biopolitical measures such as forced sterilization and the foundation of birth control clinics like those pioneered by Margaret Sanger. Eugenics attempted to eradicate the mentally ill, criminals, the disabled, and other undesirable groups from the body of the nation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenics was taken up by white and Black intellectuals. DuBois believed that engineering marriages between the right members of the Black race, the "Talented Tenth," and improving the living conditions of poor Blacks would lead to racial uplift. Inevitably, Black eugenics and the biopolitics of racial uplift aligned around the figure of the mother, already central to the iconography of the New Negro movement.

Hopkins' and Griggs' novels imagine alternative futures for Black Americans within and outside of America. However, despite the exclusion of women from political life, the texts cannot escape the centrality of reproduction and maternal bodies to racial uplift. Viola's suicide is informed by her reading of texts that theorize in Darwinian terms the demise of racial populations due to miscegenation. The potent motif of blood comes to represent the notion of a pure line of genealogical and heredity descent that must be protected from dilution or poisoning by white blood, in a reversal of the hegemonic belief that the white race must be protected from the "taint" of Black blood. Viola's belief in this theory positions her suicide – she cannot marry a

mixed-race man like Bernard – as a form of romanticized Black self-eugenics. It is positioned by Griggs as a heroic, if misguided, decision which, like the novel's ending, "produces an uncomfortable juxtaposition between a desire to foster the health of a population and the sovereign power to commit violence" (Hebard 72). Furthermore, Viola and Antoinette are both praised for their intelligence and selected as mates for Bernard and Belton but Viola's self-destructive act hints at the dangers of female education when it is not overseen by a more sober patriarch.

By giving birth to a white baby, Antoinette is excommunicated from her church and exiled from the Black community. The supposition that Antoinette has become pregnant by a white man makes her a sinner twice over in the eyes of her community and according to Viola's racial politics. Not only has Antoinette committed adultery, but she has willingly reproduced whiteness by engaging in miscegenation, tainting her own blood, and producing a child that is cast out of the Black and white communities of Virginia. When the child's skin slowly changes color as it ages from white to Black and his resemblance to Belton becomes undeniable, Belton is finally able to claim it as his son. However, he is executed at the Imperium's orders shortly afterwards.

Antoinette is forgiven by Belton. She reenters polite society and the embrace of her Black community. As she is reborn from social and spiritual death, her significance is quickly revealed to be secondary to that of her son. The endlessly self-sacrificing and virtuous Antoinette forgives Belton's vicious treatment of her. For a brief moment, Antoinette "was a girl again" and the two lovers are reunited in happiness for a final time (172). Belton is to be executed and cannot bring himself to tell Antoinette. Instead, he takes comfort in the fact that "his son would fill his place in the world." The narrative makes peace with the death of its hero by providing a replacement in

the figure of his (now) Black son. Antoinette's involvement in politics is to reproduce the race, and in particular, the Talented Tenth, of which Belton seems a precursor to. Would Belton have been so reassured if his child had been a daughter?

The stories of both women reveal patriarchal anxieties about protecting female bodies that limit women's political participation to reproduction. Viola's "self-murder" and Antoinette's miscategorization as a race traitor and adulteress are cautionary tales about the dangers of leaving women unattended domestically and in their education. Griggs never directly refers to the sexual abuse of women under slavery or the anxieties that the vulnerable Black female body continued to inspire in Black men at the turn of the century. But the tragic fates of Viola and Antoinette attest to what Alys Weinbaum describes as the "inextricability of the connection between race and reproduction," which she refers to using the term "race/reproduction" (*Wayward Reproductions* 6).

The traumatic legacy of slavery's sexual abuse of Black women and the anxiety of race's often hidden power attests to the popularity of passing as a literary trope in novels of the period. Hopkins wrestles with similar issues in *Of One Blood* and although she is able to make the sexual depravity of slavery visible through the character of Dianthe, she similarly struggles to envision "race/reproduction" as a realistic or empowering political end for Black women. Dianthe's own legacy is too messy, too fraught, too traumatic for her to be a suitable partner to Reuel. Although both Reuel and Dianthe pass as white, suggesting that Reuel too has white ancestry, Dianthe represents a strand of Black history too toxic to be incorporated into King Ergamenes' utopian, imperial project. With Dianthe's death, Reuel is free to marry Candace, a virginal queen who reproduces herself asexually through a series of replaceable virgin women. Kept sequestered and stripped of a genealogical inheritance, Candace allows Reuel to continue

the royal dynasty without the necessity of reckoning with the burden of the history of race relations in America.

IX. Conclusion

In his analysis of *Of One Blood* and *Imperium in Imperio*, Daniel Fladager describes the central problem of the novels' utopian visions of racial uplift:

> Both Hopkins's and Griggs's utopian novels follow the same pattern: they identify an originary point in the past which *could* be used to strike out on an African American utopian project, but which is struck down by a community too traumatized by the horror of slavery to accept a break from that brutal moment. (262)

What this quotation neglects to mention is the role that gender plays in the failure of these utopias. The exclusion of women from the Imperium, the role of Viola's suicide in inspiring Bernard to declare war against the U.S government, the relegation of women's role to reproducing the next generation of the Black elite, and Antoinette's transition from saint to Jezebel and back to saint based on her perceived sexual chastity: together these narratives suggest that Black women the greatest danger to Black political life in Griggs' novel. Wright pithily recapitulates Griggs' politics as "rehears[ing] the founding norm of Euro-American politics: keep women out of it" (43). Unlike Hopkins, Griggs elides the brutal reality of rape under slavery by introducing Bernard's mother as the product of a "consensual" sexual union between a young, enslaved woman and her enslaver. He is unable to integrate women's sexual trauma into his radical political vision. Antoinette survives the novel but is vulnerable to the false accusations of sexual impropriety. She is deemed socially dead to her community and to Belton who considers her nothing more than a "corpse in his heart." Like Dianthe's lifeless body on the

hospital bed, Antoinette provides another example of the aestheticization of female death. She is also, until her baby's miraculous transformation, a symbol of sexual misconduct and race treason that is too traumatic for Belton to incorporate into his life, necessitating her symbolic death. Belton's near-death experience is an emblem of masculine heroism. In contrast, the symbolic and actual deaths of women in *Imperium in Imperio* serve only to incentivize the political activity of the male protagonists, Belton and Bernard.

Death in Hopkins' *Of One Blood* can be similarly reductive. Davis rebukes Hopkins for her treatment of Dianthe at the end of the novel, writing:

> Rather than demanding that Reuel deal with history, represented by his inadvertent marriage to his sister, and rather than allowing her to survive so that Reuel must grapple with his betrayal, his abuse, and even his incestuous desire, the narrative does away with Dianthe altogether. It then removes him to a site where he can live out an unfettered masculinity. (18)

Certainly, Dianthe's death provides a convenient solution to Reuel's incestuous relationship with her. In fact, Pavletich asserts that her death is necessary "for a new era to begin," arguing that Dianthe's death exemplifies Hopkins' exhaustion of the redemptive possibilities of the "tragic mulatta" trope (660). However, as McCullough argues, by making a "fallen" Black woman the heroine of *Of One Blood*, Hopkins "affirms the human status of her African American female subject and appropriates on her behalf a reworked version of maternity and family" (43). Subject to the mesmeric powers of Reuel and Aubrey, Dianthe's agency is limited. But even in such a state of powerlessness, Dianthe almost murders Aubrey before he successfully overpowers her.

Hopkins' greatest challenge to the New Negro movement's representation of Black women in the novel is also her most successful reconfiguration of the topos of feminine death.

Dianthe only discovers her true identity when she encounters her grandmother, Aunt Hannah, on Aubrey's plantation. Dianthe is reminded of "a description of an African princess which fitted the woman before her," positioning Aunt Hannah as a foil to Candace's regal beauty (Hopkins 174). The verse reads in part:

"I knew a princess; she was old,

Crisp-haired, flat-featured, with a look

Such as no dainty pen of gold

Would write of in a fairy book." (174)

The description highlights the features of Aunt Hannah's face which are coded as Black such as her "crisp" hair and "flat" face. In doing so, Hopkins evokes a matrilineal kinship that restores Blackness to Dianthe by way of her relationship to Aunt Hannah. Aunt Hannah tells Dianthe about her mother, Mira, whose ghostly apparition appears to Aubrey and Dianthe. In contrast to Dianthe, when Mira is hypnotized by Aubrey's father during Aubrey's childhood. Mira is "full of irony and sharp jesting" (51). Rather than acquiesce to male control, Mira describes an ominous future vision that her enslaver "will not like:"

> All the women will be widows and the men shall sleep in early graves. They come from the north, from the east, from the west, they sweep to the gulf through a trail of blood. Your houses shall burn, your fields be laid waste, and a down-trodden race shall rule in your land. For you, captain, a prison cell and a pauper’s grave. (50)

Predicting the success of the Union in the Civil War, Mira's vision is full of disturbing imagery that presages the destruction of her enslaver's southern way of life. Death saturates the vision which is replete with references to "early graves," "a trail of blood," and violence of biblical proportions. According to Kassanoff, as a mother Mira "bespeaks blood violently spilled and

blood overly consolidated, thus threatening the entire fabric of society by marking sibling warfare and sibling endogamy" (174). Mira's ability to communicate with Dianthe from beyond the grave by underlining a passage in the Bible and signing her name is an example of the insurgent potential of dead women in literature. As Norman writes in *Dead Women Talking*, "Dead women tend to talk in American literature when their experiences of death can address an issue of injustice that their communities might prematurely consign to the past" (1). Mira, whose name translates from Latin to "look in wonder," is a revelatory force in the novel, uncovering the secrets that Aubrey and Reuel conspire to conceal. Unlike Griggs, Hopkins directly confronts the sexual trauma of the past as it congeals around the Black woman's reproductive body.

Despite the failure of these two utopian visions, Hopkins challenges the fatal overidentification of Black women with the historical degradations of slavery. Asserting the political power of *Of One Blood,* Kassanoff concludes that "Like Mira the rebellious mother, Pauline Hopkins subtly – even deviously – inscribed her own complicated text into the margins of the New Negro debate, questioning and challenging the contours of what African American identity would be in the twentieth century" (176). Pushed out of her editorial role at the *Colored American Magazine* by her male colleagues, Hopkins uses Dianthe and Mira to theorize alternative forms of representation for Black women. *Of One Blood* does not "solve" the racism of Jim Crow or the troubling legacies of slavery. What it does offer are critical interventions into the New Negro debate over female political participation, the topos of feminine death, and the quest for a livable future for Black Americans. Hopkins' Black feminism reminds us that by challenging how reproductive futurism co-opts maternal bodies as sites of ideological struggle, women are liberated from the burden of biopolitical duties and are free to pursue politics that converse with the living and the dead in order to reimagine thriving Black futures.

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