Perspective Development in the Novels of Colson Whitehead: A Cognitive Narratological Approach

Ph.D. Thesis

By
JAYA SHRIVASTAVA

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JAYA SHRIVASTAVA

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **PERSPECTIVE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NOVELS OF COLSON WHITEHEAD: A COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGICAL APPROACH** in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** and submitted in the **DISCIPLINE OF ENGLISH, Indian Institute of Technology Indore**, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the time period from July, 2011 to June, 2016 under the supervision of Dr. Amarjeet Nayak, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Indore and Dr. Joe Varghese Yeldho, Reader-F, National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institute.

Signature of the student with date
Jaya Shrivastava
(NAME OF THE PhD STUDENT)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my/our knowledge.

Signature of Thesis Supervisor 1 with date
(Dr. Amarjeet Nayak)

Signature of Thesis Supervisor 2 with date
(Dr. Joe Varghese Yeldho)

JAYA SHRIVASTAVA has successfully given her Ph.D. Oral Examination held on _____

Signature(s) of Thesis Supervisor(s)
Date:

Convener, DPGC
Date:

Signature of PSPC Member #1
Date:

Signature of PSPC Member #2
Date:

Signature of External Examiner
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Ms. Jaya Shrivastava

Dedicated to

My mother, Abhilasha Shrivastava

And

My father, Awdhesh Kumar Shrivastava

SYNOPSIS

Perspective Development in the Novels of Colson Whitehead: A Cognitive Narratological Approach

Introduction:

The notion of new black aesthetic has been gaining considerable attention in academia with Trey Ellis's landmark essay, "The New Black Aesthetic", which appeared in *Callaloo* in 1989. A similar term, 'post-black' gained artistic and scholarly interest since the late 1990s when it was coined by Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum of Harlem and the conceptual artist, Glenn Ligon to describe the liberating value in relieving the immense burden of race-wide representation. The term "post-soul aesthetic" was coined by Nelson George in 1992 to denote the diversity of blackness. With this literary course, a move away from essential notions of blackness without alluding to the past nostalgically has been noticed. These cultural critical discourses interlace race and racism in a way to reject their interaction, and emerge with the rise in prominence of a younger generation of African American artists and writers who came of age after the Civil Rights Movement. One such author who belongs to a new generation of African American writers is Colson Whitehead, who is often identified as developing a "post-soul", "new black" or post-black aesthetic. The move away from associations of the past presumes a shift in the representation of black experience and identity in the 21st century, called as the era of post-blackness by American writer and cultural critic, Touré.

On the one hand, post-black represents new and multiple definitions of blackness, and hence, calls forth a different perspective to look at the black experience. On the other hand, for scholars and critics such as Robert B. Stepto (1979), Houston A. Baker Jr. (1984), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988), and Bernard W. Bell (2004), double consciousness lies at the heart of African American artistic production. African American novelists continue to deploy the trope at the

thematic, discursive, and structural level. While pronouncing the internal conflict through the notion of double consciousness, W. E. B. Du Bois expresses a difficulty, a psychological challenge, and a strange feeling felt by African Americans, while unifying their black identity with their American identity. The difference between 'self-perception' and 'other's perception of the self' embedded within double consciousness rings sonorously with the narratological concept of narrative perspective, which marks the distinction between who speaks and who sees (Genette, 1980). More than the socio-cultural implications of double consciousness, some of the initial queries for this doctoral research grappled with the narratological manifestation of the double gaze in African American novels. The background study prompted a broad research question: Is there a shift in the representation of perspective from the earlier African American novels to novels produced in 'post-black era'? Although the present research work does not address this question across a representative range of authors, the study focuses on the works of Colson Whitehead to explore the way perspective mirrors the notion of post-blackness as the ability to be rooted in but not restricted by race.

Within the realms of both, structuralist and post-structuralist narratology, perspective is a complex and controversial concept. Within cognitive narratology, narrative itself is characterized as a cognitive mode built fundamentally on perspective taking. The thesis does not provide a comprehensive summary of the definitions and the history of the concept, as it does not aim to study the concept per se. However, individual chapters explicate its meaning using applicable narratological methods, as the thesis aims to see the connection and implication of perspective development in creating and transferring the idea of post-black or post-soul aesthetic. Narratologists Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (2001) give the most suitable definition of narrative perspective, which interacts with both the subject and discourse of each of Whitehead's novels. Narrative perspective means the location from which events in a story are presented to the reader. 'Location' here can have both a literal and a figural meaning. Literally, "perspective" refers to the spatiotemporal coordinates of an agent or observer; figuratively, it signifies the norms, attitudes, and values held by such an agent or

observer. Peer and Chatman believe that without the awareness of the kind of perspective, which holds a narratological model together, it is often difficult to relate the narrative as a text to the social or historical constructs under scrutiny. Three key elements are derived from this definition, which are pertinent for this thesis. The first element is the relative 'location' of the characters and narrators of Colson Whitehead within each novel and thus, the dynamics between who sees and who speaks. The second element is the shift in their beliefs with the change in narrative location, i.e. from the beginning until the end of the novel. The third element is the relation and implication of characters' perspectival change for the socio-historical construct of new black or post-black aesthetic.

Research Gaps:

Scholars such as Bernard W. Bell, Derek C. Maus, Lovalerie King, and Linda F. Selzer note and appreciate the "experimentalism" (Maus, 2014), the continuing vitality of the African American literary tradition (King and Selzer, 2008) and "the stylistic and structural experimentation in narratives" (Bell, 2004) of Colson Whitehead. Even when they point out narrative experimentation in his novels, the explication of this narratological novelty is ignored amidst socio-cultural analysis. Thus, there are no specific narratological studies on his body of work. In the light of the broader research question, i.e. to explore the shift in perspective, the present research work focuses on the representation of perspective within the novels of Colson Whitehead, studies them taking a cognitive narratological approach, and finds that the characters develop their perspective in their individual journeys narrated in each of the novels.

The attention of narratologists and literary critics alike has only recently been drawn towards the scarcity of scholarship available at the interface of race and narratology. Literary critic, linguist, and stylistician, Donald C. Freeman observes that American scholars, except for researchers like Chatman, Gerald Prince, and Ann Banfield, have tended to shy away from global treatments of narrative. One of the few authors working at this interface with African American autobiography, Dejin Xu, writes in his book, *Race and Form* (2007), that works

on narratology from the 1970s to the late 1980s were concerned with such basic issues as perspective, narrator's voice, the relationship between story and discourse. Belonging essentially to the so-called *formal* theory, these issues are but confined to the text proper. He notes that this deficiency of studying narrative structures regardless of its social and ideological implications had yet to be widely rectified within the academic circle of narratologists in the 1990s when series of works on narrative studies appeared to expand classic narratology into an interdisciplinary field, which takes into account race, gender, class, and other related social issues. Currently, narratologists and scholars such as James J. Donahue, Sue J. Kim, Janine Utell, and Jennifer Ho are working at this interface from a variety of approaches exploring race, narrative, cognition, and ethnicity in Americas.

There are a number of socio-cultural and political theorizations of works, which have been variously called as "post-black", "post-soul", and "New Black Aesthetic" (Greg Tate, 1986; Trey Ellis, 1989; Bernard W. Bell, 2004; Bertram D. Ashe, 2007; and Touré 2011). Such theorizations are applied along with different literary approaches on Colson Whitehead (Derek C. Maus, 2014; Derek C. Maus and James J. Donahue; and Kimberly Fain, 2015). These theorizations and approaches are surveyed and elaborated in individual chapters. However, most of the scholarship does not attempt to bring together cognitive narratological concepts, which in themselves operate as mental cogs to impart the post-black or post-racial idea, to bear upon Whitehead's body of work.

Research Questions and Objectives:

While engaging with the abovementioned research gaps, this thesis attempts to explore the following two research questions: (1) Which narratological concepts can effectively be applied to Whitehead's texts such that they address emerging issues in new black or post-black aesthetic?, and (2) What conclusions can be drawn from this approach and what are the implications of perspective development for the notion of new black aesthetic? To find answers to these questions, the thesis outlines three objectives. (1) to find and apply methods and

concepts from cognitive narratology on the novels of Colson Whitehead such that they interact with the subject and narrative strategies employed in each novel; (2) to find how cognitive narratological concepts inform his work on developing the post-soul aesthetic; and (3) to find the structural and thematic implications of development of characters' perspective.

Methodology and Discussion:

Taking a cognitive narratological approach, the thesis studies the novels of Colson Whitehead in four chapters. The chapter titled, "'There is another world beyond this one': Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds in *The Intuitionist*" is devoted to studying Whitehead's first novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999). In the novel, a seemingly impossible elevator accident during an election campaign for the chair of the Department of Elevator Inspectors triggers the speculations of the characters. Using Marie-Laure Ryan's concepts of embedded narratives and 'possible worlds theory', this chapter studies the novel's mental domain against its factual domain. The mental domain consists of characters' embedded narratives that they create to speculate which of the two departmental factions, the Intuitionists and the Empiricists, sabotaged the elevator in order to win the coming elections. The narratives are based on the individual's beliefs, fears, doubts, and attitudes pertaining to racial codes and political motives. To the reader, the novel's barrage of events and situations, obscure the characters' actual thought processes. By revealing the causal link between the events and the characters' thoughts, this chapter studies the role that race and politics play in shaping the personal world of the characters. The chapter also shows that by not giving certain crucial information until the novel's denouements, Whitehead first sets and then defeats characters' and readers' conjectures and expectations. He exposes the inability, of both the characters as well as the readers, to conceive of other possible reasons behind the actions of the former, as they get engrossed with the narratives of petty politics. The characters do not look into possibilities, which could be bereft of any political or racial interventions. For instance, the elevator accident occurred due to technical failure rather than sabotage. This chapter,

therefore, foregrounds the author's attempt at exposing characters' political and racial prejudice, interspersed with their search for a perfect elevator and for transfigured race relations. The study also helps in understanding how, and more importantly, why their perspective shifts when they confront the semantics of an alternate possible post-racial world revealed towards the end of the novel. The characters in this novel have to come to terms with unexpected new information. The characters of Whitehead's second novel face a similar challenge.

The chapter, "'A thousand different stories collide': Metarepresentation and *John Henry Days*" studies Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-shortlisted novel, *John Henry Days* (2001), which strives to arrive at an understanding of how people engage with the process of telling stories and making myth in an age where we are constantly enmeshed with information in a metarepresentational world. This chapter studies the novel's storyworld using the concepts of metarepresentation and Theory of Mind adapted by Lisa Zunshine for fictional studies. Metarepresentation is a human cognitive endowment, which helps to keep track of who said what to whom and sometimes where or when it was said and for what purpose. Cognitive psychology and cognitive literary circles see Theory of Mind or 'mind-reading' as our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires. Taking this approach, the chapter argues that *John Henry Days* leverages metarepresentational abilities of the characters through which they develop their perspective, offer a critical look at the ways histories are written, and establish a personal bond with African American cultural traditions. The chapter also delineates how contradictory embedded narratives and commercialized media stories in the novel allow a complex set of metarepresentations, questioning notions of authenticity, agency, and authority implied by storytellers, singers, news reporters, and columnists. The chapter then examines how a cognitive narratological approach complements and refines the evaluation of the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction and the new black aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell). The protagonist of this novel, J. Sutter associates the purpose and meaning of his life with the larger cultural myth of

John Henry. The protagonist of Whitehead's third novel establishes a similar association.

The chapter titled, "'Pierce the veil': Narrative Perspective Creating the New Black Aesthetic in *Apex Hides the Hurt*" focuses on Whitehead's third novel. A nomenclature consultant, who is the unnamed protagonist of the novel, is called in to decide a suitable new name for the town of Winthrop. The novel is mostly focalized (the events are seen or perceived) through the protagonist, but it also intermittently presents the different points of view of the three members of the town's Council and that of a few other inhabitants. Among the town's Council, the resident software millionaire, Lucky Aberdeen wants to change the town's name to New Prospera reflecting its commercial growth. The mayor, Regina Goode wants to give back its old name, 'Freedom' according to the original choice of the town's founding black settlers and her ancestors. Albie Winthrop, the son of the town's aristocracy does not want to change the name at all. This chapter studies the role played by shifting modes of perspectives in bringing out the opinions of various characters and in creating New Black Aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell). An evaluation of different viewpoints makes the protagonist change his initial choice of naming the town as New Prospera and ultimately helps in shaping his own opinion to choose the name, "Struggle" given by one of the founding black settlers but ignored and forgotten in history. The chapter's theoretical framework interacts with Gérard Genette's formulation of focalization and Mieke Bal's concept of focalizer and focalized to present the process of protagonist's decision making amid the conflicting opinions not only of other characters but also of himself where on one hand he thinks that names cannot "change the character of the place" and on the other hand he believes that names bring us "an inch closer to the truth". Such a narratological approach built on the aspect of perspective also helps understand how Colson Whitehead constructs double consciousness of their characters through narrative experimentation.

The next chapter offers narratological reflections on *The Colossus of New York*, *Sag Harbor* and *Zone One* and a case study of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. As in earlier chapters, the applied concepts are chosen not just as methodological tools, but also in recognizing their utilization by the author at the compositional level too. For instance, the technique of personification, which is extensively used by Whitehead in his non-fictional urban scenography, *The Colossus of New York* (2003), is striated using Mark Turner's notion of 'conceptual blending' (*The Literary Mind*, 1996), which allows the reader to cognitively map the terrain where people read, write and live their own versions of the city. In maneuvering the zombie genre in his post-apocalyptic novel, *Zone One* (2011), Whitehead uses, what narratologist Jan Alber defines as, the unnatural i.e., physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios and events that challenge our real-world knowledge. Therefore, the section devoted to *Zone One* uses the framework of 'unnatural narrative' and offers a preliminary study of the novel's treatment of 'zombie' as an 'unnatural' literary trope. The third section of this chapter offers a proposal for a future cognitive narratological study of *Sag Harbor* (2009). This future work will see the applicability of research on narrative and emotions to explore the affective response of the novel's teenage protagonist Benji to the social perception of his sense of identity. The last section, devoted to the cognitive narratological study of Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, presents a case study to show the absence of perspective development in characters from a novel that is not categorized as post-black or post-soul. Therefore, although the study of Morrison's novel may seem out of place concerning the focus of the thesis, it helps in highlighting the static nature of the characters' perspective in Morrison's novel as opposed to the change we see in the characters of Whitehead's novels.

Conclusion (brief summary):

The fundamental objective of the thesis was to find appropriate concepts and methods from cognitive narratology and apply them to each of the novels of Colson Whitehead. The analysis and results thus obtained interacted with the emerging issues of authenticity, authority, agency, and individualism in the post-

black, post-soul, or post-racial discourses. It was also found that characters in each of Whitehead's novels go through a process of developing and changing their perspectives, which presages a radical reimagining of black sensibilities in the 21st century. By using Marie-Laure Ryan's concepts of embedded narratives and 'possible worlds theory', the chapter on Whitehead's first novel concludes that the possible worlds generated towards the end of *The Intuitionist* force the characters to imagine a world free from the racial and political logics of our world. The chapter illustrated that such a transition from a deeply intrigued perspective to an unfettered perspective allows Whitehead to remain rooted in the past and maintain the 'signifying' nature of the African American novel and at the same time to establish the post-soul idea of looking beyond the African American literary traditions by envisioning a future where racial logics may become irrelevant.

In the next chapter, using Theory of Mind and the concept of metarepresentation, it is concluded that the author in *John Henry Days* taps into the reader's metarepresentational ability to decipher its protagonist, J.' Sutter's behavior. The novel demands individual judgment on J.'s inclination towards John Henry's story just as J. assesses the John Henry myth. The chapter, therefore, concludes that Whitehead imparts the idea of individualism not only to its characters within the novel's storyworld but also to the reader by making her evaluate the "truth" of John Henry's story just as J. Sutter is involved in doing the same. Metarepresenting J. Sutter's mental states reveal that he goes through a process of not only believing in a larger cultural myth but also associating it with the purpose and meaning of his life. The development of his perspective is characterized by uncertainties and self-evaluations one goes through while connecting with a historical myth, rather than by receiving it passively as a given cultural product. Using J. Sutter and Pamela Street as mouthpieces, Whitehead also points out the disadvantages of mediums of communication and technology that devalues humans. The various forms of technologies in the novel – be it the steam-drill from the industrial age, the postage stamp, vinyl records, and the innumerable artifacts collected by Pamela Street's father, or J. Sutter's web report

in the digital age – is brought into question for its limitations and for the role of its users as producers as well as consumers of that technology. Coming to an understanding of the obsoleteness of our systems of communications from a postdated point of view is itself reflective of perspective development shown by the characters of the novel. The chapter, however, argued that along with depicting the continuous superseding of technologies, Whitehead simultaneously attempts to bring out human beings' propensity to assess mediums of representations, which enables us to resist passive submission to these external technologies of communication and foregrounds our inherent tendency to feed on and concoct stories and narratives.

Looking at how narrative perspective and/or focalization manifests in *Apex Hides the Hurt*, we found that Colson Whitehead creates in the protagonist a cultural mulatto (Trey Ellis) and a hybridized identity (Bernard W. Bell) by making him see the reason behind the arguments made by various characters, both black and white. With this, Whitehead seems to convey that we have risen to a point in history from where we can survey all that came before, and we can evaluate and decide for ourselves that instead of reaching an apex, we are and have always been a part of a struggle. Thus, Narrative perspective not only becomes a tool or methodology for analysis but also the medium itself for creating a new black aesthetic. A theoretical synthesis of emergent issues pertaining to new black aesthetic and theories on narrative perspective and focalization demonstrate the ways in which studying the 'how' of the novels' narration can lead to understanding the 'what' of the novel's aesthetic.

In the next chapter, the first section used Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's (1994, 1998, 2002) theory of conceptual integration to understand why and how Colson Whitehead in his collection of essays, *The Colossus of New York*, enmeshes two different concepts of city space and human characteristics such that the city is personified. The city is personified to attain a perspective beyond our limited perceptions to come to terms with its constantly changing nature. The preliminary study on *Zone One* in the second section arrived at an understanding

of the use of 'zombie' as an unnatural element to meditate on the relevance of race in a post-racial scenario and as a critique of American consumer-driven life. Grounding its argument in the notion that emotion is a key feature of a reader's interaction with narrative, the third section proposed a future study of the narrative construction of *Sag Harbor* (2009) to show how the perspective of a black teenage protagonist, Benji reviews racial stereotypes. This study will draw on the work of psychologist Keith Oatley who theorizes different modes in which we experience emotion through fiction. The last section studies the trauma narrative of Toni Morrison's novel, *A Mercy* (2008), using a cognitive narratological framework. It argued that multiple focalization, polychronic narration, and representation of the inconsistent information enable Morrison to depict effectively the devastating effects of trauma – whether sexual, socioeconomic, or racial – on individual personality. Various characters of multi-ethnic origins narrate the novel and certain events are told repeatedly from different vantage points. Thus, the narrative calls forth continuous efforts on the part of the reader to process the complex and bewildering information emerging from the novel's storyworld. A cognitive approach to study the novel provides an understanding of the behavior of the traumatized and the impact of slavery on black people's consciousness and identity. Moreover, the approach gives insight into the manner in which its narrative engages the reader to revisit concentrically characters' static impression of the social forces of injustice and oppression.

By giving further depth to the existing literature on Colson Whitehead and adding to the conversations on new black or post-soul aesthetics, the thesis concludes that cognitive narratological concepts and methods, such as embedded narratives, possible worlds theory, metarepresentation, focalization, and conceptual integration, function at the thematic and structural level of Colson Whitehead's novels. Their application is insightful in understanding the way emerging issues in post-black or post-soul aesthetics, such as authenticity, authority, agency, and individualism, are translated not just thematically, but also through the narrative techniques deployed by the author. By forming embedded narratives, by imagining possible worlds, by metarepresenting a confluence of

information, by shifting their perspectives and by conceptually integrating concepts, the characters in Colson Whitehead's novels change their perspective. The characters' perspective development channels an evaluative stance, a self-critical tendency, and a move away from essential notions of blackness, not to sever the vital link, but to look into the future of African American experience.

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A. Papers Published:

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- "Reading a Culturally Different Text: Meaning Signification Process in the Language of Achebe's Short Stories" in **UGC National Seminar on 'Voicing the Silence: Redefining English Literary Studies'** 17-18 February 2012, Mata Jijabai Government P. G. Girls College, Indore.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder".
>
> (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 8)

The above lines, often quoted from W. E. B. Du Bois's autoethnographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) germinated the idea for the present research endeavor. The African Americans, according to Du Bois, due to the harrowing experiences of slavery and racism, are forced to see themselves from their own perspective as well as from the perspective of others. Du Bois expresses a difficulty, a psychological challenge, and a strange feeling felt by African Americans, while unifying their black identity with their American identity. The difference between 'self-perception' and 'other's perception of the self' embedded within double consciousness rings sonorously with the narratological concept of narrative perspective, which marks the distinction between who speaks and who sees (Genette, 1980). More than the socio-cultural implications of double consciousness, some of the initial queries for this doctoral research grappled with the narratological manifestation of the double gaze in African American novels.

1.1 Background of the Study:

On the one hand, for scholars and critics such as Robert B. Stepto (1979), Housten A. Baker Jr. (1984), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988), and Bernard W. Bell (2004), double consciousness lies at the heart of African American artistic production. African American novelists continue to deploy the trope at the

thematic, discursive, and structural level. On the other hand, post-black, new black or post-soul art and literature interlace race and racism in a way that rejects their interaction. Commentaries on post-soul aesthetic began with Greg Tate's article, "Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke: the Return of the Black Aesthetic" for the *Village Voice* in the fall of 1986. Along with post-soul, the notion of new black aesthetic has been gaining considerable attention in academia with Trey Ellis's landmark essay, "The New Black Aesthetic", which appeared in *Callaloo* in 1989. A similar term, 'post-black', gained artistic and scholarly interest since the late 1990s when it was coined by Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum of Harlem and the conceptual artist, Glenn Ligon. For them, the term describes, "the liberating value in tossing off the immense burden of race-wide representation, the idea that everything they do must speak to or for or about the entire race" (Pinckney, 2012). Nelson George uses the term "post-soul aesthetic" in 1992 to denote the diversity of blackness. With this literary course, a move away from essential notions of blackness without alluding to the past nostalgically has been noticed. These cultural critical discourses emerge with the rise in prominence of a younger generation of African American artists and writers who came of age after the Civil Rights Movement. One such author who belongs to a new generation of African American writers is Colson Whitehead, who is often identified as developing a "post-soul", "new black" or post-black aesthetic. The move away from associations of the past presumes a shift in the representation of black experience and identity in the 21st century.

Post-black represents new and multiple definitions of blackness, and hence, calls forth a different perspective to look at the notion. Golden, in "Freestyle" catalogue to the 2001 Studio Museum in Harlem exhibition, reflects about black artistic freedom in post-Civil Rights movement:

> "'Post-black' was shorthand for post-black art, which was shorthand for a discourse that could fill volumes. For me, to approach a conversation about "black art," ultimately meant embracing and rejecting the notion of such a thing at the very same time. . . . It was a clarifying

> term that had ideological and chronological dimensions and repercussions. It was characterized by artists who were adamant about not being labeled as "black" artists, though their work was steeped, in fact deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness". (14)

As Golden's statements suggest, these artists regard any sort of labeling as limiting their freedom. American writer and cultural critic, Touré, in his book, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it Means to be Black Now* uses the term post-black to describe black identity in the 21st century, which he calls as the era of post-blackness. Reflecting on the range of identity of Barack Obama, Michael Eric Dyson in the foreword to Touré's book writes "He's rooted in, but not restricted by, his Blackness" (*Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?* xi). This phrase can very well define post-blackness, suggesting the plasticity of blackness conforming to a bewildering array of identities and struggles. Dyson conveys that the most salient features of the identities of black folk are no longer bound to a single idea of blackness. With this, both Dyson and Touré also elucidate what the notion does not suggest. According to Dyson, post-black does not signify the end of blackness; it means we transcended beyond our narrow understanding of blackness. He says, "Post-Blackness has little patience for racial patriotism, racial fundamentalism and racial policing" (xv). Touré further clarifies that post-black does not imply "post-racial". To him, post-racial suggests colorblindness, it posits that race does not exist, or that we have surpassed racial constructs, which is not the case.

While editing the 2007 special issue on post-soul aesthetic in *African American Review*, Bertram D. Ashe notes the lack of consensus on the scholarship on the era and the new black aesthetic. Names, for instance, range from "The New Black Aesthetic" to "postliberated" to "post-soul" to "post-black" to "NewBlack". There is also a disagreement on whether the era begins, or whether or not it has ended ("Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic", 609). It has also been observed that the writers and the artists of the younger generation respond against the idea of legitimate blackness. In this regard, Richard Schur comments, "If African

American critics and writers sought to decenter knowledge and the literary gaze during the 1980s, the subsequent generation (i.e., hip hop or post-Soul) has taken up as its theme how this decentering or multicultural rewriting of the canon has distorted the very images the prior generation sought to create" ("Stomping the Blues No More?", 202). Nelson George (1992) and Mark Anthony Neal (2002) observe that the generation born between 1964 and 1986 share a common political and aesthetic sensibility, and they identify this ideology or mindset as post-soul. This gives even more reason to study the novels of Colson Whitehead, who belongs to this generation, using the lens of narrative perspective, which is a mode to represent a point of view or ideology.

To conceptualize the new black aesthetic, one needs to understand the notion of the "cultural mulatto" given by Trey Ellis while discussing his views on this post-Civil Rights movement era:

> "Just as a genetic mulatto is a black person of mixed parents who can often get along fine with his white grandparents, a cultural mulatto, educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world. And it is by and large this rapidly growing crop of cultural mulattoes that fuels the NBA. We no longer need to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black". ("The New Black Aesthetic", 235).

Scholars see Colson Whitehead as a "cultural mulatto" being educated in esteemed institutes who navigates the white world by extending the African American literary tradition with the sophisticated maneuvering of popular fiction and genres such as detective and zombie novel. He was born in New York City in 1969, lived in Manhattan throughout his youth and attended the esteemed Trinity School. His artistic curiosity stimulated through popular culture, watching B-movies, horror movies, science fiction movies, and reading horror comics ("Colson Whitehead's Brains"). He attended Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduating with a degree in English literature. Whitehead returned

to New York and began his writing career as a freelancer and television critic for *Village Voice*.

Colson Whitehead's books were published in prominent publishing imprints and the book reviews of his work appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, and *Time*. He has been the recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship and the Whiting Award. Whitehead's body of work has received a generally positive critical response. His first novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999) was named a finalist for the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for debut fiction. His second novel, *John Henry Days* (2001) received the Anisfield-Wolf Award, which recognizes exemplary literary works dealing with racism and cultural diversity, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. Whitehead then moved on to write his nonfictional third book, *The Colossus of New York*, which was published in 2003. He returned to fiction in 2006 with his third novel, *Apex Hides the Hurt*. His fourth novel, *Sag Harbor* (2009) was a finalist for both the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and the Hurston/Wright Award in 2009. His fifth novel, *Zone One* (2011) too became a finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. Even his characters, especially the protagonists, are featured as cultural mulattoes; they are highly skilled black professionals. Howard Rambsy II notes, "Because Whitehead and artists of his generation came of age during a time when an unprecedented number of African Americans achieved mainstream success, it is not surprising that they would design high-achieving black professionals more frequently and more comfortably than their predecessors" ("The Rise of Colson Whitehead", 223). Lila Mae Watson of *The Intuitionist*, J. Sutter of *John Henry Days*, and the unnamed protagonist of *Apex Hides the Hurt* - all possess the intellectual and technical expertise, which empower them to achieve elevated status in their professional careers.

Along with Ellis's conception of the cultural mulatto, Bertram D. Ashe proposes two more features to characterize the post-soul aesthetic. He calls the second point as 'blaxploration', or the propensity to trouble blackness. He writes,

“Explicit post-soul blaxploration argues that blackness is constantly in flux, and in that way the post-soul aesthetic "responds" to the 1960's "call" for a fixed, iron-clad black aesthetic” (“Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic”, 615). As noted earlier, Ashe says that artists who trouble blackness often do so with characters who could be considered cultural mulattos. He offers ‘allusion-disruption moments’ as the third point in the post-soul matrix which emerge regularly in post-soul aesthetic texts. He says that many of these texts signify on Black Power and the Civil Rights movement, but other post-soul texts signify on earlier eras in African American history as well. Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days*, for example, compares a cultural mulatto protagonist to the folkloric legend John Henry, and in the process asks difficult questions about heroism in this post-Civil Rights movement era. Ashe summates that “through the allusion-disruption process, post-soul authors use characters [that I read] as cultural mulattos to trouble blackness, to oppose reductive iterations of blackness in ways that mark this post-Civil Rights movement African American literary subgenre as compellingly different from those of earlier literary periods” (616).

This background literature prompts a broad research question: Is there a shift in the representation of perspective from earlier African American novels to novels produced in ‘post-black era’? Although the present research work does not address this question across a representative range of authors, the study focuses on the works of Colson Whitehead to explore the way perspective mirrors the notion of post-blackness as the ability to be rooted in but not restricted by race. Scholars such as Bernard W. Bell, Derek C. Maus, Lovalerie King, and Linda F. Selzer note and appreciate the “experimentalism” (Maus, 2014), the continuing vitality of the African American literary tradition (King and Selzer, 2008) and “the stylistic and structural experimentation in narratives” (Bell, 2004) of Colson Whitehead. Even when they point out narrative experimentation in his novels, the explication of this narratological novelty is ignored amidst socio-cultural analysis. Thus, there are no specific narratological studies on his body of work. In the light of the broader research question, i.e. to explore the shift in point of view, the thesis focuses on the representation of perspective within the novels of Colson

Whitehead, studies them taking a cognitive narratological approach, and finds that the characters develop their opinions in their individual journeys narrated in each of the novels.

Within the realms of both, structuralist and post-structuralist narratology, perspective is a complex and controversial concept and is pertinent to narrative. Within cognitive narratology, narrative itself is characterized as "a discourse genre and a cognitive style that relies fundamentally on perspective taking" (David Herman, 2002). As narratives have at least one narrator and usually more than one character, they offer a range of, and a change of, perspectives ("Perspective - Point of View"). A narrator may tell the story from his point of view, or may also tell the story from the point of view of a character. The thesis does not provide a comprehensive summary of the definitions and the history of the term, as it does not aim to study the concept per se. However, individual chapters explicate it using applicable narratological methods, as the thesis intends to see the connection and implication of perspective in creating and transferring the idea of post-black or post-soul aesthetic. The most suitable definition of narrative perspective, which interacts with both, the subject and discourse of each of Whitehead's novels, is given by narratologists Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman in the collected volume edited by them, *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspectives* (2001), and hence deserves to be quoted in full:

> "By this we mean the location from which events in a story are presented to the reader. 'Location' here can have both a literal and a figural meaning. Literally, "perspective" refers to the spatiotemporal coordinates of an agent or observer; figuratively, it signifies the norms, attitudes, and values held by such an agent or observer. We believe that the application of narratological models in the various disciplines benefits from a clear awareness of the kind of perspective that does or does not hold it together. Without such awareness, it is often difficult to relate the narrative as a text to the social or historical constructs under scrutiny" (*New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, 5).

Three key elements are derived from this definition that are pertinent for this thesis. The first element is the relative 'location' of the characters and narrators of Colson Whitehead within each novel and thus, the dynamics between who sees and who speaks. The second element is the shift in their beliefs with the change in narrative location, i.e. from the beginning until the end of the novel. The third element is the relation and implication of characters' perspectival change for the socio-historical construct of new black or post-black aesthetic.

The attention of narratologists and literary critics alike has only recently been drawn towards the scarcity of scholarship available at the interface of race and narratology. Literary critic, linguist, and stylistician, Donald C. Freeman observes that American scholars, except for researchers like Chatman, Gerald Prince, and Ann Banfield, have tended to shy away from global treatments of narrative (*New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*). One of the few authors working at this interface with African American autobiography, Dejin Xu in his book, *Race and Form* (2007), acknowledges the intrinsic value of narratology's formalistic approach to the text and its contribution to and enrichment of not only the field of literary criticism but also other fields of humanities. However, he also says that works on narratology from the 1970s to the late 1980s were concerned with such basic issues as perspective, narrator's voice, and the relationship between story and discourse. Belonging essentially to the so-called *formal* theory, these issues are but confined to the text proper. He notes that this deficiency of studying narrative structures regardless of their social and ideological implications had yet to be widely rectified within the academic circle of narratologists in the 1990s when series of works on narrative studies appeared to expand classic narratology into an interdisciplinary field, which takes into account race, gender, class, and other related social issues. Currently, narratologists and scholars such as James J. Donahue, Sue J. Kim, Janine Utell, and Jennifer Ho are working at this interface from a variety of approaches exploring race, narrative, cognition, and ethnicity in Americas.

There are a number of socio-cultural and political theorizations of works on “post-black”, “post-soul”, and “New Black Aesthetic” (Greg Tate, 1986; Trey Ellis, 1989; Bernard W. Bell, 2004; Bertram D. Ashe, 2007; and Touré 2011). Such theorizations are applied along with different literary approaches on Colson Whitehead (Derek C. Maus, 2014; Derek C. Maus and James J. Donahue, 2014; and Kimberly Fain, 2015). These theorizations and approaches are surveyed and elaborated in individual chapters. However, none of the studies has attempted to bring together cognitive narratological concepts, which in themselves operate as mental cogs to impart the post-black or post-soul idea, to bear upon Whitehead’s body of work.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives:

While engaging with the abovementioned research gaps, this thesis attempts to explore the following two research questions: (1) Which narratological concepts can effectively be applied to Whitehead’s texts such that they address emerging issues in new black or post-black aesthetic?, and (2) What conclusions can be drawn from this approach and what are the implications of perspective development for the notion of new black aesthetic? To find answers to these questions, the thesis outlines three objectives. (1) to find and apply methods and concepts from cognitive narratology on the novels of Colson Whitehead such that they interact with the subject and narrative strategies employed in each novel; (2) to find how cognitive narratological concepts inform his work on developing the post-soul aesthetic; and (3) to find the structural and thematic implications of development of characters’ perspective. To make such an attempt, it is pertinent to take relevant narratological approach.

Narratology examines the ways that narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us. The thesis holds that the narrative structure of the literary texts under study can be deduced from cognitive principles of perspective, which are manifested differently in individual texts. This is shown in an analysis of point of view on two levels. On the first level, the thesis looks at the relation between the ‘speaker’ and the ‘observer’ reflected in

the narratological differentiation between the 'narrator' and the 'character'. On the second level, the thesis studies the way opinions of a character change within a narrative. Thereby the thesis employs those conceptual methods for this analysis that helps us in understanding the manner in which cognitive states and dispositions of characters in the storyworlds[1] are evoked by narrative representations.

The thesis not only considers the notion of perspective as applicable to the rhetorical structure of narrative transmission but also takes it in a literal manner, as applicable to the description of the semantic content of narratives. In this regard, the analysis offered here follows new applications of perspective proposed by narratologists such as Willie van Peer, Seymour Chatman, and Ansgar Nünning. Nünning emphasizes the inclusion of the world-models of the fictional individuals that populate the represented universe projected by narrative texts into the semantic description for a more fruitful application of the notion of perspective. In this sense, perspective not only means the acts of narration and focalization but more generally a character's or a narrator's subjective worldview ("On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts", 207). The thesis, therefore, considers character-perspectives and narrator-perspectives to be conditioned by the individual's knowledge, mental traits, attitudes, and system of values.

In the second chapter, the thesis applies Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of "the private domains of the characters" (1986: 324) to study their mental constructs of racial and political codes in *The Intuitionist*. The third chapter uses Theory of Mind and the notion of metarepresentation with a view that they ought to be examined analogously with the phenomenon of focalization and perspective development to keep a track of changes in opinion along with keeping a track of who speaks what to whom. Thus, this framework is apt to study how the protagonist and the novel's reader process the plethora of factual and dubious information, which pervades the historiographic metafictional world of *John Henry Days*. In the fourth chapter, the very notion of perspective and focalization is studied to focus how the perspective of the unnamed protagonist of *Apex Hides*

the Hurt plays a role in resolving conflicts between discrepant world-models projected by other characters. The protagonist, who is a nomenclature consultant, himself having his own subjective validity, confronts contrary ideologies and opposing voices for naming a town. The conflicting world-views challenge and relativize one another and undermine the notion of an authoritative worldview. And this characteristic feature of questioning the notion of authority is a prominent mode to deliberate post-soul or new black aesthetic. Application of methods such as conceptual integration, unnatural narrative, and narrative representation of emotions in the fifth chapter become more rewarding with the focus on the kind of attitudes and values held by characters of Whitehead's texts and Whitehead himself. This approach helps us in finding that the author expands the African American literary tradition by giving prominence to both individualism and collective cultural codes and thus transcends the essentialist notions of blackness. The introduction will now discuss how these methodologies are used to interpret individual texts.

1.3 Methodology and Discussion:

Taking a cognitive narratological approach, the thesis studies the novels of Colson Whitehead in four chapters. The second chapter titled, "'There is another world beyond this one': Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds in *The Intuitionist*" is devoted to studying Whitehead's first novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999). In the novel, a seemingly impossible elevator accident during an election campaign for the chair of the Department of Elevator Inspectors triggers the speculations of the characters. Using Marie-Laure Ryan's concepts of embedded narratives and 'possible worlds theory', this chapter studies the novel's mental domain against its factual domain. Possible worlds theory is founded upon the idea that "reality" is composed of many distinct worlds. Along with one actual world, there are many alternative or non-actual possible worlds. In order to understand the concept of embedded narratives, a plot should be seen as a combination of factual events and mental constructs. In the novel, the mental domain consists of characters' embedded narratives that they create to speculate which of the two departmental

factions, the Intuitionists and the Empiricists, sabotaged the elevator in order to win the coming elections. The narratives are based on the individuals' beliefs, fears, doubts, and attitudes pertaining to racial codes and political motives. To the reader, the novel's barrage of events and situations, obscure the characters' actual thought processes. By revealing the causal link between the events and the characters' thoughts, this chapter studies the role that race and politics play in shaping the personal world of the characters. The chapter also shows that by not giving certain crucial information until the novel's end, Whitehead first sets and then defeats characters' and readers' conjectures and expectations. He exposes the inability, of both the characters as well as the readers, to conceive of other possible reasons behind the actions of the former, as they get engrossed with the narratives of petty politics. The characters do not look into possibilities, which could be bereft of any political or racial interventions. For instance, the elevator accident occurred due to technical failure rather than sabotage. This chapter, therefore, foregrounds the author's attempt at exposing characters' political and racial prejudice, interspersed with their search for a perfect elevator and for transfigured race relations. The study also helps in understanding how, and more importantly, why their perspective shifts when they confront the semantics of an alternate possible post-racial world revealed towards the end of the novel. The characters in this novel have to come to terms with unexpected new information. The characters of Whitehead's second novel face a similar challenge.

The third chapter of the thesis, "'A thousand different stories collide': Metarepresentation and *John Henry Days*" studies Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-shortlisted novel, *John Henry Days* (2001), which strives to arrive at an understanding of how people engage with the process of telling stories and making myth in an age where we are constantly enmeshed with information in a metarepresentational world. This chapter studies the novel's storyworld using the concepts of metarepresentation and Theory of Mind adapted by Lisa Zunshine for fictional studies. Metarepresentation is a human cognitive endowment, which helps to keep track of who said what to whom and sometimes where or when it was said and for what purpose. Cognitive psychology and cognitive literary

circles see Theory of Mind or 'mind-reading' as our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires. Taking this approach, the chapter argues that *John Henry Days* leverages metarepresentational abilities of the characters through which they develop their perspective, offer a critical look at the ways histories are written, and establish a personal bond with African American cultural traditions. The chapter also delineates how contradictory embedded narratives and commercialized media stories in the novel allow a complex set of metarepresentations, questioning notions of authenticity, agency, and authority implied by storytellers, singers, news reporters, and columnists. The chapter then examines how a cognitive narratological approach complements and refines the evaluation of the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction and the new black aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell). The protagonist of this novel, J. Sutter associates the purpose and meaning of his life with the larger cultural myth of John Henry. The protagonist of Whitehead's third novel establishes a similar association.

Chapter four, "'Pierce the veil': Narrative Perspective Creating the New Black Aesthetic in *Apex Hides the Hurt*" focuses on Whitehead's third novel. A nomenclature consultant, who is the unnamed protagonist of the novel, is called in to decide a suitable new name for the town of Winthrop. The novel is mostly focalized (the events are seen or perceived) through the protagonist, but it also intermittently presents the different points of view of the three members of the town's Council and that of a few other inhabitants. Among the town's Council, the resident software millionaire, Lucky Aberdeen wants to change the town's name to New Prospera reflecting its commercial growth; the mayor, Regina Goode wants to give back its old name, Freedom according to the original choice of the town's founding black settlers and her ancestors; and Albie Winthrop, the son of the town's aristocracy does not want to change the name at all. This chapter studies the role played by shifting modes of perspectives in bringing out the opinions of various characters and in creating New Black Aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell). An evaluation of different viewpoints makes the protagonist change his initial choice of naming the town as New Prospera and

ultimately helps in shaping his own opinion to choose the name "Struggle" given by one of the founding black settlers but ignored and forgotten in history. The chapter's theoretical framework interacts with Gérard Genette's formulation of focalization and Mieke Bal's concept of focalizer and focalized to present the process of protagonist's decision making amid the conflicting opinions not only of other characters but also of himself where on one hand he thinks that names cannot "change the character of the place" and on the other hand he believes that names bring us "an inch closer to the truth". Such a narratological approach built on the aspect of perspective also helps understand how Colson Whitehead constructs double consciousness of their characters through narrative experimentation.

Chapter five offers narratological reflections on *The Colossus of New York*, *Sag Harbor* and *Zone One* and a case study of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. As in earlier chapters, the applied concepts are chosen not just as methodological tools, but also in recognizing their utilization by the author at the compositional level too. For instance, the technique of personification, which is extensively used by Whitehead in his non-fictional urban scenography, *The Colossus of New York* (2003), is striated using Mark Turner's notion of 'conceptual blending' (*The Literary Mind*, 1996), which allows the reader to cognitively map the terrain where people read, write and live their own versions of the city. In maneuvering the zombie genre in his post-apocalyptic novel, *Zone One* (2011), Whitehead uses, what narratologist Jan Alber defines as, the unnatural i.e., physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios and events that challenge our real-world knowledge. Therefore, the section devoted to *Zone One* uses the framework of 'unnatural narrative' and offers a preliminary study of the novel's treatment of 'zombie' as an 'unnatural' literary trope. The third section of this chapter offers a proposal for a future cognitive narratological study of *Sag Harbor* (2009). The study proposed in this section will see the applicability of research on narrative and emotions to explore the affective response of the novel's teenage protagonist Benji to the social perception of his sense of identity. The last section, devoted to the cognitive narratological study of Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, presents a case

study to show the absence of perspective development in characters from a novel that is not categorized as post-black or post-soul. Therefore, although the study of Morrison's novel may seem out of place concerning the focus of the thesis, it helps in highlighting the static nature of the characters' perspective in Morrison's novel as opposed to the change we see in the characters of Whitehead's novels.

Notes:

1. David Herman in his book, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2002), defines storyworlds as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate – or make a deictic shift – as they work to comprehend a narrative" (9). Herman uses the term to refer to the world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly by a narrative.

Chapter 2

"There is another world beyond this one": Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds in *The Intuitionist*

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter studies the mental domain of the characters in Colson Whitehead's first novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999), against the novel's factual domain to foreground the author's attempt at exposing characters' political and racial attitudes and tendentious prejudices, which interplay with their expectations for a perfect elevator and for transfigured race relations. The mental domain, which this chapter focuses on, comprises the personal embedded narratives (Marie-Laure Ryan, 1986, 1991) of characters, which represent their plans, passive projections, desires, beliefs, and fears. The overt (narratively expressed) and covert (narratively unexpressed) mental narratives of a character interact and often conflict with that of the other. The depiction of a barrage of various events and situations occurring in the novel conceals the characters' thought processes, which function as the cause and effect of these events. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to study this interrelation in order to render clearly the role race and politics play in shaping the personal world of the characters, and to understand how, and more importantly, why their perspective shifts when they confront the semantics of an alternate possible world revealed towards the end of the novel.

In *The Intuitionist*, a seemingly impossible elevator accident, during an election campaign for the chair of the city's Department of Elevator Inspectors, triggers the speculations of the characters. The timing of the accident, before the election and just when the city's Mayor presses the elevator call button to show the place to the people from the French Embassy, makes it "a high-profile mess-

up" (109). They quickly form embedded narratives shaped by their beliefs, fears, and doubts, to consider which of the department's two warring factions, the Intuitionists, and the Empiricists, sabotaged the elevator in order to win the coming elections. They carry out actions guided by their circumstances and preconceptions, devoid of complete knowledge of the intents of other characters and the actual cause of the accident. They engage in an exploration of a plethora of possibilities conceived, defined, and constrained by social, political, and racial codes. By withholding certain crucial information on characters and events until the novel's denouement, Whitehead first sets and then defeats characters' and readers' conjectures and expectations. He exposes their inability to conceive other possibilities and likely reasons for characters' actions, as they are completely engrossed in the narratives of petty politics. The characters also evade looking into possibilities, which could be bereft of any political or racial interventions. The elevator accident, for instance, occurred due to technical failure rather than sabotage.

2.2 Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds:

This section only gives a brief description of the concepts of possible worlds theory and embedded narrative applied to the reading of the novel and begins with their definitions. Possible worlds theory[1] is founded upon the idea that "reality – conceived as the sum of the imaginable rather than as the sum of what exists physically – is a universe composed of a plurality of distinct worlds" (Ryan, 2013). Following the work of philosopher and logician, Saul Kripke (1963), Ryan explains that this universe is hierarchically structured by the opposition of one element, which functions as the center of the system, to all the other members of the set. The central element is known as the "actual" or "real" world while the other members of the system are the alternative or non-actual possible worlds. A world is possible if it is linked to the actual world by a relation of accessibility. Ryan observes that two main theories of actuality have been proposed regarding the properties that make one of the worlds of the system the actual world. According to the first, the actual world differs in ontological status from merely

possible ones. All the other worlds, then, are the product of a mental activity, such as dreaming, imagining, foretelling, promising, or storytelling. The other interpretation regards actuality as an indexical notion with a variable reference. The actual world, therefore, would mean the world where one is situated and the possible worlds are actualized from the point of view of the inhabitants. Put simply, the actual world is the world in which we actually live, which includes the authors and the readers. The textual actual world, on the other hand, is the world of the story and consists of many embedded worlds.

In order to understand the concept of embedded narratives, it is pertinent to see a plot as a combination of factual events and mental constructs. Ryan considers narrative plots as "layered entities, made up not only of a linear sequence of factual events, but also of the projections, wishes, plans, and interpretations produced by the characters as they reflect upon the world of which they are members" ("Embedded Narratives and the Structure of Plans", 107). She calls these mental constructs, which present and structure a story, as 'embedded narratives' insofar as they link events and states in a causal chain. Plots, thereby are bundles of 'Possible stories', some actual and some virtual, whose interaction determines the behavior of characters (108). The virtual domains comprise the knowledge, wishes, intents, and obligations of the various characters.

Making further narratological interventions, Janine Utell explains that the *textual reference world* is the world the narrator creates by telling us about the textual actual world; it is the narrated, told world. She says that in the world of the story, that which is not narrated, but which happens nevertheless is part of the textual actual world. It shows us that within a plot are embedded many possible worlds, some actualized, some not (*Engagements with Narrative*). Within both the textual actual world and the textual reference world, are other worlds called *textual alternative possible worlds*, which represent the mental life of the characters. Ryan designates these worlds with letters. The K-world is the knowledge-world, which deals with knowledge, ignorance, and belief; the O-world is the obligation-world, which deals with obligations, prohibitions,

dictated by social rules of behavior; and the W-world is the wish-world, extracted from subjective value judgments, which deals with goodness and badness (Ryan, 1991). Utell explains that these make up the private worlds of the characters, and can be used to define different kinds of conflict; the types of world generate a theme, and the conflicts lead to a plot, which leads to the creation of more possible worlds. Conflicts can be created among the textual actual world and the private worlds; also between different private worlds in one character, and within one private world (different wishes, for instance). Similarly, it can be created between different private worlds across different characters. Plot happens when the relations among these different worlds is altered (Ryan 126).

Ryan places the application of possible world theory into two categories: the theory of fiction and the semantic description of storyworlds. The present study mainly falls under the second category as it aims to study the personal worlds of a character and how they interact with that of the other characters. For this study, as Umberto Eco regards, the semantic domain of narrative is a universe made up of a constellation of possible worlds. A literary text, he writes, is not a single possible world, but "*a machine for producing possible worlds* (of the *fabula*[2], of the characters within the *fabula*, and of the reader outside the *fabula*" (*The Role of the Reader*, 246). Ryan explains the three types of world as: 1) the possible worlds imagined and asserted by the author; 2) the possible worlds imagined, believed, wished, and so on by the characters of the *fabula*; 3) the possible worlds that the Model Reader imagines, believes, wishes, and so on. She further explicates that the first type of worlds describes the *fabula* as a succession of distinct states mediated by events. The present chapter mainly focuses on the second type of worlds which corresponds to "the mental activity of the characters, a mental activity through which they react to the changes of state that occur in the physical world or to their idea of what happens in the mind of other characters" ("Possible worlds", 6). However, it also addresses the states interceding the events, which is regarded as the actual world of the narrative system of the novel. The third type of worlds describes the dynamics of how the story unfolds in the reader's mind.

2.3 Why study *The Intuitionist* using the concepts of Possible Worlds Theory and Embedded Narratives?

The above-mentioned three worlds, as explicated by Ryan, provide an appropriate analytical tool for the study of *The Intuitionist*, specifically because they help in explaining the interaction of characters' conflicting motives. This further helps in revealing how and why some of the characters, especially Lila Mae Watson, the protagonist, are tricked into other characters' plans which they project on her to accomplish their motive of finding the perfect elevator called the black box. Moreover, along with these characters, the reader too is led to hold false assumptions until the better part of the novel. The concepts, therefore, provide an in-depth account of the complexity of the novel's plot. Ryan says, "The importance of the strategic opposition between the actual and the merely possible is demonstrated by the quintessential narrative of knowledge, the mystery story" ("Possible Worlds, 8). Like other mystery stories, the plot of this novel suggests, "a variety of possible sequences of events, one of which gradually emerges as actual" (8). The novel evokes multiple non-actual possible worlds and thus becomes more complex and "tellable"[3] (Ryan, 1986). By looking at the kind of consequences the characters within the novel and the reader encounter when the type-2 and type-3 worlds match, one can also realize how intricately we weave our world with socio-political and racial codes.

The concepts of possible worlds theory and embedded narratives also give insight to the novel at the generic level. Critics have emphasized in their interpretations how the novel features a mix of genres. Michael Bérubé calls it a "wry postmodern *noir*" ("Race and Modernity in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*", 163). For Derek C. Maus, the novel is a "hardboiled detective fiction and/or film noir" (*Understanding Colson Whitehead*, 17). Jeffery Allen Tucker adds that the novel shows "enthusiasm for detective fiction" and at the same time "poke(s) fun at the same genre" ("Verticality Is Such a Risky Enterprise", 152). Whitehead himself asserts that the novel is "a kind of detective novel" ("The Ascent of Man"). Allison Russell, on the other hand, sees it "as antidetective

fiction: a revision of American history and the detective genre" ("Recalibrating the Past", 46). She adds, "Whitehead's parody of detective fiction targets the American hard-boiled variety rather than the tamer English version" (50). Such generic traversing initiates readers' participation in a way where they pre-figure certain formulaic embedded narratives by anticipating generic characteristic features to occur in the novel. But the chapter argues that the readers are wrongly led to formulate those possible worlds as Whitehead eventually negates them to make them question their singular approach to solving political intrigues and racial intricacies. At the same time, Whitehead elicits from the reader an alternate possible way of thinking. The characters and the readers, thereby, are forced to make a re-adjustment in their formulation of the novel's storyworld. The ensuing discussion, therefore, gives narratological and thematic implication of rereading events and situations and of envisioning possible worlds.

2.4 *The Intuitionist*, Possible Worlds, and Embedded Narratives:

In the novel, Whitehead does not specify the time and the place where the story takes place. We are only told that it is "not a Southern city" but "the most famous city in the world" (*The Intuitionist*, 12). It is "the Big Skyscraper" (208). Valerie Boyd notes that just like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Whitehead never names the city or the year in which the story takes place ("The Intuitionist"). For Gary Krist of the *New York Times*, the city is a "New York where money and power – those twin engines of all modern societies – are inextricably associated with the politics of vertical transport" ("The Ascent of Man"). In the very first sentence of the novel, the readers are informed about an elevator accident which seems impossible as "It's a new elevator, freshly pressed to the rails, and it's not built to fall this fast" (*The Intuitionist*, 1). Lila Mae, an Intuitionist and the first colored female elevator inspector in the Department of Elevator Inspectors, was the last person to inspect and approve it, and thus she becomes the principal suspect. She is caught in a political battle because of the brewing tension between the Department's two warring factions, the Empiricists and the Intuitionists, before the election for its chair. To clear her tarnished name, and to solve the mystery of

whether the elevator was sabotaged and, if so, by whom and for what reason, Lila Mae takes on a role as the "detective-philosophers of vertical transport" (55).

The two competing groups in the Department differ in their methodology to inspect elevators. The Empiricists utilize traditional methods to physically measure and check the mechanical details of the elevators. On the other hand, Intuitionists diagnose elevators with their feelings. Whitehead seems to imply that Empiricism represents traditional and conservative thought while Intuitionism represents liberal and progressive thoughts. Kimberly Fain observes that "on the issues of race, class, and gender, the department rivalry between the two factions is satirical due to its mockery of the political strife between traditionalists and progressives" (*Colson Whitehead*, 5). Empiricists consider Intuitionists as their "renegade colleagues" (57) and label them "voodoo inspectors", "swamis, voodoo men, juju heads, witch doctors, Harry Houdinis" (57). Some counter-nicknames from the Intuitionists for the Empiricists are "flat-earthers, ol' nuts and bolts, stress freaks . . . babbits, collators" (58). In "Recalibrating the Past: Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*," Alison Russell asserts that "the Empiricists' racially inflected terminology for Intuitionists characterizes their competing belief systems as a cultural, as well as epistemological, conflict" (50).

2.5 Elevator Accident – A Trigger for the Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds:

The elevator accident, which drives the plot of the novel, is of an extraordinary nature. It arouses similar reactions of shock from various characters: "That's impossible. Total freefall is a physical impossibility" (35); "this isn't a standard accident" (36); "The accident is impossible. It wasn't an accident" (42); "This elevator went into total freefall, which hasn't happened in five years, and that was in the Ukraine and who knows what kind of backward standards they got there" (110); "An elevator doesn't go into a freefall. Not without help" (63). The failure of the elevator presented itself as an opportunity for the two rival groups of the department to blame each other of sabotage and to win the department's election. The piece of information that the elevator accident was indeed a catastrophe

caused solely due to technical malfunction is kept hidden from the knowledge of readers and the characters. It is revealed much later in the novel, leading the characters and readers to think of the elevator accident as a result of nothing but sabotage done by one or the other party. This line of thinking elicits presumptuous thoughts and conclusions defined and constrained by characters' racial prejudices and political motivations. Their conclusions and assumptions are thwarted towards the end of the novel, thus leaving some of the characters exposed and shamed with their follies.

The accident occurs at the Fanny Briggs Building named after a slave who taught herself how to read. According to Linda Selzer, the Briggs building epitomizes uplift ideology. She states, "As a slave woman who taught herself to read, Fanny Briggs provides what appears to be an original model of black uplift through education and self-reliance" ("Instruments", 685). Fanny Briggs is a hero to African Americans and since Lila Mae is assigned the inspection of Fanny Briggs Memorial Building, Briggs' "status as a marker of apparently authentic black empowerment" (685) is narratively significant. Just like Fanny Briggs is one of the "country's most distinguished daughters" (22), Lila Mae is a pioneer in her field being the first colored woman elevator inspector. The building's 18-deep elevator stack is "a career-making case for any inspector" (13). Her connection with Briggs also runs deep in her past as she wrote a report on Fanny Briggs in her childhood. The Mayor named the building after Fanny Briggs to appease the city's disgruntled and "increasingly vocal colored population" (12). To Linda Selzer, this illustrates the Mayor's attempt to reinforce the narrative of self-reliance to circumscribe more collective forms of social action ("Instruments", 685). Consequently, the elevator crash at the Briggs' building symbolizes the failure of power and architectural structures founded on social and racial inequities.

Before studying *The Intuitionist* with the concepts of embedded narratives and possible worlds, the chapter surveys how scholars approach the novel with various methods. Michael Bérubé and Saundra Liggins identify how the novel

maintains its African American literary tradition by using standard tropes. To Liggins, Whitehead demonstrates a gothic sensibility in *The Intuitionist*. She sees the novel as an allegorical tale of black's struggle for upward mobility ("The Urban Gothic Vision", 360). For Linda Selzer, although the novel's central trope of elevators is associated with elevation, she sees Whitehead's narrative developing an ambivalent stance toward uplift ("Instruments More Perfect than Bodies"). Jeffrey Allen Tucker, on the other hand, studies the novel against the paraliterary and although he claims it as a critique of hierarchical thinking about both genre and race ("'Verticality Is Such a Risky Enterprise'"), he fails to demonstrate how Whitehead shatters this thinking. For Alison Russell, Whitehead's allusions to his textual predecessors and its references to various deceptions, call forth a complex exploration of literacy, textuality, and authority ("Recalibrating the Past"). Isiah Lavender, III studies the symbolic transfer of meaning between racial politics and science fiction ("Ethnoscapes: Environment and Language"). For Lauren Berlant, technology in this novel becomes a new mode of knowing the historical present ("Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event"). Martin Kevorkian considers that Whitehead rethinks racial identity through tales of technology (*Color Monitors*). Looking at the encounter between theories of postmodern urbanism and African-American literary and cultural studies, Madhu Dubey notes the novel's tropes of the book-within-the-book and the scenes of reading and writing, which examines the coupled inheritance of print literacy and urban modernity (*Signs and Cities*). These scholars offer brilliant insights into the novel's allusions and its allegorical, symbolic, and technological references, but they often ignore Whitehead's attempt to negate and fail the racial-political presumptions, which underlie the characters' thought processes i.e. their mental narratives, functioning as the cause and effect of events and situations occurring in the novel.

The chapter will now look at how the elevator crash affects the private universes of the characters and guides their actions. In their private universes, they start forming speculations based on their assumptions that are shaped by political motives and racial factors. Such assumptions lie strewn throughout the

narrative but are concealed and often go unnoticed in the fast-paced action and events. In the novel, Lila Mae initially speculates that Frank Chancre, the current head of the Elevator Guild and an Empiricist, sabotaged the elevator to trap her, as she was the last inspector to check it and give it a clean bill of health prior to its crash, and thereby, she thinks he would bring disrepute to Intuitionism. At the beginning of the novel, readers come to know Lila Mae's embedded narrative while she figures out Chancre's intention in sabotaging the elevator. This narrative is correct as far as she reflects that by assigning the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building to her, Chancre wants to win the favor of the colored folks within the Department and the city as the building was dedicated to Fanny Briggs, a colored slave. Therefore, Chancre's motive, in assigning the building either to her or to Pompey, the only other colored inspector in the department, is clear to Lila Mae. By doing so, he also compensated whatever grounds he lost among his competitors. But her conjecture that Chancre sabotaged it, is wrong and she along with the reader comes to know this much later. The assignment was also meant to draw attention from Orville Lever, Chancre's opponent in the election for the Guild Chair. Lever believed that only Intuitionists were capable of building coalitions with fundamentally different people. Lila Mae, apart from being an Intuitionist, was a colored woman, thus, she becomes an important sub-agent in Chancre's plan to win the election, as "Chancre had a lot at stake on his reelection to Guild Chair" (15). At a press conference, he makes it a point to declare who his contender in the elections is and the political implications of what Lila Mae might have done to the elevator. Chancre just takes the advantage of the accident to project his own embedded narrative against the Intuitionists. Instead of being curious about what actually happened at the Fanny Briggs Building, readers get to know much later that he was more interested in gaining the favor of two major elevator manufacturing companies, Arbo and United.

Meanwhile, Chuck, Lila Mae's only friend in the department, forms his personal narrative speculating over the accident. We are told that "Chuck (a clever man, but not precocious about it) knows Chancre's game" (33). He thinks that the press conference allows Chancre to reach the members of the Elevator

Inspector's Guild who no longer work for the city, "the 'unactives' who. . . have secluded themselves behind the ivy gates of the Institute for Vertical Transport or entered into the private sector, consulting the dolts from United and American and Arbo on what elevators are really about" (33). He warns Lila Mae that the Internal Affairs is looking for her and suggests her to talk to them. One can see that Chuck's formulation of his embedded narrative is correct in deducing Chancre's aim to use the accident as a political tool to win the election.

To evade being seen as a suspect and confronting uncomfortable questionings, Lila Mae, instead of reporting to the Department, goes to her apartment and finds it forayed by two thugs, Jim and John, who posed as "the watchdogs of the Elevator Inspectors Department". While searching her clothes, the readers realize how both of them create personal embedded narratives linking her racial identity with crime: "It appeases John's societal schemata that Lila Mae is of the colored persuasion" (28). In a comical description, the narrator satirizes Jim and John's attempt at rummaging Lila Mae's apartment when John scrutinizes a pile of receipts because "you never know what notations can be encrypted into a seemingly innocuous phrase such as "Bob's Grocery: A Place to Shop" (32). The satirical tone shows how baseless suspicion targeted at Lila Mae owing to her race, sex and ideological affinity makes the characters misinterpret all her activities. Whitehead thus pokes fun at such racist embedded narratives.

It is interesting to note that, for a while, the novel tricks us into thinking that Lila Mae is hiding something, that she indeed has something to do with the accident. At one point, we are informed: "What Jim and John are missing is the safe behind the somber paintings of haystacks. Where she keeps all of her important things. Perhaps John would have found the safe eventually if Lila Mae hadn't disturbed their search" (32). Later we are told that even if Jim and John had found Lila Mae's safe behind the painting, they would not have found anything interesting in the contents. It had a soccer trophy from high school, her high school graduation ring, a love letter from a dull boy, her diploma from the Institute of Vertical Transport, and her prizewinning paper on theoretical

elevators. “Not much, really” (42). This plot trick not only enhances the elements of mystery and suspense by making us suspect Lila Mae, it also elicits readers’ own embedded narratives in which they would formulate reasons for suspecting and blaming Lila Mae. Later, by revealing that nothing suspicious was found in Lila Mae’s things, Whitehead defeats readers’ expectations and make us question our own tendency to quickly form such embedded narratives even at slight hints.

The two main elements of plot interests, namely mystery and suspense runs parallel in the novel. According to Eyal Segal, narrative interest is “aroused in the reader by the creation of informational gaps about any aspect of the represented world of the story, as a result of the interplay between two basic temporalities – the mimetic/actional and the textual; in other words, those of the told and of the telling/reading sequence” (“Narrativity and the Closure of Event Sequences”). The mystery over the question of who sabotaged the elevator and the suspense with regards to how Lila Mae, being an underdog, fighting society-wide racism and sexism, will find the black box and the culprit of the elevator crash and thereby clear her name, drives the narrative interest simultaneously. The chapter argues that Whitehead withholds a lot of information from the knowledge of the characters and the readers, not just to maintain the narrative interest by creating mystery and suspense, but mainly to point at the presumptuous nature of our thinking.

Just when Lila Mae is about to make an inquiry of Jim and John’s identification, she is interrupted by one Mr. Reed. He insists Jim and John to leave Lila Mae’s home. To Lila Mae, Mr. Reed is “just another white man with an attitude” (41) until he introduces himself as Orville Lever’s secretary. She presumes that the Intuitionist candidate for Guild Chair has sent him to look after her. He informs her that the two men were not from Internal Affairs and that she was set up; the elevator crash was not an accident. Lila Mae muses over Mr. Reed’s intentions and motivations. She reflects on how Mr. Reed might have been affected by the philosophy of James Fulton, an eminent theoretician of elevator science, the founder of Intuitionism and the author of famous books, *Theoretical*

Elevators Volume I and II: “Fulton’s words discovered and altered Lila Mae early in her studies; she can only reckon what kind of spiritual catastrophe the book would have caused in a man like Mr. Reed, who had dutifully served Empiricism for so long. Must have felt the world had betrayed him” (59). He was called into service by Orville Lever as his campaign manager and Lila Mae is doubtful about why he is “bothered to intercede in her Fanny Briggs mess” (60). She thus formulates Mr. Reed’s possible intentions by conjecturing around limited facts she knows about him. However, she aims to find it out soon and imagines “The grim mist of his master-plan comes out of his pores and pollutes the air in the garden” (60).

In order to solve the mystery behind the accident, Mr. Reed insinuates Lila Mae to think about Chancre’s motivations to find the black box, the perfect elevator on which Fulton was working in his final years and which is supposed to bring a “second elevation” (100) to the city. She remembers the conception of the black box from the infamous design problem from her school days: “What does the perfect elevator look like, the one that will deliver us from the cities we suffer now, these stunted shacks?” (61). Mr. Reed tells Lila Mae that two weeks ago, Lever received a packet in the mail. It contained torn out journal entries dating back a few years, and they were notes on a black box ripped out of Fulton’s final journals, which they were never able to find. They also discovered that a reporter from the *Lift* magazine had received portions of it too. Lila Mae believed that Fulton was devoting his energies to Intuitionist theory and not engineering. But Mr. Reed insisted that he was constructing the elevator on the Intuitionist principles. For Lila Mae, it was hard to digest from an engineering standpoint. According to her, “Intuitionism is about communicating with the elevator on a nonmaterial basis” (62). Mr. Reed explains that Intuitionism and Empiricism are not incompatible; Fulton’s Volume I and Volume II was “a renegotiation of our relationship to objects” (63). Here, we see Mr. Reed projecting a political plan to Lila Mae for her to act upon, a plan that affects Lila Mae’s ideological beliefs.

The first line from Fulton's writing that comes to Lila Mae's mind is '*There is another world beyond this one*'. Quite literally here, this idea places the semantics of a possible alternate world into the main storyworld itself. Thereby the narrative forces its characters to develop a perspective to look into the logics of other possibilities which may not be defined and constrained by social, political, and racial constructs. Lila Mae wonders at the connection between the elevator accident and Fulton's black box. To see the vital link, Mr. Reed further guides her to imagine the consequences of the black box, built on the Intuitionist principle by the most famous elevator theoretician of the century, on Empiricism. Mr. Reed tries to impose his way of thinking on Lila Mae by indicating that the Empiricists will not only lose the election but also their faith if they come to know about the Intuitionist black box. He also informs that the two men at Lila Mae's apartment were Johnny Shush's men, a thug, whom Chancre knows. Therefore, he takes Lila Mae to the Institute's home for the Intuitionists to safeguard her. Lila Mae is easily persuaded with the projected plans of Mr. Reed and concludes that one needs to find the black box. Mr. Reed is clever enough to caution her that anyone could have been set up if he/she were at Lila Mae's position as Chancre wants to stall the discovery of black box by orchestrating a high-profile failure for the Intuitionists and their liberal policies, which included her admission in the Department. Lila Mae nevertheless decides to find the black box, which is the actual plan of Mr. Reed. In order to secure her participation in his actual plan, he presents a virtual plan to Lila Mae, in which he says that his purpose is to "take care of our own people", so that "she will be absolved of the crime" (63). Therefore, unlike other detective characters of hardboiled detective fiction, we see that even when Lila Mae assumes the role of a detective agent, she herself becomes a sub-agent in the schemes of other characters. In fact, for the better part of the novel, we see her as a puppet in the hands of the political giants of the Department.

To find the blueprint of the perfect elevator, i.e. the black box, Mr. Reed asks Lila Mae to speak with Fulton's colored maid, Marie Claire Rogers because she has been procuring Fulton's final notes and not allowing anyone to access

them. He assumes that as Mrs. Rogers and Lila Mae are "both colored" (86), Mrs. Rogers might reveal something to Lila Mae and tells her, "She refuses to talk to us. Perhaps you're the perfect one to talk to her" (86). Upon looking at Lila Mae, Mrs. Rogers understood their plan behind sending her, and sensed that they must have thought they "belong to the same club" (89). To Mrs. Rogers, Lila Mae is just another person in a series of people sent to retrieve Fulton's secret, a "little nigger gal on the payroll" (93). But Mrs. Rogers was adamant about holding on to the journals. She chides Lila Mae on mixing up with the whites and hopes that she must still have some sense. Thus, we not only see that race is used as a tool to give and retrieve information, but we also see how the idea of racial belonging shapes the causal linking of desired plans and thus limits the consideration of other possibilities where such racial causality may not work. Mrs. Rogers expresses her resentment at how white officers came to her to inquire about the documents and behaved as if she were invisible. She does not divulge much about Fulton to Lila Mae but only gives a puzzling hint: "He's not the man you think he is" (94). Whitehead's narrative thus defeats the racial logics the characters estimate.

Harboring racial prejudices, Lila Mae suspects Pompey who works in her department and is the first colored elevator inspector in the city. Lila Mae's suspicion betrays interracial hatred and insecurity. She thinks, "Did Pompey resent Lila Mae for presenting them (the Department) with a more exotic token, thus diluting their hatred toward him, the hatred that had calcified over time into something he came to cherish and savor as friendship; or were his haughty stares and keen disparagements his attempt at a warning against becoming him, and thus an aspect of racial love?" (25-26). She creates a personal embedded narrative where she is sure that they sent Pompey to sabotage the elevator stack in the Fanny Briggs building, as she thinks, "It would have appeased their skewed sense of harmony to pit their two coloreds against each other. Dogs in a fighting pit" (87). It is revealed later that Lila Mae was wrong in suspecting Pompey and in drawing such presumptuous conclusions.

Lila Mae even believed in Mrs. Rogers' lies that someone stole Fulton's journals and mailed them in portions to Chancre, Reed, and the *Lift* Magazine reporter, Ben Urich. When she got no significant information from Mrs. Rogers, she even believed that "it is herself she has failed" (98). She even blames herself on her inability to predict about the black box and the new cities of the second elevation from Fulton's writings. Meanwhile, Bart Arbergast, from Internal Affairs asks Chuck to spill Lila Mae's whereabouts. Arbergast believed that Lila Mae sabotaged the elevator and at the same time gave it a clean bill to give herself an alibi. The political game gets murkier when Chancre takes Johnny Shush's help to kidnap Lila Mae and inquires her to make sure if she knows anything about the black box and if Mrs. Rogers has told anything to her. Chancre lures her into believing that she will be rewarded for her good work if only she does not take any wrong step, which meant betraying anything about the black box to Reed and Lever. In her own embedded narrative, Lila Mae is assured that Chancre will have no power once the black box comes out. Whereas Chancre is confident, that Lever has no chance to win this election. He had already prevented Ben Urich from publishing the article on the black box in *Lift* magazine by kidnapping and torturing him. Chancre knows that she does not have the papers as she has already been searched and if she had it, Mr. Reed would not have sent her to the Institute. When Lila Mae suspects Chancre of sabotage, he is amused to know that Reed has fed this line of thought into her mind to get her on his scheme. He denies having done anything to the elevator.

Thus, we see sabotage becomes the focal narrative of all the characters to get hold of the black box. Whitehead said in an interview, "Everyone in *The Intuitionist* has all sorts of hopes and aspirations tied into the perfect elevator" (Sherman). Interestingly, Lila Mae's role itself becomes questionable in this entire convoluted scheme. Chancre tells Lila Mae that she did not even enter into the picture until the accident on Friday, and even then, she was not a concern until she went to the Intuitionist house and Reed sent her to Fulton's maid. He also explains that they would not have waited until after the accident to search her house if their intent was to set her up. And if he had sabotaged the elevator, they

would not have waited until she is informed that they are going to catch her. Chancre negates all the beliefs Lila Mae has nurtured so far, and thus nullifies Reed's plans too. By making fun of the Intuitionists, he points towards Lila Mae's mistaken belief system: "You Intuitionists really are crazy. Maybe instead of separating the elevator from elevatorness, you should separate paranoia from fact" (115). Parting racial and political narratives from the everyday logics seems to be the aim of Whitehead's novel too. Chancre explains Lila Mae how she has been used as a ploy to get the black box for the Intuitionists and how by making her visit Mrs. Rogers and stay at the Intuitionist house, they have made her raise everyone's suspicious eyebrows. This has put her job in danger and after all, she will have to work under Chancre in the same department.

Pulled out of the selfish narratives of people representing her own ideological affinities, Lila Mae is now thrown into the realm of fake racial-solidarity narrative. Chancre tells her that just as he has protected Pompey in his Department, he wants to make her an example, "Of what your people can achieve". He tells her, "That's what makes you run, right? To prove something?" (115). In exchange, he wants her to find Fulton's box for him. Chancre does not shy away from admitting that "he favors colored progress, but gradual" because he believes that a fast paced progress would be chaotic (115). He even warns her that if she believes Lever is 'friends of the colored people' then she is wrong to think so. "Because no one cares about a nigger" (116). "Isiah Lavender III rightly asserts that "white racists like Chancre" cause the "immobility of black uplift" ("Ethnoscapes", 194). Chancre even threatens her that if she does not go along with his plan, she would meet with one of the Shush's boys.

Feeling betrayed by the Intuitionists and trapped by the Empiricists, Lila Mae concludes that these white men see her as a threat but refuse to make her a threat. "They see her as a mule, ferrying information back and forth, not clever or curious enough to explore the contents. Brute. Black" (122). She finds her home ransacked again after meeting Chancre and this time it was not searched by Jim and John. Later, when Reed inquires if she was able to procure some information

from Mrs. Rogers, Lila Mae refused. He suggested her that if she is not going to talk to Internal Affairs Bureau, then she should better stay out of sight. This makes Lila Mae uncertain about whether Mr. Reed trusts her any more than she trusts him. She thinks that it is possible that he went to her apartment last night to look for her and saw the mess. “Perhaps he is trying to get her out of the way, now that she has served her role as the colored liaison to Mrs. Rogers. The one who knew her language” (127).

Another character named Natchez, appointed by Mr. Reed as Lila Mae’s porter, tries to fit her into his personal scheme. Natchez informs her that in her absence Mr. Reed thought that she must have made a deal with Chancre and that she had double-crossed him. To her amazement, Natchez tells her that he is Fulton’s nephew and knows about the black box. He shows her his mother’s photographs, Fulton used to send her letters. Lila Mae sees young Fulton’s photo and concedes it could be him. “In the picture, two colored women and one white man stand under slanting sunlight” (136). She comes to know that Fulton was a man of color who passed as white. Natchez informs Lila Mae that Fulton’s father was a white man. Natchez’ mother died last summer and that’s when he found out who his uncle was. He wants the black box as his birthright; he can claim it as Fulton’s only living relative. Now Natchez tries to fit her into his own plan by projecting a narrative of racial injustice, saying, “They always take away from our people” (139). Lila Mae thinks that people from the department would always have hidden the fact that Fulton was colored. They would never accept that “they worship a nigger” (139). Readers come to know later that Natchez was an Intuitionist spy and therefore he builds a racial narrative to lure Lila Mae again to fulfill his own personal motives: “When I hear them talk about his invention, they always say it’s the future. It’s the future of the cities. But it’s our future, not theirs. It’s ours. And we need to take it back. What he made, this elevator, colored people made that. It’s ours. And I’m going to show that we ain’t nothing. Show the downstairs and the rest of them that we are alive” (139-140).

Instead of taking on a role of an active agent, Lila Mae seems to fall a prey to the schemes and lies of other characters. She is taken into confidence; is made to believe that each one representing a group is on her side, be it the Intuitionists, the Empiricists, or the 'coloreds'. However, every time she becomes a victim of their selfish plans. Despite all the wrong assumptions and beliefs, she now sees Fulton's work from a new perspective: "it all meant something different now. Fulton's nigresence whispered from the binding of the House's signed first editions, tinting the disciples' words, reconnoting them" (151). She understood that the library would be empty if these scholars knew Fulton was colored. Lila Mae was a devout follower of Fulton and used to consider his work as "holy verses". Having acquired new knowledge about Fulton's racial identity, she now reads the word "race" not to mean the human race, but the 'colored' race in Fulton's writings. She reads, "horizontal thinking in a vertical world is the race's curse" (151), and hates him.

In the novel, we see that mixed racial lineage affected Fulton's life and work and he envisioned a future free of racial differences, where he could openly accept his identity and heritage without risking his career and hard earned name and fame. Even after his death, his work, principles and the vision of a perfect elevator, continues to give hope to the future generations professionally as well as ideologically. Saundra Liggins writes in "The Urban Gothic Vision of Colson Whitehead's The Intuitionist (1999)," that "the past still influences the present and future, and issues of identity still create conflicts within the individual" (359). This is specifically true of James Fulton.

Lila Mae is no less than Fulton, in terms of hiding her identity. She wears a mask of invisibility to shield her feelings and intentions. "She puts her face on. In her case, not a matter of cosmetics, but will…It took practice" (57). By accepting that black presence is invisible, she chooses to wear a maid's dress and is able to navigate in the crowd invisibly at the 15th Annual Funicular Follies, the annual function for the Department of Elevator Inspectors. Disguised as a maid she thinks that she is fooling others but she fools herself. Her co-workers do not

even recognize her: “They see colored skin and a servant’s uniform. As an inspector she confronts superintendents, building managers, who do not see her until she shows her badge. In the Pit, she toils over paperwork next to these men every day. In here they do not see her. She is the colored help” (153). Because of her role as a detective, the readers may fall prey to Whitehead’s trick, in assuming that she is unlike Fulton and has no conflicts with regards to her identity. But it is only by seeing her embedded worlds in conflict with each other, that we realize she is both the trickster and the tricked. Fain observes, “racial invisibility serves as a veil of protection while simultaneously subverting the person’s individuality as a human being” (20). This is in keeping with W. E. B. Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness, which underlies the intention of African American novelist such as Colson Whitehead. Du Bois stated in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (8).

A consciousness of this dual identity is portrayed not only through the characters at the level of the storyworld but is embodied at the authorial level too. Apart from depicting the black American experience, one sees the ambivalent use of popular fiction, detective fiction, a mystery novel, speculative fiction and the African American novel in *The Intuitionist*[4]. Russell, in this connection, observes that Whitehead engages in “revision of the genre undermin[ing] the ethnocentric perspective of Western science” (“Recalibrating the Past”, 50). Referring to Stephen F. Soitos, Russell adds that African American writers have revised the formulas of detective fiction to present their social and political worldviews. A reader anticipating the fulfillment of formulaic characteristics in the novel’s ensuing narrative may find herself at a loss when such generic constructions are defeated. The possible worlds generated towards the end of the novel forces the characters to imagine a world free from the racial and political logics of the world presented thus far in the novel. I argue that viewing the storyworld from a politically and racially intrigued perspective to viewing it from politically and racially unfettered perspective allows Whitehead to remain rooted in the past and

maintain the 'signifying' nature of the African American novel. At the same time, it allows him to establish the post-racial idea of looking beyond the literary traditions by envisioning a future where racial logics may become irrelevant.

Conflicts in Lila Mae's private universe increase with more intriguing incidences. At the Funicular Follies, Chancre fails in his attempt to re-enact safety-device inventor, Elisha Otis's show of the 1853 Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations. Characters now consider Chancre's fall from the elevator platform as an act of sabotage done by Lever to pay him back for Fanny Briggs; "A crash for a crash" (164). However, Natchez confesses that this sabotage was done by him. He again projects a plan for Lila Mae by saying that he wants her to take credit for this crash so that she can re-claim her allegiance with the Intuitionists. But later the readers come to know that his actual intent was to find the black box. But at this point in the storyworld, Natchez and Lila Mae together make an agreement to help each other in their plans. Lila Mae's suspicious eyes now target Pompey to make him confess his crime with the Fanny Briggs elevator, as she believed he was sent by Chancre to sabotage it. She even threatened him to tell the truth if he were Chancre's man; else, she would call Internal Affairs. He denied having anything to do with the elevator. In accusing Pompey, she addresses him with a disdainful epithet, "you people" (193). She treats him as the racial "other" which reflects the conflict in her own identity.

By using Ryan's concept of possible worlds, we can see that Lila Mae's W-world is defined by racial assumptions towards her fellow workers and towards herself, which leads her to fixate upon the idea that Pompey was jealous of her as she got an opportunity to inspect the Fanny Briggs stacks. In her W-world, she wishes to clear her name by proving Pompey guilty. Being the only two colored inspectors in the Department, she assumed that he wants to climb the ladder of success in the white world by denigrating his fellow colored member. She does not regard Pompey's struggle of being "the colored first" and avoid considering the possibility that he might not harm the reputation of a co-worker of his own race. This goes along with her O-world, in which she feels even more

obligated to absolve herself from any racial injustice she is going through. She assumes that because she is a colored female elevator inspector and an Intuitionist, she is, in Chuck's words, "three times cursed" (20) and has thus becomes the target of the political chaos ensuing with the elevator crash. Lila Mae's W-world and O-world are real, but they are completely wrong, and the narratorial actual world makes this clear.

2.6 Elevator Accident – A 'crash' of the Embedded Narratives and Possible Worlds:

Lila Mae comes to realize her mistaken assumptions and beliefs only after being proved wrong by each character she suspected for the crash of Fanny Briggs' elevator Number Eleven. "If they didn't do it, she muses, then who did – because if no one is responsible then she was negligent. And she is never wrong" (197). Whitehead negates all embedded narratives, which represented the philosophical affinities of characters. When Lila Mae goes to the *Lift* magazine building to retrieve Fulton's notes and the unpublished article, she meets Ben Urich, the *Lift* reporter. He informs her that it is actually United and Arbo, the biggest elevator manufacturing concerns, endorsed by Chancre and Lever respectively, that needs the black box because "whoever owns the elevator owns the new cities" (208). Therefore, it turns out that Lila Mae is wrong in thinking that the contest between Intuitionism and Empiricism is about philosophy, as Urich says, "No one really cares about it. What really matters is Arbo and United. The whole world wants to get vertical, and they're the guys that get them there. If you pay the fare" (208). She comes to know from Urich that the two thugs, Jim and John, are actually Jim Corrigan and John Murphy, who work as 'consultants' for Arbo. She is also shocked to know that Natchez is actually Raymond Coombs, a 'colored' consultant for Arbo. Lila Mae now understands Natchez's virtual plan, which was framed in a "story of correcting the injustices done to her race" (230). She even realizes how Reed trapped her, as "he knows the attended latches of the Intuitionist mind, his weaknesses are hers" (229). She is also astonished to know

that her name was written in the margin in one of the pages from Fulton's notebooks: "*Lila Mae Watson is the one*."

An excerpt from Fulton's lost notebooks, which forms the beginning of the novel's Part Two, offers a thematic interpolation of its narratology and a cue towards the requirement of "a bit of recalibrat(ion) of y(our) imagination" to understand the function of its possible worlds.

> "By the nineteenth floor, everything is air, but that's jumping ahead a bit. It starts with the first floor, with dirt, with idiocy…What will happen: it will move from the first floor, from safety, from all you've ever known and that takes a bit of recalibrating your imagination. To recognize that come-hither look of possibility. Trust in the cab, made by people like you, trust is the worst of it: it was made by people like you and you are weak and you make mistakes. They have incorrectly imagined this journey, misfigured the equipment necessary. By the fifth floor, the unavoidable consideration of physical laws, the slender fragility of the cables holding the car. Your own fragility… How can you breathe when you no longer have lungs? The question does not perturb, that last plea of rationality has fallen away floors ago, with the earth." (221-222).

Although Fulton seems to reflect upon the future of elevation, this excerpt can be read as an evocation to the way political assumptions and racial prejudices creeps into our embedded narratives, an "idiocy" in the way we think. The social and racial constructs, like the cab described in the novel, are made by people, who are weak and are liable to make mistakes. The characters within the novel have incorrectly imagined the journey on which the political and racial cab takes them. They evade estimating the fragility of their virtual domain and in the process, the lea of rationality is left unheard. This also presents a metafictional reflection on the behavior and actions of the novel's characters. The characters, including Lila Mae, became a "prey to the dull obviousness of biology". Whitehead also questions characters' and readers' scope of their reasoning faculty, their "fragility" which allows them to assume that a person of light skin would only be white. Lila Mae herself assumed it. She also assumed that she is embroiled in this political game just because she is black. She was confident in believing that Pompey sabotaged the elevator on Chancre's direction.

The conflict in all the three private worlds of Lila Mae goes in accordance with Linda Selzer's observation that Whitehead's narrative develops a deeply ambivalent stance towards uplift, one that complicates Lila Mae's position at the end of the text and raises pointed questions about the readers' own participation in this problematic social philosophy. Studies on uplift ideology, she says, suggests that "black people's continuing struggles against racist practices and representation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led them to develop an ideology of uplift that unfortunately itself replicated some aspects of majority practice and discourse even as it struggled to subvert them" ("Instruments More Perfect than Bodies", 681). Having a vision for her own uplift, Lila Mae in her personal narrative identifies Pompey as a "shuffling embarrassment" (197) and "house nigger" (239) competing against her and thus created division within the black community. To clear her own name and to fight against the racial logics, she ironically embraced them. Such ambivalence sustained in the text invites readers to examine their own assumptions and to consider the degree to which it affects their own interpretation, especially of the position Lila Mae acquires at the end of the novel.

Lila Mae now re-focuses on the elevator crash itself, which had jolted everyone's embedded narratives and possible worlds. She thinks of "the forgotten victim in this drama… So preoccupied is she with how the accident impacts her that Lila Mae never gives a thought to the bereaved" (197). She goes again to see Number Eleven at the Fanny Briggs building and recalls her inspection of the crashed elevator. She still could not intuit anything odd and re-considers all her logical derivations about what possibly would have happened. She now thinks that if Chancre is true and there was nothing odd in the elevator then, "this was a catastrophic accident" and the only commonality between Intuitionism and Empiricism is that they cannot account for the catastrophic accident (227). She realizes that nobody sabotaged the elevator; that the accident is "not even probability because it's beyond calculation. It's fate" (227). As she is never wrong, she thinks that the elevator passed for healthy so well that even she did not see it. "Even Fulton stayed away from the horror of the catastrophic accident:

even in explicating the unbelievable he never dared broach the unknowable" (229). The accident's unaccountability and chance occurrence thus become the focal narrative now.

At the beginning, the textual actual world of *The Intuitionist* represents Lila Mae as an elevator inspector who is "never wrong" in her inspection. In her private world too, she imagines herself to be always accurate in her skills at intuiting the functions and malfunctions of an elevator. The textual world presents situations wherein this would seem to be the case. The accuracy rate of the Intuitionists is 10 percent higher than that of the more traditional Empiricists. Yet the narratorial actual world, which tells Lila Mae's story, betrays a possibility that she might be wrong in her assumption. Whenever we are told that Lila Mae is never wrong, a narrative voice follows immediately, letting us know that "she doesn't know yet" (*The Intuitionist*, 9) indicating that she will come to know about her mistakes later. And indeed, we find that her inspection of the Fanny Briggs stacks failed, as her intuitionist skill could have never detected or predicted a technical catastrophe. The dynamics between the textual reference world and the narratorial actual world generates further alternative possible worlds. Lila Mae's K-world is defined by a near-total ignorance of how wrong she could be. This led her to cradle a series of wrong assumptions. She believed that Pompey must have sabotaged the elevator and thus accused him. She also believed that James Fulton was white and that he shared a romantic relationship with Marie-Claire Rogers. She had a firm faith that Intuitionism is a viable way of inspecting elevators. She believed that new Arbo elevator at the Fanny Briggs is not built to fall. She also thought that Natchez is romantically inclined towards her. Part of the work of the plot thus becomes putting her in situations that allow her to gain knowledge in these matters and change her perspective.

Lila Mae realizes that Fulton not only lied about his identity to the world but lied about his elevator philosophy as well. "He was the perfect liar the world made him, mouthing a supreme fiction the world accepted as truth" (231). She confronts Mrs. Rogers and is informed that Fulton, in his first book was playing a

joke. As nobody took it seriously, he paid for its publication himself and then everyone believed it. Later he was confused and upset that people did not get the joke. Since then, he hoped that someone would understand. Mrs. Rogers told Lila Mae that Fulton would hate the rules and regulations of the Empiricists. He had told her, "They were all slaves to what they could see" and Mrs. Rogers added, "there was a truth behind that they couldn't see for the life of them". Lila Mae offers, "They looked at the skin of things" and couldn't see his lie (239). Alison Russell says that the novel explores "the process of perception and the nature of learning" ("Recalibrating the Past", 46). Whitehead thus forces his readers to look and investigate deeper, to search for what does not seem to be but could be, to look into all the possible worlds. He asks his readers to look into the limitations of our worldview and re-read, and re-view the social constructs we form, just as Lila Mae "learned how to read, like a slave does, one forbidden word at a time" (230). The readers and the characters change their perspective when they look at how the characters formed embedded narratives and how their possible worlds clashed.

Within the storyworld of *The Intuitionist*, we see that James Fulton, the father of Intuitionism, deceives others in propounding its false theory as a legitimate way to inspect elevators through feeling, experiencing, and intuiting the machine. Begotten by a white father and a black mother, the color of his skin, allowed Fulton to pass as white. In hiding his true identity, he tricks himself. He codified his hope for racial transcendence in formulating the principles of Intuitionism and a perfect elevator while writing *Theoretical Elevators*, Volume I. Lila Mae discovers that he did not believe in it himself:

> "Lila Mae knew he was joking because he hated himself. She understood this hatred of himself; she hated something in herself and she took it out on Pompey. Now she could see Fulton for what he was. There was no way he believed in transcendence. His race kept him earthbound…There was no hope for him as a colored man because the white world will not let a colored man rise, and there was no hope for him as a white man because it was a lie. He secretes his venom into the pages of a book. He knows the other world he describes does not exist. There will be no redemption because the men who run this place do not want redemption. They want to be as near to hell as they can." (240)

Lila Mae now intends to find why her name was in Fulton's journals. Mrs. Rogers tells her that towards the last days of his life, Fulton spent his days and nights in finishing his last project. He used to spend the nights in the library and used to see a light on in the room across the way. One day he asked her if she knew what the name of the colored student on the campus was. Mrs. Rogers gave Lila Mae only the above information along with Fulton's last notes, therefore the mystery behind her name in his notes lingers until she meets Raymond Coombs (who initially disguised himself as Natchez), who told her that they just wanted to follow up every lead from his notes and thus they enquired her. However finally, they realized that her name being in his notebooks did not mean anything as Fulton had a habit of scribbling random thoughts. They sent Jim and John to her apartment just to make sure, if she knows anything about the black box. And "The accident changed everything. It was a bonus" (248). He said that the accident helped things considerably. Coombs also poked fun at how Lila Mae's racial and political assumptions led her to fixate upon the idea of sabotage and Pompey along with their plans: "Let one colored in and you're integrated. Let two in, you got a race war as they try to kiss up to whitey" (249).

Readers are informed that Fulton wrote in passing and realized later that "he has written *Lila Mae Watson is the one* in the margin of his notebook" (253). The narrator informs that he wrote her name just because she was the only person he, by chance, found awake at that hour of the night apart from him and was wondering who it could be. Steven Belletto comments that this is the author's way "to exploit chance as a marker of identity that could not be absorbed or otherwise defined by either system" (*No Accident Comrade*, 81). He writes that despite Lila Mae's discovery that her presence in his notebooks is merely an accidental scribble, she feels she is no longer an actor in someone else's plot, but rather has more control over her own destiny.

Lila Mae, at the end of the novel, can be seen working on Fulton's unfinished third volume. She begins writing Volume Three of *Theoretical Elevators* by "nailing Fulton's voice" (254). She knew Fulton's handwriting and

has even practiced it when she was his devout student. With her new knowledge, with the key she now possesses, she takes on an authorial role. “She’s just filling in the interstitial parts that Fulton didn’t have time to finish up” (254). Fulton left instructions, and unlike being played upon, this time, “she knows she is permitted to alter them according to circumstances” (255).The hope offered towards the end of the novel, according to Maus, is “distinctly a feature of the novel’s status as a work of postsoul historiographic metafiction, relying as it does on a conscious act of self-empowerment through the renovation of an existing text” (*Understanding Colson Whitehead*, 33). The novel does not offer any direct or clear resolution; it moreover, renders the act of searching and investigating ambiguous and complex but asks to “make the necessary adjustments” just as Lila Mae does (255).

2.7 Perspective Development: Re-reading and Re-writing the Future of (Racial) Elevation:

Better informed with the plans and motivations of other characters and after gaining knowledge about Intuitionism, and the real identity of Fulton and Natchez, Lila Mae develops her perspective first by eliminating her wrong assumptions. She begins to re-read Fulton’s books not only as a futuristic philosophy in elevator science but also in terms of race relations. The accident itself is reinterpreted and reconsidered with new knowledge. The possibility, that it could merely be a catastrophe, was never thought of. Lauren Berlant says that “the scene of a catastrophe that reveals the machinery of white supremacy is at the heart of not only politics and corporate ideology, but engineering itself” (“Intuitionists”, 852-853). The two groups, the Intuitionists and the Empiricists nurture a number of false beliefs following the accident, such as the Fanny Briggs elevator was sabotaged; the perfect elevator, i.e. the “black box” exists; and Lila Mae either knows about it or may help them to find it. All these beliefs turn out to be false when the textual actual world reveals a number of corresponding facts such as, the true identity of Fulton; the black box is non-existent; the elevator crash was simply a catastrophic accident which neither of the two disciplines can

account for; Lila Mae was embroiled in the elevator mystery and the political game not because of her race or because of her belief in Intuitionism, but simply because her name was found written in the margins of Fulton's notes and Fulton used to scribble such random notes unconsciously with no particular intent.

We also see that Lila Mae experiences conflict in all three of her private worlds. In her O-world, she must report to her duty after inspecting the elevator at the Fanny Briggs Building. Since she does not come back to the Department, she becomes the prime suspect. In this world, she is also obligated not to bring disgrace to her race. In her W-world, she desires to clear her name, to dismiss the allegation, and to find out the saboteur or what exactly happened with the elevator. In her K-world, her own lack of knowledge about the origins of Intuitionism led her to follow the principles of the Father of Intuitionism, James Fulton. She believes in the power of the black box, which would enable 'second elevation' of the city, only to discover later that no such perfect elevator exists. She also comes to know that James Fulton, who passed as white throughout his life, wrote his seminal book, *Theoretical Elevators* Volume I as a joke which was taken seriously and went on to write its second volume to devise solid method from his original satire as no one understood his joke. She discovers that Fulton himself did not believe in the perfect elevator. The work of the novel, among other things, thus, becomes to resolve each of these conflicts within each of these private worlds and to present the events that result from these conflicts.

In *The Intuitionist*, type-3 world, i.e. the possible worlds that the Model Reader imagines, believes, wishes, and so on is also disapproved by the *fabula*. And when this happens, Ryan says, they disappear from the narrative universe but remain as "ghost chapters" in a wider semantic domain that encompasses the events narrated as facts and all the virtual stories evoked to the reader's mind by the text ("Possible worlds", 6). These ghost chapters haunt the individual psyche as it shows the extent to which their attitudes are defined by political motives and racial prejudices. Lila Mae is approached by each group with racial solidarity just to fit her into their larger plans when in reality she became the focus just by

chance and co-incidence and because everyone was searching for clues that could lead them to the black box. She herself cradles intra-racial antagonism towards Pompey, her 'colored' colleague in the Department, assuming his jealousy of her progress. Resolving the conflicts equates to creating a new world for Lila Mae; she overcomes embracing racist signifiers through which she looked at herself and her colored co-worker. She also gains more knowledge about her profession, the political and corporate powers controlling the department and the philosophical school, which she believed and adhered to almost throughout her career. By monitoring the construction of possible worlds by the reader, this chapter attempted to see the narrative's potential in exposing presumptive thoughts, which might be lurking in the evoked possible worlds of the reader.

The concepts of possible worlds and embedded narratives can also give complementary insights with other approaches to the novel that are consistent with the technique of historiographic metafiction and the cultural mindset of the postsoul aesthetic. Analyzing the postsoul character of Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt*, Jesse S. Cohn offers a useful comment elaborating how Whitehead's work is both deeply connected with its literary antecedents but also meaningfully separate from it:

> "If the concept of "soul" in African American culture traditionally meant a precious racial "essence" . . . the failure to manifest "soul" would seem to imply unreality, fakery, crossing over and selling out, betraying the culture and history of sacrifice (the "hurt") that created it.
>
> While definitions of post-soul . . . have tended to suspend such judgments of value . . . it seems to me that Whitehead's writings betray a sense of anxiety over the source of cultural value, of guilty indebtedness to the past". (20-21)

Cohn concludes that Whitehead's work is "haunted by debts to shadowy cultural fathers and to the names they have bequeathed" (21). Darryl Dickson-Carr too suggests that post-soul aesthetics "evoke the younger generation's desire to transcend the definitions of the older, to rise above while being posterior" (190). It is at the seams of the interwoven embedded narratives of the characters and an

alternate possible world suggested by Fulton's imaginative perfect elevator, that we see manifestations of the indebtedness to the past and the desire to transcend traditional cultural values. When the embedded constricted definitions clash with each other, they generate newer possibilities to be deliberated.

We have observed that Lila Mae, in her personal embedded narrative, sees herself as a symbol of progress, and might even applaud to have become the first colored female elevator inspector. However, in the textual actual world, she is "the sacrificial lamb for corporate, government, and elite interests" (*Colson Whitehead*, 15). About her talents as an Intuitionist, she knows that she cannot be mistaken in inspecting the Fanny Briggs Elevator Number Eleven. "I'm correct" (*The Intuitionist*, 9), she says to the super of the building after the inspection. But the textual actual world betrays that even though she thinks she is never wrong, "she doesn't know yet" (9). The novel's factual domain, towards the end, informs about Lila Mae's discovery of technical failure as the cause of the accident, comprehending which, was beyond her powers and which indeed makes her wrong against her own previous judgment. Lila Mae's knowledge is restricted, and the information, that "she doesn't know yet" repeatedly given to the reader, reflects the metafictional nature of the novel, where the readers are overtly made aware of its authorly quality. Readers are at once within the story and outside the story; they are made aware of both the present and the future at the same time. They are told what Lila Mae knows presently, but are immediately given a glimpse of the possible future too. The readers build an expectation that once she will gain more knowledge, she will change her assumption about herself. Linda Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as a novel, which incorporates "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" and is "self-reflexive" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 5). The above narratological observation evidences that *The Intuitionist* goes one-step ahead and shows self-awareness of its own fictional quality.

We also see that Lila Mae retreats into the underground; she works in the basement of the Department of Elevator Inspectors, called as a pit. Jeffrey Allen

Tucker observes that "Lila Mae had to live in the equivalent of a janitor's closet because separate dormitories had yet to be constructed for African Americans, who are referred to not as 'African Americans' but as 'colored' or 'Negro'" ("Verticality", 151). According to Fain, Whitehead's use of the terms *underground* and *invisible* is an allusion to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (*Colson Whitehead*, 7). Whitehead thus borrows from his literary heritage in making Lila Mae the invisible woman like Ralph Ellison's the Invisible Man. Therefore, the novel is, as Bernard W. Bell says, a symbolic sociocultural act in terms of analyzing the African American novel (*The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, 339). In an issue of *Science Fiction Studies*, Isiah Lavender III asserts that "the concept of verticality, both architectural and cultural governs the action of both camps as they vie to find the black box" (192). The cultural concept of verticality is intricately tied with the idea of racial uplift influencing the mental constructs of the characters. The chapter shows that the "social, political, and cultural possibilities of race in other place and times", as Lavender says, is created through the possible worlds existing in the minds of the characters and generated by the text for the readers where they are inspired to hope for an alternate improved possible world. We have already seen that the idea of elevation itself offers a number of possibilities in the individual embedded narratives of the characters. For Fulton, it is a way to transcend the limits of perception and racial constructions, and a way to embrace his racial identity. For Lila Mae it is her gateway to achieve excellence and to erase her tarnished name. For Pompey it means socioeconomic progress. For Chancre, Mr. Reed, Orville Lever, and for corporate giants like United and Arbo, it denotes political and economic gain.

One can also observe that Fulton envisions a new world devoid of racist social codes; the idea of levity for him is not rooted in race or ethnicity. Thus, his imagination of an alternate world calls for a color blind or postracial society. The Oxford dictionary defines the term 'post-racial' as "denoting or relating to a period or society in which racial prejudice and discrimination no longer exist". American writer Ta-Nehisi Coates in his article published in *The Atlantic* says, "we should seek not a world where the black race and the white race live in

harmony, but a world in which the terms *black* and *white* have no real political meaning". Whitehead eventually constructs such a world denoting that the elevator accident need not be considered only as an act of political sabotage of the machine and Lila Mae's name in Fulton's notes need not be considered only as an act of racial generosity in passing the secret of technological innovation.

It can be concluded that the elevator crash, when seen as a catastrophic accident, collapses the racial and political narratives running in each individual's mind; those narratives, which by definition of the "postracial", have been deemed no longer relevant to current social dynamics" (Urban Dictionary). Fain writes, "Since Fulton racially passes as a white man, into a world where his race is an invisible nonfactor, he lives a postracial existence in a pre-civil rights era society" (26). Fulton's racial and professional success, implicated in his passing as white and gaining fame as the father of Intuitionism, as well as Lila Mae's seeming success in solving the mystery of the elevator crash and carrying on Fulton's work for future posterity does not signify that a postracial society exists. In this respect, their apparent success is reinterpreted as a failure to accomplish racial, social, or architectural elevation. The fact that Fulton had to hide his identity and had to play the joke with which he initially fooled his readers to believe in the second elevation, does not seem to serve his purpose of achieving the social and racial uplift in the truest sense. Similarly, Lila Mae too had to disguise herself as Fulton, her ideological teacher, in order to gain societal and professional re-acceptance. At the end of the novel, we see her writing *Theoretical Elevators* volume III by adopting Fulton's writing style, which eventually would imply proceeding Fulton's futuristic elevator tricks amalgamated with racial jests. In this regards, Maus and Donahue (2014), read Whitehead's satirical skills as serving a kind of protest, for improving institutions or humanity, to inspire a remodeling. Nevertheless, studying the dynamics of embedded narrative and possible worlds in Whitehead's narrative gives us insight into the very factors that enable him to satirize these constructs. Underlying his satirization is a call for developing one's perspective, which achieves the very idea of 'postracial'. Perspective-taking, self-

observation, and self-reflection are certain pre-requisites for a satirical treatment of prevalent social and political structures and practices.

Narrative perspective in general and perspective development, in particular, explicate the relation between the observer and the observed, the speaker and the observer. The ideological expansion and refinement one acquires in one's point of view underlie the reason for satirical treatment of socio-political structures. While sharing some facts about Fulton, Raymond Coombs, tells Lila Mae, "His color doesn't matter once it gets to that level. The level of commerce. They can put Fulton into one of those colored history calendars if they want – it doesn't change the fact that there's money to be made from his invention" (250). Although Coomb's statement implies the lack of relevance race has when financial profit is to be made, Whitehead himself disputes the idea of a postracial society ("The Year of Living Postracially"). Whitehead's attempt is to expand the singular notion of blackness and black identity. Cultural critic Touré in his book *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?* suggests that "to experience the full possibilities of Blackness, you must break free of the strictures sometimes placed on Blackness from outside the African American culture and also from within it" (4). Whitehead, in this novel, creates and then nullifies these constraints at the social, political, racial, and ideological levels to break stereotypical presumptive structures.

Gary Krist writes that the "second elevation" is a "new stage in the evolution of African American social levity" ("The Ascent of Man"). The new elevator technology signifies an alternate possibility, a utopian world free from racial strife and promising social integration. The concepts of possible worlds and embedded narratives, utilized to interpret the novel reveals the difference between a catastrophic event and the narratives characters build around it. Such narratives are woven with social, political, and racial constructs and carry personal motivations, fears, desires, and insecurities. Whitehead shows us a possibility and allows us a perspective to look past the world deeply embedded with such constructs. Michele Elam says in "Passing in the Post-Race Era: Danzy Senna,

Philip Roth, and Colson Whitehead" that "The detective novel's epistemological requirement – that the world can be known – dissolves into science fiction's conceit – that worlds can be imagined" (763). The concept and theory of possible worlds give a narratological footing for imagining an alternative viewpoint, an alternative world, and a "second elevation". The chapter thus asserts the efficacy of applying possible world theory in studying this text, as it embodies the imagination of its characters and the theme of the novel itself. Ryan's concept of possible worlds can also be seen in connection with Linda Selzer's observation: "Whitehead's novel asks readers to consider not only the ways in which words, generic preconceptions, social texts, cultural narratives, and shared signifiers may get you where you want to go, but also the degree to which they may direct you to where you *can* go" ("Instruments", 686). The novel thus becomes an examination of both the actual and the possible pathways to the world, and an attempt to actualize what we think can happen.

Notes:

1. Inspired by Leibniz' philosophy, the concept of possible worlds, Ryan states, was developed in the second half of the 20th century by philosophers of the analytic school (Kripke, Lewis, Hintikka [1989], Plantiga [1976], Rescher) as a means to solve problems in formal semantics. She further observes that starting in the mid-70s, possible worlds theory was adapted to the fictional worlds of narrative by the philosopher David Lewis, and a number of literary theorists, including Eco, Pavel, Doležel, and Ryan. A thorough exposition of the philosophical applications of the notion of possible worlds and a critique of the use of the concept by literary theorists can be found in Ronen 1994.
2. *Fabula*, along with *syuzhet*, is a term originating in Russian Formalism and employed in narratology; first used by Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky. *Fabula*, understood as story, refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative; and *syuzhet*, understood as discourse, is the re-presentation of those events.
3. Ryan defines tellability as "partly a matter of conceptual and logical complexity", and "the complexity of a situation, or of a sequence of events, depends on an underlying system" of what she calls "embedded narratives" ("Embedded Narrative and Tellability", 319-320).
4. The amalgamation of various generic forms in Colson whitehead is noted by Tucker, Fain, Maus, and Russell.

Chapter 3

"A thousand different stories collide": Metarepresentation and *John Henry Days*

3.1 Introduction:

Colson Whitehead, in his Pulitzer Prize-shortlisted novel, *John Henry Days* (2001), strives to arrive at an understanding of how people engage with the process of telling stories and making myth in an age where we are constantly enmeshed with information in a metarepresentational world. This chapter studies the novel's storyworld[1] using the concepts of metarepresentation and Theory of Mind developed by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby and further approached by Lisa Zunshine. Metarepresentation is a human cognitive endowment, which helps to keep track of who said what to whom and sometimes where or when it was said and for what purpose. Cognitive psychology and cognitive literary circles see Theory of Mind or 'mind-reading' as our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires. Taking this approach, the chapter argues that *John Henry Days* leverages metarepresentational abilities of the characters through which they develop their perspective, offer a critical look at the ways histories are written, and establish a personal bond with African American cultural traditions. The chapter also delineates how contradictory embedded narratives and commercialized media stories in the novel allow a complex set of metarepresentations, questioning notions of authenticity, agency, and authority implied by storytellers, singers, news reporters, and columnists. The chapter then examines how a cognitive narratological approach complements and refines the evaluation of the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction and the New Black aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell).

At the center of the novel is the story of John Henry[2], a real-life 19th-century black railway worker who died of exhaustion just after winning a race

against a steam-powered drill. His triumph, symbolizing man's struggle against the machine, turned him into a legendary figure in American folklore. This narrative core is framed within the story of J. Sutter, a 20th-century black freelance journalist who is writing a report on the first annual John Henry Days Festival[3] for a new travel website. The frame story involving J. Sutter and various other characters is a fictionalized account of an actual event – a weekend-long celebration of the release of a commemorative John Henry postage stamp organized by U. S. Postal Services in July 1996 in the neighboring towns of Talcott and Hinton, West Virginia. Whitehead portrays an array of characters, whose lives are shaped and influenced by the legend of John Henry. Some of these characters are entirely invented such as Pamela Street, the daughter of a recently deceased collector of John Henry artifacts and memorabilia; Alphonse Miggs, a stamp collector; hoteliers Benny and Josie in whose lodge Pamela, Alphonse, and J. stay with J.'s fellow journalists. A few other characters are fictionalized versions of real-life people such as Guy B. Johnson, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, who conducted his research on John Henry in the late 1920s, and African-American actor and singer Paul Robeson who played John Henry in a Broadway musical in 1940.

The changeability and the multiplicity of the legend of John Henry keep the novel's narrative structure dynamic, whereby the legend weaves its way into the lives of characters and eventually becomes a part of the larger cultural myth. The following discussion shows that the multifarious embedded narratives allow the author to explore the notion of authenticity, authority, and agency, both in their literal as well as in the layered, complex sense. Furthermore, the reader becomes a participant in the process of myth-making as the novel constantly evokes metarepresentational reading in dealing with what Bernard W. Bell calls "the dialectic tension between fact and fiction, myth and legend, folk culture and popular culture, the oral and literary traditions that inform the theme, structure and style of the novel" (329).

3.2 Defining Authenticity, Authority, and Agency:

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "authentic" as something that is "worthy of acceptance or belief as confirming to or based on fact." Philosopher Charles Taylor addresses the complex ethical dimensions of authenticity which leads Bernard W. Bell to surmise that it is "conferred from without as well as from within the dialectic process of the rites of passage of one's life" (*The Contemporary African American Novel*, 42). Although authority and authenticity overlap, authority differs from the latter because it requires the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior. Bell further admits that although phenotypically and sociohistorically black writers could claim the authority of their racial and cultural experience with slavery and segregation, the actual authority of the identities of African Americans as revealed in the novels by Colson Whitehead, is more complex. According to him, the authority of the identities of African Americans emanates from not only the black racism in the United States, but also from the language of our individual and collective political agency in the present and future to maintain or change power relationships (42). Agency, Bell avers, is the sociocultural and sociopsychological process by which the individual assumes a responsible political position in maintaining or changing the systems of language and power by which he or she constructs and represents a personal and group identity or subjectivity of authenticity and authority. Agency, in other words, is a personal initiative and principled action in effecting social change (43). Bell only tangentially mentions the meaning of 'agent' in narratology as the representation of a human being whose speech acts influence events. The present study serves as a point of departure in devising the narratological delineation of the notions of authority, authenticity, and agency in the novel, which is sidelined in its socio-cultural analysis even when acknowledged. Agency at the level of story, as defined by David Herman, concerns characters' ability to bring about deliberately initiated events, or actions, within a storyworld. It is also a pertinent concern at the level of storytelling or narration, affecting who gets to say what kind of story in what contexts (*Basic Elements of Narrative*, 181). In *John Henry Days*, the maneuvering of information

either revealed or concealed by the characters and the narrator mirrors the dynamics of individual and collective subjectivity and wields the power to exercise choice, a characteristic feature of New Black Aesthetics.

3.3 Metarepresentation and Theory of Mind (ToM):

Cognitive psychologist Leda Cosmides and biological anthropologist John Tooby discuss the possible evolutionary history[4] of metarepresentation and its significance for our species, in their essay, "Consider the Source". Lisa Zunshine in her book, *Why We Read Fiction* draws on Cosmides' and Tooby's work and adapts it for the purposes of explaining metarepresentation in fiction[5] and this chapter largely builds on her propositions. Zunshine states that "our tendency to keep track of sources of our representations – to metarepresent them – is a particular cognitive endowment closely related to our mind-reading ability" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 47). She explains that a metarepresentation consists of two parts. The first part specifies a source of representation, for example, "I thought. . . ." The second part provides the content of representation, for example, ". . . that it was going to rain". The source is the mind behind the sentiment or expression. When we suspect a source or content of representations, we keep that information in mind but wait for further evidence that would either strengthen or weaken that claim. We revise initial information while we retain the metarepresentation. She propounds that the "meta" part of the representation that specifies the source of information is what prevents the representation from circulating freely within our cognitive system and from being used as an input to many inferential processes, whose outputs are inputs to others. Once the information is established to a sufficient degree the source tags are lost; for example, when people forget who told them that apples are edible or that plants photosynthesize[6]. Our metarepresentational ability also allows us to attribute mental states to a person and by extension to literary characters. This quality is known as mind-reading, a term used by cognitive psychologists, interchangeably with "Theory of Mind". We make use of the same cognitive architecture, whether we engage with real or

fictive worlds. Zunshine thus infers that one preliminary implication of applying what we know about ToM to our study of fiction is that it makes literature, as we know it possible.

When we keep track of the sources of representations in *John Henry Days*, the novel shows that, while receiving John Henry folk tales, the characters sometimes forget the source of stories or their details[7]. In other words, some part of both the content as well as the source is lost. In such cases, the gaps in narratives are sometimes filled by fabrications of the storyteller bearing his or her intentions, imagination, fantasies, goals, and desires. In this way, the propagated stories contain embedded narratives, defined by Marie-Laure Ryan as "any story like representation produced in the mind of a character or produced in the mind of the reader" ("Embedded Narrative and Tellability", 320). As discussed earlier, agency, accorded through speech act, initiates power relations. Therefore, the chapter argues that embedded narratives allocates agency to those storytellers who modify narratives. Larger cultural narratives, like that of John Henry's legend, appropriate personal narratives of the masses, rendering invalid the ascription of authority, authenticity, and agency to a singular entity or to a master narrative. The chapter, therefore, also argue that characters' metarepresentational ability to constantly weigh sources and contents of information allows Whitehead to construct the fluidity of these notions in order to question the way histories are composed.

3.4 Why Study *John Henry Days* Using Metarepresentation and Theory of Mind?

This novel is a good example of a fictional narrative that relies on, manipulates, and titillates our tendency to keep track of who thought, wanted, and felt what and when. It presents multiple views of characters who give some conflicting as well as some overlapping information on John Henry's life. The content of information on John Henry seems to vary with the situation, mental states, and credibility of its source, i.e. people narrating these stories as well as with its recipients to whom

it is related. Furthermore, Whitehead introduces a number of artifacts on John Henry, such as, folktales, sociological narratives, archival research, postage stamps, vinyl records, cassettes and CDs recording John Henry ballad songs and testimonials, and the anticipated web report which J. Sutter is supposed to write. Each of these artifacts relates to the modifying forms of representations the John Henry legend has taken over time, from the industrial age to which John Henry belonged, to the present information age to which J. Sutter belongs. Moreover, these various forms of representations affect and are affected by people whose lives are connected in some way or the other by the legend. Because of these vertiginous multi-representations, some characters within the storyworld have to navigate their way through this labyrinth. Such a wide canvas makes the novel "a narrative tour de force that astonishes on almost every page", "sumptuously written" with "encyclopedic aspirations"[8]. Colson Whitehead himself says that the novel is a complex attempt "to explore the idea of John Henry, to attack it from different angles, different ways people interact with the myth. . . John Henry becomes a way to talk about different things and different things become a way to talk about John Henry. It goes back and forth" ("Post Office to Unveil Colson Whitehead Stamp"). As this novel exaggeratedly engages our metarepresentational capacity by providing multiple and conflicting accounts and as we can rely on our ability to read characters' states of mind and our own, it becomes pertinent to study the novel using the concepts of metarepresentation and Theory of Mind. The following discussion will also show how reading the novel through metarepresentational concept sheds light on readers' enduring preoccupation with the issue of the "truth" of literary narrative and the distinction between "history" and "fiction"[9]. This reading lends itself to analyzing the novel as a historiographic metafiction.

The chapter takes into account four types of metarepresentations categorized by Dan Sperber to discuss the ways representations on John Henry are transmitted. The four types are: 1) Mental representations of mental representations (to take, for example, J. Sutter's thought about John Henry and his story. He *thinks* that John Henry was made up), 2) mental representations of

public representations (the thought that J. says, John Henry was made up), 3) public representations of mental representations (the utterance, "I thought that John Henry was made up") and 4) public representations of public representations (the utterance, J. said that John Henry was made up). The chapter then considers these four types to predict the behavior of characters, especially of J. Sutter because Theory of Mind and metarepresentational reading lend themselves well to interpret the open ending of the novel, which has a crucial bearing on predicting J. Sutter's behavior.

3.5 Metarepresentations in *John Henry Days*:

The prologue of *John Henry Days* hurls at its readers fourteen variants of the John Henry legend as testimonials on his life and his ballads. This is provided in response to an advertisement published in the Chicago Defender requesting information on John Henry. We get incompatible information about John Henry's nativity, race, physicality and the way he died. A steam shovel operator says that he has heard steel drivers sing "John Henry" all his life and that "every new steel driving "nigger" had a new verse to "John Henry" (5). This shows the extent to which John Henry's story permeates the lives of people who knew him, so much, so that everyone had something or the other to add to it. Besides the question of procuring definite knowledge of John Henry, there is also the question of whether he existed in the first place, which leads us to think that perhaps all these stories are merely hypothetical. Analyzing these vignettes metarepresentationally reveals the uncertainty in informative content shaping the elusive nature of John Henry and the pervasive entrenchment of his story in the memories of respondents as they recollect its source in their own families and acquaintances.

Interestingly, in these series of sketches, Whitehead provides an informant's reply, which in itself is indicative of his/her overt assessment of the sources of the John Henry stories, songs, and the contexts in which they were heard:

> "I have heard the song in a thousand different places, nigger extra gangs, hoboes of all kinds, coal miners and furnace men, river and wharf rats, beach combers and sailors, harvest hands and timber men. Some of them drunk and some of them sober. It is scattered over all the states and some places on the outside. I have heard

> any number of verses cribbed bodily from some other song or improvised to suit the occasion.
>
> The opinion among hoboes, section men and others who sing the song is that John Henry was a Negro, "a coal black man" a partly forgotten verse says, "a big fellow," an old hobo once said. He claimed to have known him but he was drunk on Dago Red, so I'm discounting everything he said. I have met very few who claim to have known him. The negroes of forty years ago regarded him as a hero of their race" (6).

The informer is aware of the malleable nature of songs and ballads and he/she disregards the version (content of representation) related by a hobo (source of representation) who lost credibility being drunk (the 'when'/context of representation). Thus, we see that it is not just the reader, but also the characters who juggle through these invalidating and uncertain stories challenging their metarepresentational ability. Similar is the job of J. Sutter, who has to incorporate such socially mediated constructions in his website report.

The depiction of the characters in the novel establishes and at the same time satirizes the sometimes-corrupt relation between who writes (source) and what is written (content) in print and electronic media. To sell news, reporters and columnists, exploit the potential fluidity and context dependency of representations to manufacture or tamper information. Cosmides and Tooby also point toward the possible misapplication of representable information which, although may be usefully descriptive in a narrow area of conditions, is false, misleading, or harmful outside the scope of those conditions. This observation holds specific importance to analyze the loss, which occurs between an event and its representation.

In the novel, the narrator relates how witnesses reduce their accounts of a shooting incident during the festival to incomplete, rudimentary facts. When they share what they have seen, they "fit their perspectives into one narrative through a system of sobbing barter" and when in the "first few minutes a thousand different stories collide", the making of truth becomes violence too, out of which facts are formed (24). Interestingly, Whitehead appoints Joan Acorn, a young and inexperienced journalist, to report this incident. Joan Acorn received her job as a journalist through her father's contacts making the reader doubt her efficiency as

well as the report she writes. When the newspaper's Sunday slot man tries to get information about the shooting incident from her, she begins to cry and finds difficulty in getting the words out: "She thinks, where, what, who, these are the essential questions a journalist must ask herself. And then Joan feels a warmth in her chest and she says in someone else's voice, 'Talcott, West Virginia – A postal worker opened fire Sunday afternoon on a crowd of people gathered for the unveiling of a new postage stamp; critically wounding three people before being shot and killed'" (26). In this way, she condenses her account to mere 'facts', stripping down the details such as the identities of the shooter and the victims, the motivation for the shooter to open fire, and the confusion ensuing the shooting. In other words, her account was devoid of story, but had content enough to be passed as a report for publication that intended to sell 'facts'. This incomplete and ambiguous information have crucial ramifications, as the reader holds this piece under advisement while reading the rest of the novel and wonders whether J. will become one of the victims.

Instead of merely depicting the partial loss in representing an event or a historical figure, Whitehead, in a considerable part of his novel, also presents blues and ballads as mediums of transmission for a cultural myth to travel among common folk integrating people's personal narratives. Adopting a peculiar narrative technique, he renders anonymous the "meta" part, i.e. the source (singer) of the John Henry songs in order to capture the commonality in the compositional process which incorporates various aspects of a singer's life. The 'he' of the following lines finds no particular referent:

> "Others will hear it and add a verse, goose the rhythm, slow it down to fit their mood, temperament, to fit the resonance set up in them by the arrangement of plates on the kitchen table that morning. . . He wasn't there at Big Bend. This is his own John Henry, who he figures is a man like himself, just trying to get along. And if the man who taught him the song has his own John Henry, let him. The next man will have his. Someone else will change his verses and today's John Henry will be gone, or secret in altered lines like memory" (102-103).

The adaptability of ballads poses a challenge in research for Guy B. Johnson who is baffled by the number of varied responses he receives on his inquiry regarding

'The Ballad of John Henry'. The narrator seems to presage, "This is the method of gathering folklore, accumulating, sifting, tracking with ineffectual magnifying glass the footprints of ghosts. But he had not reckoned on the variety and plentitude of the accounts. No, he had not foreseen the true extent of this adventure at all" (155). Guy B. Johnson's research involves practicing his metarepresentational endowment to assess goals and intentions of people who provide information on John Henry and to integrate a composite narrative out of incompatible information. Whether Johnson is following up on correspondence or randomly canvassing longtime residents, he cannot get two stories to coincide. The reader shares Johnson's perplexity at processing variegated representations from the perspective of multiple characters, which makes reviewers such as Jonathan Miles say, "there's enough debris for seven or eight lesser novels whirling 'round Whitehead's funnel cloud" ("John Henry Days").

3.6 Tracking J. Sutter's Representations and the Development of J.'s Perspective:

African American journalist from New York, J. Sutter is intent just upon making money and is indifferent towards reportage. He feels that he works more efficiently if he does not think of his audience. He likes to keep his obligations to meeting the word count. He is introduced at an airport terminal, chasing a stray receipt, which he found on the floor so that he can fraudulently claim reimbursements from his employers. He has been very conscientious about staying away from "the forge of his race's history". He is at Talcott at the behest of the United States Postal Service to cover the unveiling of a postage stamp. He is "inertial, grubbing, hoarding receipts, because he is on a three-month junket jag he is too unwilling or too scared to break" (15). He expresses his serious doubts whether he could place a story about a stamp. He and his fellow journalists thought that they do not have to write about all the events they attended, but just enough to keep from looking like "complete hacks". Like Joan Acorn, J. Sutter's lack of commitment to his work makes the authority of his report on the John Henry festival dubious to the reader.

J. Sutter initially believes that covering such an event is ridiculous to even his and his fellow junketeers' degraded standards. Whitehead leaves no room for doubt when he introduces J. Sutter as an "inveigler of invites and slayer of crudités, this drink ticket fondler and slim tipper, open bar opportunist, master of vouchers, queue-jumping wrangler of receipts" (56). The travel website for which he is working wants him to look for content and J. prefers the apparent lack of pretense to be more honest than the claim for authorship of stories or articles. J.'s ignorance of the obligation to his audience and his belief in the content problematizes the notion of metarepresentation emanating from the novel because it is not just the content but its dynamics with the sources and the audience as well which play an important role in the propagation of stories. As the novel shows, the audience becomes the source of representation when they pass on the stories and transform them into legends. A legend diminishes the distinction between source, content, and audience as each aspect intricately embeds the other. This realization allows J. Sutter to evolve his perspective along with his experience of the John Henry legend during the festival.

Transporting the reader a few years back, the narrative informs us that Sutter was a dedicated and sincere journalist: "He was green then, nervous about repercussions, clinging valiantly to an abstraction of journalistic ethics" (13). But years of working for a media culture which makes stories in order to sell them changed J. to the extent that he became too worn out "to pretend that there is anything but publicity". Moreover, none of J. Sutter's journalist friends was serious about writing a report on the John Henry festival. They wholly engage in grabbing material benefits through their insubstantial craft.

By explicitly using one's metarepresentational ability, one can hold on to crucial pieces of information concerning J. Sutter, which are initially not so apparent but gradually makes the reader wonder if J. will continue to be a part of the superficiality of their job they themselves mock as "puff". J. is apprehensive of leading a hollow life if he continues to cover events after already being on a three-month junket jag. He is also aware of how a similar attempt of junketeering devoured Bobby Figgis' life. Thus, J. says, "I don't want to be another Bobby

Figgis". The statement, indicative of J's awareness to steer clear from Bobby Figgis' fate is a vital metarepresentation for the reader, which needs attention and which would be overlooked if one does not keep a track of J. Sutter's thoughts. In a similar manner, we note that he could not find any substantial reason behind attending this event or rather in making a junketeer record. J. then initiates a self-evaluative process and his Theory of Mind finds crucial manifestation later in the novel where instances of self-evaluations cause a gradual change in his perspective. The novel, therefore, demands from the readers a continuous attempt at mapping J. Sutter's thoughts, beliefs, and attitude towards John Henry, his web report, and the festival.

The depiction of the evening event of dinner mocks the behavior of the group of junketeers aimed only at grabbing the food offered free. Mayor Cliff informs them that Mr. Vereen, a singer, will not be able to perform, as he is sick, so he has arranged for some homegrown talent to appear after dinner. J. decides to tune out the singer as "homespun rubbish". He is unconcerned towards the happenings of the festival and thinks that he can easily write a report as per the dictates of the market research on the average attention span of a web surfer. J. Sutter's carefree attitude shows that he is completely disconnected with the subject of his work. Sutter's fear, that his article would be pruned by the website editor to fit the parameters set by a market study, mocks at the way journalists are motivated to write content-driven reports which demand trimming down the richness of a story or an event. Human interactions with such technological innovation, reduce web users to mere measurements of time. Such dehumanizing renditions of technological use also detaches Pamela Street from her work. A temporary agency farms her out for "a content driven interactive information provider" (287). Her job was "ontology", to direct new users amid millions of websites. Their company needed an extra hand until they worked out some glitches in "the Tool", a new data entry interface which measured visitors or users in terms of "the hits, the eyeballs, the clicks" (288). The technological control over human interaction provides a postmodern critique for the anxiety emanating from the entrapments in widespread meshwork of mediums of communication.

Using J. Sutter and Pamela Street as mouthpieces, Whitehead points out the disadvantages of mediums of communication and technology that devalues humans. Linda Selzer, in an interview, asked Colson Whitehead to elaborate on "the issues generated by new technologies" such that his "narratives are alternately inflected by and suspicious of technological innovation". Whitehead responded: "I'm constitutionally leery of systems, whether we're talking about human organizations or new technologies. Every advancement has its benefits and its price. My outlook on the world prohibits me from cheerleading the latest thing – I always have to find the weakness. The hidden cost" ("New Eclecticism", 396). The various forms of technologies in the novel – be it the steam-drill from the industrial age, the postage stamp, vinyl records, and the innumerable artifacts collected by Pamela Street's father, or J. Sutter's web report in the digital age – is brought into question, for its limitations and for the role of its users, as producers as well as consumers of that technology. Whitehead asks, "The steam drill is more efficient, but what happens to the laborer? The novel also questions the relevance of the postage stamp and the print or digital media. In his own article too, he questions, "What kind of monument was a postage stamp? It was so banal that it addressed something about our debased age" ("I Worked") Coming to an understanding of the obsoleteness of our systems of communications from a postdated point of view is itself reflective of perspective development shown by the characters of the novel.

In a similar vein, Daniel Grausam, in his brilliant essay, "After the Post(al)", reflects on the irony of a John Henry stamp. John Henry dies directly after defeating the drill, exhausted by the race. He becomes an immortal American folk hero by proving mortal; defeated ultimately by the very thing he has supposedly defeated. The novel's implicit argument, according to Grausam, is that the exact same thing is happening again; "John Henry, immortalized on a stamp, is immortalized at the very moment when the death knell of postal delivery is already being sounded" (635). Grausam also notes that J. Sutter's first assignment for the emergent digital technology will end the very print culture he is covering while already living through a paradigm shift from the era of the story

and article to the era of "content". Whitehead continually returns to the obsolescence of both the stamp as media technology and the railroad this stamp represents. John Henry drove steel in order to blast tunnels for the railroads, which is a doubly obsolete system of transport as it has been replaced once by the interstate highway system and now by the virtual superhighway of information. Besides reckoning older systems of technology to be hackneyed, Daniel Grassian too opines, "either the technology has become too powerful to challenge and/or we (or, at least, the hip-hop generation) have lost the desire that John Henry had to prove human superiority. Rather, we have let technology dehumanize us and grow apathetic in the process" (*Writing the Future of Black America*, 80-81). Grassian and Grausam thus, remarkably observe Whitehead's continuous attempts at bringing our resignation to the dehumanizing effects of technology and the obsolescence of these systems, which are also mediums of representations.

The chapter, however, argues that along with depicting the continuous superseding of technologies, Whitehead simultaneously attempts to bring out human being's propensity to assess mediums of representations, which enables us to resist passive submission to these external technologies of communication and foregrounds our inherent tendency to feed on and concoct stories and narratives. Our ability to assess functions through our metarepresentation and mind reading skills and we both, play with and are played upon by stories surrounding us. Moreover, it is this innate system, which enables us to reckon the obsoleteness of the older technologies and the dehumanizing effects of the newer technologies in the first place. In other words, the inherent nature of people to perceive and project stories and the way stories become more accessible and shareable, as in *John Henry Days*, seems to be a constant in the face of all external technologies.

Reading the novel metarepresentationally brings to our focus the natural disposition of a human being to create and receive stories. Such a focus also brings to the fore the process of oral communication, which is the mainstay of African American literary and cultural tradition. John Henry's story became legendary owing to its adaptable and transforming nature; people added,

subtracted, and modified parts of it depending on their circumstances, contexts, hopes, and desires. This corresponds to Ryan's definition of the embedded narrative and one can see how it functions in transmissions of such stories from one generation to another. In other words, our ability to reassess and modify information allows certain stories to sustain and shape our culture with all its benefits and drawbacks[10]. As Zunshine herself says, the functioning of our metarepresentational ability "today informs our interaction with the world on more levels than we are immediately aware of" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 54). Having said that, one should also note that the way we receive and narrate stories might evolve with our cognitive abilities undergoing major evolutionary changes over eons of time.

The inaugural dinner humorously depicts J.'s acute desire and excitement to have a prime rib. Derek C. Maus notes Whitehead's use of mock-heroic tenor and infers that the tone provides "a metafictional touch that calls attention to itself by its very inappropriateness. The junketeers' behavior is far from the idealized virtue exemplified by the heroes of epic tales such as John Henry, and the rapturous thoughts Sutter directs at a plate of prime beef suggests that his ability to be fulfilled has become entirely material, instead of spiritual or philosophical" (*Understanding Colson Whitehead*, 45). From a symbolic standpoint, Maus further adds, such a condition prevents him from ever being able to derive any meaning from John Henry's story (45). However, J. Sutter's perspective changes and eventually he does derive meaning from John Henry's story. One gains this insight only by noting what J. says or thinks, i.e. by keeping track of his representations. This shift occurs as an outcome of J. Sutter's metarepresentational ability. He exhibits this talent by going back and forth in time - reminiscing about his past, especially his early days in journalism when he was enthusiastic and dedicated; by being conscious of his present, as in covering the festival and by sometimes being wary about his future, as he does not want to end up as Bobby Figgis.

The novel frequently veers away from the present, not just through J. Sutter's recollection but also by narrating the reasons behind the arrival of Pamela Street and Alphonse Miggs, to this festival. Moreover, the novel devotes some sections to John Henry, both, as a 20th-century legendary figure and as an 18th-century railway worker, nearing his contest with the steam drill. Such frequent shifts in wide ranges of time and space in the novel impart a serpentine nature to its narrative, opening up a number of levels for our metarepresentational ability to work on. We have on the one hand J. Sutter, within the storyworld, reassessing his own perception of John Henry and this entire event, and on the other hand, we as readers of the novel engage in continuously readjusting our perception of John Henry as well as of J. Sutter. This also allows the readers to see J. Sutter initially as a reporter who tries to gain superficial access to information on John Henry, and subsequently as a person trying to get under John Henry's skin, experiencing his motleyed represented myth. This process of readjustment and re-assessment explains William Ramsey's statement that the novel allows the readers "to construct rather than receive historical truth" (An End of Southern History", 780). Our mental faculty, preventing us to imbibe information at its face value, allowing us to reweigh its sources and content, facilitates the active participation of the readers involved in constructing "historical truth". Moreover, a cognitive narratological approach to the novel also informs us that the "historical truth" itself is not just an end-product of the reader's construction but a means to understand it as an ongoing process, which varies in its truth-value with time, place and people.

After the choking incident, where Alphonse Miggs, the railroad stamp collector, ultimately rescues him, J. Sutter becomes a bit grave. Even then, Sutter does not give much importance to the impending report and he figures that he can write his report at the airport, which will be edited several times and finally will be lost in the world of web never to be seen again. J. Sutter's frivolous attitude makes his professional integrity disputable, more so, when we see him fascinated with the rather fickle and anonymous realm of the internet. He continues to think of himself as a successful freelancer because his checks arrive timely, his

reimbursements arrive when he mails in receipts and he continues to get assignments. But a gradual transformation occurs in J. Sutter's attitude towards life after the choking incident. The narrator informs, "Except for what happened earlier that evening, J. has tuned himself perfectly to the rhythm of events, found parity between what had been his life before and what his life is going for the record. They struggle and win brief inches, but neither side wins him. He neither wants to go home and take a few days off nor submit himself mindlessly to the flux of events" (136). In this instance, J.'s indecisiveness and unwillingness to go home or to go for the record mindlessly is apparent. But by overtly using the Theory of Mind and by keeping track of J.'s fluid representations, one would interpret this seeming irresolution as a shift in J.'s perspective. That J. Sutter, a die-hard junketeer, who is unconcerned with the subject of his report and who has conducted himself flippantly, is considering the option of not chasing the record aimlessly. Such signals of perspectival shift strewn occasionally in the novel will be oblivious if the work is not viewed through the lens of metarepresentation and the Theory of Mind. The author relies on the capacity of the reader to metarepresent his representations of J. Sutter. The reader can compare J.'s past and present attitudes and thus read these lines in context to decipher how much J. has changed. In a novel where J. Sutter shows an endless dance between ridiculing, disbelieving, questioning and believing the story of John Henry, and the purpose of his life, it becomes crucial to know what he thinks and says, when, where and why. Knowing what J. says and does and what drives him is paramount to our understanding of his thought process and to the narrative trajectory of the novel itself.

Just as we trail J. Sutter's representations, J. Sutter too keeps track of his representations pertaining to Bobby Figgis. He asks himself whether Figgis shared the same feelings of apprehension with him. He attributes a state of mind to Bobby Figgis: "he was in control, before pop consumed him" (136). Attributing this state of mind to Figgis leads J. to feel dreadful of his record and his purpose of attending this event. Such reanalysis keeps him from "submit(ting) himself mindlessly to the flux of events". Therefore, J. Sutter's mind-reading faculty plays

a significant role in altering his attitude, and eventually helps in revamping his perspective of John Henry.

3.7 Connecting back to African American cultural tradition:

J. seems to assess his inclination towards John Henry's myth through recollection and self-assessment. He recalls that the first time he heard of John Henry was in the fifth grade, in a cartoon film shown on a projector for J.'s class taught by Mrs. Goodwin[11]. Interestingly, the reader comes to an awareness of J.'s thought on John Henry's cartoon film and the entire scenario of his class, as a child then, simultaneously with what he thinks of it now, as an adult. In other words, J. Sutter applies metarepresentation, by concurrently comparing his perceptions of John Henry's cartoon film as a fifth grader and as an adult. He remembers Mrs. Goodwin telling the class that they were going to see a film about a great American hero who helped build America. Adult J. questions the purview of the class and wonders at the interdisciplinary scope of the subject, "Mrs. Goodwin taught English, but was this story English or History or Social Studies, for that matter" (Whitehead, *John Henry Days* 137).

Adult J. Sutter finds the exaggerated and imprecise images of the film strange, such as, the "bold colors and blocky limbs of people" (137), and "John Henry was born big, forty pounds, and he was gifted with speech straight out the womb" (137). He also remembers that it was the first time he saw a black mother and father in a cartoon and his fascination stands out probably because he was the only black kid in his class. While the child J. saw that John Henry "ate the food in great inhalations", the adult J. wonders: "He was born a slave. His parents were slaves. Where did they get that food?" Child J. passively received the image of one-day-old John Henry informing his parents that he was going to die at the Big Bend Tunnel on the C&O Railroad. Whereas adult J. is amazed, that John Henry was only "womb-wet and already saddled with the knowledge of his destiny and doomed to fulfill it" (138). Adult J., therefore, differentiates himself from the time and space of this film and marvels how unrecognizable his younger self appears to him now. J. thus becomes aware of his evolved comprehension of the film as

differentiated from his perceptions of it as a child. Narratologically speaking, Whitehead deploys overt parsing of the narrating-I and the experiencing I, where the narrating I, i.e. the adult J., re-experiences, and re-analyzes the cartoon film by recollecting the child J.'s impressions. By metarepresenting J. Sutter's fluctuating states of mind, we are able to see that he has revised his earlier views "stored" in his mind with an agent-specifying source tag merged with a time tag, such as, "The child J."

While self-assessing himself, J. Sutter offers some brilliant sociocultural critique and evaluations of the cartoon film. Perplexed that there was no mention of slavery in the cartoon, he critiques the limited and biased approach of their school education towards history. J. wondered if, like him, his white classmates were supposed to take John Henry's walk from home, in search of his fate as the slave's walk from the plantation. J. is now aware that this was not necessarily the case as he realizes that the difference in opinion originated from his racial identity and the children were encouraged to find their own experience in John Henry's ventures. Apart from being amazed, like his other classmates, by John Henry's superhuman feats, J. Sutter admired the man's prowess with a hammer, his endeavor at winning the race, breaking the shackles of slavery, and proving the importance of labor against mechanization. This admiration affects and shapes adult J.'s interpretation of John Henry's walk from home, which, he now surmises, was a walk "from a slave economy into an industrial economy" (139).

While the children picked up the cues from the film, eliciting emotions it wanted to generate, J. Sutter, by reviewing every representation, reads fine, implicit racial meanings, which the film avoided. When caricatured John Henry felt joyous to receive the job, adult J. is able to perceive the hardships behind his gladness. He reflects that in reality this freed slave was being exploited; he worked for pennies and "wandered from job to job in search of circumstances promised in the good Mr. Lincoln's proclamation" (140). J. also satirizes the inaccurate portrayal of race relations, which existed back in John Henry's time. Immediately after the contest with the steam drill, John Henry fell down

exhausted and died; a doctor rushed in and took his hand. J. mocks, “This cartoon doctor deigned to touch nigger flesh, of all nineteenth-century Southern doctors this man served all of God’s children with equal care” (142). Even though the children picked up various clues from the film, they could not fathom its ambiguous ending. The questions they raised about John Henry’s end could probably trouble anyone, irrespective of their race or era – the slave economy, industrial economy or the information age. And probably this is why, for J., the questions asked in the tone of a fifth grader, who would equate death with defeat, were still relevant: “Mrs. Goodwin, why did he die at the end? Mrs. Goodwin, if he beat the steam engine, why did he have to die? Did he win or lose?” (142).

Memories, therefore, have a threefold implication in the novel: for J. Sutter, for the author, and for the reader. By revisiting the story of John Henry, J. Sutter is able to find what he shared with him, which is much more than race. While the child J. always felt odd when his white classmates looked at him differently, the adult J. begins to understand what struggles and tests John Henry was put to. John Henry was a freed black laborer and the contest with the steam drill was not just a way to prove himself, it was a way to support his livelihood under threat from a machine. Although both John Henry and J. Sutter belong to two different eras and their skills and work differ, both are threatened by the advent of the latest technological innovation. It was the advent of industrialization for John Henry and for J. Sutter it is the digital age. Therefore, by recollecting crucial pieces of information about John Henry from his memory and then revising and readjusting it with the knowledge and the worldview he has acquired now as an adult, J. Sutter initiates a process of establishing a personal relationship with “the steel driving man”. The reader finds that after reminiscing this childhood experience, J. Sutter has changed, from a man who does not care about his report on John Henry, to a man who is concerned about the way his story is portrayed.

Instances of recollections in the novel also enable the characters, previously disconnected from their cultural traditions, to re-connect with the

African-American culture and folklore, of which John Henry was a part. The generational isolation from his racial predecessors, felt by J. Sutter owes to his belonging to the "hip-hop generation". Grassian calls J. Sutter, a disaffected hip-hop generation African American free-lance writer and for him "Whitehead suggest that the late twentieth century is an era of fluff, of the elevation of the trivial over the significant" (Grassian 74). Although J. Sutter seems to be disengaged initially, he is eventually drawn towards the socially constructed myth of John Henry when he confronts its vertiginous representations at the John Henry Days festival. This compels him to revise, evaluate and eventually modify his initial doubts about John Henry with little room left to stay totally disconnected. By developing his perspective, J. Sutter is able to see the 'significant' amid all the seeming 'trivialities' in media representations, and thereby able to follow the pervasiveness of his racial tradition despite being generationally distanced. For the reader, tracing the evolving thoughts of J. Sutter is essential to comprehend his attitudinal change in a scene, which would otherwise be considered as a casual moment of recollection.

Even though we see a gradual change in J.'s perspective, the transformation is not consistent. As J. Sutter dangles between showing concern and being unconcerned about the story of John Henry, the novel challenges the reader's judgment in attributing a persistent inclination towards John Henry. As and when we see J. Sutter inclining to his story, we see him getting closer to finding a professional purpose as opposed to his aimless record. After recalling the cartoon film, we see an insurgence of new emotions in J. Sutter while he takes a walk for the first time in search of food outside his lodge as he overslept and missed a free meal. He is unable to figure out the cause of a certain change in himself. He initially thinks that the choking sobered him up. However, he continues to ponder, "Maybe it is more than that. Thinking back, he hasn't felt this clear in months. (Such is the bad posture of his nights, slouching away into dipso inclinations.) Grateful body" (151). Instead of thinking that his sober state is the reason behind the clarity and the change he is feeling, the representation, "Maybe it is more than that" is a cue for the reader prompting to read more into

J.'s bodily feelings. Metarepresenting our way through J.'s thoughts, we know by now what J. himself does not fully realize, that he is gradually undergoing a process of changing opinion. Thereby he gets closer to finding his purpose in life, to make his profession more meaningful and to derive some meaning from the legend of John Henry.

Since the cue does not tell us explicitly what this reason could be, the author relies on us to recon J.'s perspective change. The author has by now, particularly after J. recollects watching the cartoon film, kept us under the impression that J.'s bodily feelings betray his growing interest, an inclination or disposition to believe John Henry's story and to quit the aimless run for the record, despite being a carefree junketeer. Had there been any other reason, say J. is rested and feels rejuvenated in order to continue going for the record, Whitehead would have told us so. But as he does not, he simply takes for granted that we will interpret it as having been caused by his shifting perspective. What allows Whitehead to assume that we will automatically read his body language as indicative of his thoughts and feelings is our prowess at reading the mind of others.

The author would not tell the readers explicitly about J.'s feelings through a narrator figure when J. could not spell it out on his own, as he intends his readers to fill the narrative gap by providing essential information. The author taps into the reader's ability to decipher J.'s behavior and demands individual judgment on J.'s inclination towards John Henry's story just as J. assess his myth. The author, therefore, imparts the idea of individualism not only within the novel's storyworld but also to the reader by making him/her evaluate the "truth" of John Henry's story just as J. Sutter is involved in doing the same. By taking a cognitive narratological approach to study the novel, we get narratological explication of Bell's observation that the aesthetics of Colson Whitehead seek in different ways to displace rather than complement and expand African American vernacular tropes of core black personal and collective identity with African America satirical tropes that privilege individualism. (*The Contemporary African*

American Novel, 303). Whitehead prompts the readers to make their own individual judgment of J. Sutter's inclination.

Metarepresenting J. Sutter's mental states reveal that he undergoes a process of not only believing in a larger cultural myth, but also associating it with the purpose and meaning of his life. The development of his perspective is characterized by uncertainties and self-evaluations one goes through while connecting with a historical myth, rather than by simply receiving it as a given cultural product. By doing so, Colson Whitehead makes J.'s experience more appealing to his contemporary readers, creative artists and writers like himself, who belong to the hip-hop generation or whose work qualifies as post-black or post-soul aesthetic. Reading the mind of his readers, both contemporary and future, Whitehead assumes them to feel generationally distanced from the pre-civil rights generation. By initially portraying J. Sutter as a self-involved, carefree journalist and then gradually making him trustworthy, the author makes J.'s journey relatable for the readers.

The reader, set to anticipate a continuation of attitudinal change in J., is again frustrated to know that J. is unable to find his purpose. He approaches the town and "whistles without recognition the tune he heard at dinner the night before" (152). The act of whistling without identifying its source would be read without a number of meaningful layers embedded into it if it is conceptualized without explicitly employing metarepresentation and mind reading skills. Firstly, we note that J. whistles the tune without tracing its source, i.e. without assigning it any agent (the singer) or the time tag ("the night before"). Secondly, the reader keeping track of the source of this tune, immediately remembers that it must be of the "Ballad of John Henry" sung by the local teenage singer, the one whom J. neglected at the dinner. Thirdly, lacking conscious awareness while receiving the tune of John Henry evidences the invasive nature of its folklore and the oblivious way by which people sometimes absorb the story of John Henry's story or song. It is infused unconsciously into their mental landscape. Fourthly, it is indicative of J.'s participation in the dissemination of the John Henry legend by receiving and

responding to one of its various modes. Lastly, such a reading shows the author's reliance on our and J.'s metarepresentational ability whereby the readers are prompted to recall and assign a source of the tune and the meaning of J.'s whistling without these details furnished by the narrator figure. The readers are thus drawn to participate in the myth-making process by furnishing information from their working memory. The readers' act of supplying subtle details syncs with the grand scheme of the novel, the nature of folklores, myths and legends the novel unfolds, and with the way it infuses into the minds and lives of the characters, whether or not one remains aware of it.

Just as the novel provides us with enough reasons to doubt the credibility of J. Sutter, it also provides us with situations where the reader would again be inclined to rely on him in showing journalistic zeal and ethics. In one of the flashbacks, we are told that J. was an ardent follower of the world affairs and was dedicated in his early journalistic endeavors. He previously used to work as an intern for *Downtown News* whose owner, the liquor magnate Reinhart Becker's authority and agency becomes questionable as he "had purchased the ailing *News* out of financial boredom, fiscal inertia, in order to expand his empire into the realm of the printed world" (170). Whitehead's convincing rendering of the manner in which J.'s enthusiasm and devotion are thwarted shows how some media personnel grows unconcerned and sensation-hungry when they work for already decayed profit-seeking systems. J. wanted to cover Eleanor Bumper's story, which according to him was "another example of a larger pattern of police attacks against the black community. Whitehead draws this from the real-life shooting of Eleanor Bumpurs. The narrative tells us that "Eleanor Bumpurs was a sixty-nine year old Afro-American woman who had been killed by the Emergency Services Unit as they try to evict her city-owned apartment" (173). Eleanor Bumpurs' story, as covered in the Metro section of the *Times*, reveals implicit racism, racial insecurity, and violence, which attracted J.'s attention. He thought these were real stories and was the kind of work he wanted to do. He realized that he had been "raised in a cocoon, programmed for achievement, but there was a

whole city out there that was unruly and didn't give a shit about plans" (175). He wanted to take his place in it; he felt a part of the Bumpers piece.

J. was supposed to attend a meeting with his boss, Metro editor, Winslow Kramer and the new editor in chief, Jimmy Banks on the Eleanor Bumpurs case. For the first time, the reader sees J. excited for a cause, preparing himself for the meeting by gathering all the information related to the case. But to the reader's annoyance, J. gets late for the meeting because his friend, Freddie had called him back upon his request to find a bar where they could meet and have some fun. When he reached, the meeting had already started and despite having great fervor to express, he intended not to speak unless addressed. The meeting ridiculously degenerated into finding a catchy headline, completely ignoring, and dissolving serious concerns. For instance, after engaging themselves in circuitous effete discussion, even when they came up with the idea of getting someone to write a sidebar over the weekend "to get the black angle", they suggested a professor at NYU, who they initially thought is black, but was not. In a desperate search for the next black person, Jimmy Banks notices J. and asks his name. He replied that he was an intern and was asked to come to the meeting in case they needed to know anything about the piece. Banks said "Intern," and nodded and looked down at his desk. He probably lost interest and said, "It's probably too late for a sidebar anyway." He nodded some more and then abandoned his thought saying, "Everybody put your thinking caps on or else it's Bloodbath on 174th Street." And this is how the headline was finalized.

In bringing a real life incident of Eleanor Bumpurs case and by depicting the way headlines and news reports take devious shape; Whitehead brings to attention the incongruity between events and the act of reporting these events. The case echoes with several incidences of police brutality with African Americans, including the most recent shooting of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin and the chokehold of Eric Garner. Public outrage erupts from the way sometimes information, news and stories inappropriately take shape through journalists and media. This happens especially as an outcome of trials, indictments, decline of

indictments and cases fought in courts of justice. The judging authorities and juries navigate their way through a collision of stories and many versions of incidents, where so much depends on who said what and when. Our metarepresentation and mind reading has a prominent bearing on legal narratives, where factual details such as who did what to whom when, where and why are influenced and sometimes manipulated by who said what to whom, when, where and why.

3.8 J. Sutter, Pamela Street, and John Henry: An Unlikely Bond and a Vital Link:

J. Sutter's opinion evolves significantly with his newfound attraction and relation with Pamela Street, who gives him certain crucial pieces of information regarding John Henry and about her father's obsession with him. J. Sutter and Pamela Street exercise their mind reading ability by "concocting" stories in their minds about each other when they meet at Herb's Country Style. J. conveys his doubt to her: "I thought John Henry was made up but these people really take him seriously." Pamela reacts by saying that the ballads mention the Big Bend Tunnel in Talcott and the songs identify the C & O Railroad too: "So it fits that it comes from a true story". When J. is skeptical of the reality of the race, Pamela informs him about the two books on the contest and that his father had the first editions. She tells them that two folklorists – Louis Chappell and Guy Johnson – came down in the twenties or thirties to interview people around here and find out if he really lived or not. Some told them he did live, while some said he did not. Some of the people who worked in the tunnel said they witnessed the race, some said it never happened. Most of the people died, so many stories circulating were secondhand anyway. According to Pamela, one of the writers, the white man, Chappell, believed that the contest happened, and the black man, Guy Johnson thought there was not enough proof. They interviewed the same people, a year or two apart and got different stories from them. She added that Talcott and Hinton obviously think he existed and his father thought the same.

During their conversation with each other, we see Pamela suspicious of J.'s intentions. J. too suspects John Henry's story by asking questions like "Can a man actually beat a steam drill?" Pamela's answer overturns the superhuman aura surrounding the legendary qualities of John Henry; and through her narrative, the readers begin seeing him as a common man. She says that the first mechanical drills were not that efficient and kept breaking down; a very strong steel-driver probably could beat one. Her account also reveals how factual details are erased from history as we receive it. The two professors tried to find the employment records for the C & O in this region but were told they had been burned in a fire. By the end of this conversation and of the novel, both J. and Pamela connect with each other and arrive at an increased understanding of John Henry and his stories when they eventually walk to John Henry's probable burial place to bury her father's ashes.

The novel persistently leads us to sway our inclination towards either of the two divergent attitudes of J. Sutter. This plays an important role in our interpretation of not only J.'s professional integrity but also the meaning of the John Henry myth amid its commoditized representations. The novel keeps open for the readers, until its very end, the two dispositions we would like to attribute to J. Sutter as we find him on the verge of taking a decisive step. After the completion of John Henry Days Festival, J. stands in the parking lot of his motel pondering whether to go back to New York with Pamela on an earlier flight or to continue pursuing his run for the record. He contemplates: "He had put on paper some of the things she had said the day before but now he thought what happened today was the real story. It is not the kind of things he usually writes. It is not puff. It is not for the website. He does not know who would take it. The dirt (where they buried the urn of Pamela's father) had not given him any receipts to be reimbursed. He does not even know if it is a story. He only knows it is worth telling" (387). Among others, Whitehead leaves unanswered the question of whether Sutter breaks the junketeers record or leaves with Pamela to start a meaningful life.

3.9 The Novel's Open Ending:

My interpretation of the novel's open ending, by overtly applying metarepresentation and the Theory of Mind, leads me to infer that J. Sutter opts to go with Pamela Street instead of going for the record. The cognitive narratological approach to study the character portrayal of J. Sutter allowed me to formulate this predictable conviction. J. has changed his opinion not by having an uninformed belief in the story but through the process of believing, disbelieving, doubting, adapting, adding, modifying and embedding varying aspects of John Henry's story and thereby deeming it to be worth telling. Thus, J. Sutter comes to this conclusion from a much higher and developed perspective than that of a naïve believer. Such a process gives life to the myth and adds meaning to the lives of people who influence it and are influenced by it. My interpretation differs from that of other scholars such as Maus and Selzer in having an informed, well-deduced belief. The prediction, with a possibility of being mistaken[12], is based on the knowledge that just as I had kept track of J.'s mental states, J. too will keep a track of his hard-earned knowledge: "He only knows it (John Henry's story) is worth telling" and that he will lead his work and life from this disposition of belief, irrespective of whether he goes on for the record or with Pamela Street.

The novel, by exemplifying an understanding of the functioning of our minds, offers a critique of the limiting notions of agency, authority, and authenticity by questioning them. The novel as a work of fiction is itself a metarepresentation with source tags pointing to the author. As Zunshine says, envisioning a much more intricate system of degrees of metarepresentational framing that would raise far-reaching inquiries into the ways cognition structures and is in turn structured by culture. The reader, assuming Whitehead's agency as an author on all the representations he comes across in the reading of the novel would also assume him to reveal whether J. stays or goes. However, Whitehead adeptly evades self-assignation of authority in not revealing the last act of J. Sutter and by leaving the novel open ended in this respect. The ultimate source of all the representations we have been trying to trace in this novel is the author, i. e.

the "meta" part, the source tag[13]. And he denies himself to be the source of our interpretations through the novel's open end by prompting us to make our own predictions of J. Sutter's decisions and future actions. Had Whitehead told us explicitly what J. does in the end, it would have been like closing and sealing J.'s destiny and claiming his own authority on it but he lets the reader predict on his own and thus allows him to be the authority on his interpretations. Bernard W. Bell's socio-cultural study on the narrative experimentation in the works of Colson Whitehead, therefore, finds substantiation with a cognitive approach to his narrative adroitness.

3.10 Metarepresentation, Bricolage, Encyclopedic Fiction, and Historiographic Metafiction:

The depiction of appropriation, alteration, and possible rejuvenation of the John Henry legend over the course of two centuries allows Derek C. Maus to call the novel a historiographic metamyth. For Maus, Whitehead's comments suggest the categorization of the novel as an encyclopedic narrative or as a bricolage. He further adds that transcending the boundaries of these two approaches also requires an additional kaleidoscopic perspective. Seeing how the chapters focused on John Henry story, on J. Sutter and about various characters play and interact involves looking not just at the constituent parts or the resulting whole but also at the way in which the parts are juxtaposed with one another to make up the whole, which is an inherently metafictional mode of reading. Maus's interpretation finds supplementation in the reading this chapter offers in following the novel's mental and public representations intently in order to pave our way through the interwoven routes of the novel's encyclopedic or kaleidoscopic narrative.

While defining the narrative of authenticity operating in hip-hop discourse, Michael Eric Dyson says that it pivots around multiple centers. He says, "Authenticity becomes a node through which flows arguments about who is capable, or not, of legitimately interpreting a culture—and, therefore, participating in its most esoteric goings-on" ("An Interview with Michael Eric

Dyson", 787). Our metarepresentational and mind reading ability although enables us to deem or assign a source to our representations and authenticate it, it is this very ability which allows us to question it too. The novel thus evokes a constant monitoring of sources and content of representations in the form of stories, songs, and ballads. By doing so, the novel calls us to reconsider our reductive approach towards the notion of agency, authority, and representation of reality. It encourages us to experience the world where stories occupy both the subject and the object position because the modes which we engage in representing our interactions simultaneously shapes and affects those interactions.

Notes:

1. David Herman in his book, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2002), defines storyworlds as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate – or make a deictic shift – as they work to comprehend a narrative" (9). Herman uses the term to refer to the world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly by a narrative.
2. John Henry is an African-American folk hero. He was a slave who worked on the C&O (Chesapeake & Ohio) Railroad in the 1870s. Factual events coupled with lore makes it hard to derive any definitive knowledge about him and his life. His story has passed on in the form of classic songs, ballads and represented in many stories, plays, novels, and films. Moreover, in Whitehead's *John Henry* "there's the question of whether John Henry existed or not" (" Colson Whitehead", 77). This novel intertwines the fictive with the historic accounts by including the story of some real life people whose lives had intersected with the story of John Henry. Some of these characters include the University of North Carolina folklorist and social anthropologist, Guy Benton Johnson who conducted his research on John Henry in the late 1920s and African American actor and singer Paul Robeson who performed the role of John Henry in a Broadway musical version of his story in 1940.
3. *John Henry Days* celebrates the legend of the Steel Drivin' Man. "This festival includes three days of crafts, free music, a parade, car show, water events and many other fun activities" (John Henry Days Festival, http://visitwv.com/company/john-henry-days-festival/). The festival is celebrated in Talcott, WV at the John Henry Memorial Park. In 1996, the U.S. Post Office issued a commemorative series of four stamps focused on American folk heroes – Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, Casey at the Bat, and John Henry. Besides John Henry, the other three folk heroes are also mentioned in the novel (for example, in a conversation between two postal employees).

4. The study of human evolution is integral to the study of literature and vice versa because narrative is a product of mind, which has evolved over ages. Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, an evolutionary psychologist, and a Research Associate at the University of Oregon Institute of Cognitive and Decision Sciences focuses on cognitive adaptations for cultural transmission, with an emphasis on narrative. In her article, "Narrative Theory and Function: Why Evolution Matters" she says that the reasons for this strange proposition are twofold: "Firstly, the practice of storytelling is ancient, pre-dating not only the advent of writing, but of agriculture and permanent settlement as well. Secondly, narrative is ultimately a product of the mind, which in turn is the product of a long history of evolution by natural selection. Thus, an understanding of why and how humans create and consume narrative requires an understanding of (1) features of ancestral environments and (2) features of the mind that made the emergence of this phenomenon possible" (233). She further opines, "The universality of narrative is further testimony to its being an ancient cognitive phenomenon. Literate or not, all known cultures, past and present, practice storytelling" (234).
5. In response to Brian Boyd's review of her book, *Why We Read Fiction*, Lisa Zunshine in her article clarifies that her book "makes a case for admitting the recent findings of cognitive psychologists into literary studies by showing how their research into the ability to explain behavior in terms of the underlying states of mind can furnish us with a series of surprising insights into our interaction with literary texts" ("Fiction and Theory of Mind: An Exchange", 189). She further states that her study draws on the already well-established as well as forthcoming work of numerous cognitive scientists (including Simon Baron-Cohen, Clark H. Barrett, Richard Byrne and Andrew Whiten, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, Christopher Frith, Uta Frith, Paul Bloom, Susan Carey and Elizabeth Spelke, Peter Carruthers, Andy Clark, Antonio Damasio, Daniel Dennett, Alison Gopnik, Francesca Happe, Paul Harris, Lawrence Hirschfeld, Stanley Klein, Alan Leslie, Andrew Meltzoff, Robert Mitchell, Keith Oatley, Gloria Origgi, Oliver Sacks, Dan Sperber, James Stiller, and Endel Tulving) ("Fiction and Theory of Mind: An Exchange", 189-190).
6. All these examples may appear so obvious and it is here that Zunshine crucially asks and then answers as to why we need "this newfangled concept of mind-reading, or ToM, to explain what appears so obvious". She says, "Our ability to interpret the behavior of people in terms of their underlying states of mind seems to be such an integral part of what we are as human beings that we could be understandably reluctant to dignify it with fancy terms and elevate it into a separate object of study. One reason that ToM has received the sustained attention of cognitive psychologists over the last twenty years is that they have come across people whose ability to "see bodies as animated by minds" is drastically impaired—people with autism. By studying autism and a related constellation of cognitive deficits (such as Asperger syndrome), cognitive scientists began

to appreciate our mind-reading ability as a special cognitive endowment, structuring our everyday communication and cultural representations" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 7). She further points out that "cognitive anthropologists are increasingly aware that our ability to attribute states of mind to ourselves and other people is intensely context dependent. That is, it is supported not by one uniform cognitive adaptation but by a large cluster of specialized adaptations geared toward a variety of social contexts. Given this new emphasis on context sensitive specialization and the fact that Theory of Mind appears to be our key cognitive endowment as a *social* species, it is difficult to imagine a field of study within the social sciences and the humanities that would not be affected by this research in the coming decades" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 8).

7. Here I presume peoples' remembrance and forgetfulness of folktales as depicted in the novel in terms of a combination of semantic and episodic memories. According to Zunshine, "the concept of metarepresentationality begins to figure in psychologists' discussion of the difference between our episodic memories (i.e., memories tied to specific learning episodes or experiences) as compared with semantic memories (i.e., general knowledge not tied to specific learning experience). It has been suggested, "Episodic memories are stored and retrieved via metarepresentations." That is, such memories retain the time-, place-, or agent-specifying source tags and as such are stored as events that have been "experienced by the self at a particular and unique space in time . . , with conscious awareness that 'this happened to me.'" She further says that by contrast, semantic memories are representations that are stored without the source tag. She quotes Klein et al. (2002): "Semantic memory . . . enables a person to have culturally shared knowledge, including word meanings and facts about the world, without having to recollect specific experiences on which that knowledge was based (e.g. knowing that Sacramento is the capital of California)" (491). With this, I presume that a story or a folktale pertaining to a folk hero like John Henry is a play between episodic and semantic memories. Over time, people forget certain sources and parts of contents of representations; in other words, time-, place-, or agent-specifying source tags get erased and the content is modified too. The John Henry Days festival becomes a mega-metarepresentation (including numerous representations of John Henry and the events related to his life in the forms of artifacts ranging from the postage stamp to the enactment of the race with the machine on the last day of the festival) where people are served with the culturally shared knowledge pertaining to John Henry.
8. Jonathan Franzen says, "like its great-uncle *Ulysses* and its great-grandfather *Moby-Dick*, *John Henry Days* has encyclopedic aspirations". Derek C. Maus in his book, *Understanding Colson Whitehead* (perhaps the only book out in the market written entirely on Whitehead and his works) notes that such comparisons were generally intended to praise Whitehead's talent, although the *New Republic*'s James Wood also asserted that Whitehead "lacks the composure of DeLillo's often

distinguished prose." "Whether his reviewers intend to praise or to denigrate him," Maus explains how "they also limit – perhaps unintentionally – the implications of Whitehead's work by associating it too closely with existing models and literary predecessors" (37).

9. It becomes important to note here the personal choice of the author regarding the representation of history in the novel. Although the novel includes an array of real-life historical figures and events, when asked in an interview how he began writing the novel, Colson Whitehead mentions that the book started of conceptually; he was not sure how to write about John Henry though he knew he did not want to do a historical novel. When asked for the reason behind this, he simply says, "It just didn't appeal to me. I wanted to do something where I could talk about modern pop culture. *The Intuitionist* had no pop culture references at all. From being a TV critic and a cultural critic, it felt like an obsession for me. With John Henry I got my history jones out by having chapters that take place in different time periods" ("Colson Whitehead", 76).
10. "A number of neurological deficits, such as autism and schizophrenia, have been linked to the failure of metarepresentational capacity" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 54).
11. "Whitehead, who is 31, first encountered the John Henry story back in the mid-1970's, as an elementary-school student in Manhattan. "It was kind of the start of multicultural education, and one day the teacher showed us a cartoon about Henry." He was immediately fascinated, he says, "by the idea of this black superhero. I hadn't seen that before." As he grew older, he became acquainted with various renditions of the ballad -- he particularly relishes the clank-filled Johnny Cash version -- and decided that, one day, he would write about Henry (whose actual existence is debated by scholars)" ("Tunnel Vision").
12. Zunshine in her book elaborates upon "our partial failures to keep track of some of the sources of our representations as part of the normal functioning of the metarepresenting brain" (58). By saying, "normal" in this context, she means, "to contrast it both with the sustained, pathological pattern of such failures typical for schizophrenic patients and with the deliberately planned and carefully highlighted instances of such failures in the works of fiction" (58). She further clarifies if one may ask why we should posit our metarepresentational ability and our Theory of Mind as a special cognitive adaptation when we are routinely unsure about the sources of our representations and when in fact, we routinely misread, misinterpret, and misrepresent other people's states of mind by bringing in Ellen Spolsky's insights ("Iconotropism"; *Satisfying Skepticism*, 7; "Darwin and Derrida," 52). She says, "both the metarepresentational ability and the Theory of Mind are not "perfect" in some abstract, context-independent sense. Instead, they are "good enough" for our everyday functioning: however imperfect and fallible, they still get us through yet another day of social interactions" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 59).

13. According to Zunshine, "the "meta" part of the representation, that little "tag" that specifies the source of information (i.e., "it was Eve who told me that . . .") is what prevents the representation from circulating freely within our cognitive system, whose outputs are inputs to others." Instead of being available to *all* of our stores of knowledge and prompting us to adjust our behavior in numerous ways, some of which could be harmful to us, that information is stored in what Cosmides and Tooby call a "suppositional" format and is thus available to a very selective set of cognitive databases, many of them having to do with the source of information" (*Why We Read Fiction*, 50-51)

Chapter 4

"Pierce the veil": Narrative Perspective Creating the New Black Aesthetic in *Apex Hides the Hurt*

4.1 Introduction:

In Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006), a nomenclature consultant, who is the unnamed protagonist of the novel, is called in to decide a suitable new name for the town of Winthrop. The novel is mostly focalized (the events are seen or perceived[1]) through the protagonist, but it also intermittently presents the different point of views of the three members of the town's Council and that of a few other inhabitants. Among the town's Council, the resident software millionaire, Lucky Aberdeen wants to change the town's name to New Prospera reflecting its commercial growth; the mayor, Regina Goode wants to give back its old name, Freedom according to the original choice of the town's founding black settlers and her ancestors; and Albie Winthrop, the son of the town's aristocracy does not want to change the name at all. This chapter studies the role played by shifting modes of perspectives[2] in bringing out the opinions of various characters and in creating New Black Aesthetic (Trey Ellis, Bernard W. Bell). An evaluation of different viewpoints makes the protagonist change his initial choice of naming the town as New Prospera and ultimately helps in shaping his own opinion to choose the name, "Struggle" given by one of the founding black settlers but ignored and forgotten in history. The chapter's theoretical framework interacts with Gérard Genette's formulation of focalization and Mieke Bal's concept of focalizer and focalized to present the process of protagonist's decision-making amid the conflicting opinions. These opinions are not only of other characters but also of himself where on one hand he thinks that names cannot "change the character of the place" and on the other hand he believes that names bring us "an inch closer to the truth". Such a narratological approach built on the aspect of

perspective also helps examine the novel as part of an aesthetic movement in literature called New Black Aesthetic (Trey Ellis and Bernard W. Bell) wherein authors like Colson Whitehead construct double consciousness of their characters through narrative experimentation.

4.2 Explicating focalization in brief:

Gérard Genette elucidated the distinction between voice and mood[3], between narration and focalization by raising two questions, namely Who speaks and Who sees? In an often cited statement, he said, "most of the theoretical works on this subject [perspective] . . . suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*" (*Narrative Discourse*, 186). This difference can be elaborated by saying that the narrator tells the story but the events and situations are presented from a specific perspective, a point of view called 'focalization' by Genette, which may or may not belong to the narrator. And as Manfred Jahn warns us, one has to be careful not to take Genette's question too literally. According to Jahn, "*Who sees?* aims at identifying a reflector", while "Who speaks? is interested in pinpointing the utterer of the narrative discourse, that is, the narrator" ("Focalization" in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 97). Although Genette calls his theorization as a mere reformulation of the traditional "point of view", he leans more towards Todorovian information based model, describing focalization in terms of knowledge and information.

Based on the gradable feature of "restriction of narrative information", Genette differentiates zero focalization, internal focalization and external focalization in the following manner. "The first term corresponds to what English-language criticism calls the narrative with omniscient narrator and Pouillon calls "vision from behind," and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula *Narrator* > *Character* (where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly *says* more than any of the characters knows). In the second term, *Narrator* =

Character (the narrator says only what a given character knows); this is the narrative with "point of view" after Lubbock, or with "restricted field" after Blin; Pouillon calls it "vision with." In the third term, *Narrator* < *Character* (the narrator says less than the character knows); this is the "objective" or "behaviorist" narrative, what Pouillon calls "vision from without" (*Narrative Discourse*, 188-189). Genette further categorized the second type, i.e. narrative with internal focalization, into three types: "(a) *fixed* – canonical example: *The Ambassadors*, where everything passes through Strether; or even better, *What Messie Knew*, where we almost never leave the point of view of the little girl, whose "restriction of field" is particularly dramatic in this story of adults, a story whose significance escapes her; (b) *variable* – as in *Madam Bovary*, where the focal character is first Charles, then Emma, then again Charles; or, in a much more rapid or elusive way, as with Stendhal; or (c) *multiple* – as in epistolary novels, where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several letter-writing characters" (189-190). As Genette's theory and the neologism of focalization distinguish between narrative agency and visual mediation, many narratologists widely adopted it and some have contributed additions and refinements. This chapter does not provide an exhaustive study/description of various improvisations on focalization theory and the debates it has generated, but briefly tries to bring to attention some key reconceptualizations, which are pertinent to the present discussion and support the argument of the chapter. Therefore, keeping in view the aim of the chapter ,which is to find that to what extent focalization can address some of the issues emerging from the novel, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, in terms of New Black Aesthetic, it would suffice to mention that Mieke Bal's reconceptualization of Genette's typology in terms of focalizing subjects and focalized objects strongly influenced post-Genettean focalization theory.

Mieke Bal makes an important observation in Genette's typology. She comments: "Referring here to Georges Blin's restrictions of field, Genette distinguished the narrative whose narrator is traditionally called omniscient (the narrator who knows, if not "everything," at least more than the character knows)

from the narrative whose narrator knows only what a given character knows. This character, "from whom" the narrative is recounted, is the "focalized character." The third type of narrative, however, the narrative with external focalization, is distinguished from the second by a wholly different principle of classification. Now we are no longer dealing with a restriction, but with an inversion of functions. In the narrative with external focalization, characters also are focalized, but they are focalized from without. That means that the narrative's center of interest is a character (as it is with internal focalization), but its development is seen only from the outside" (*Narrative Theory*, 269). In other words, in narrative with internal focalization, the "focalized" character *sees* and in a narrative with external focalization, s/he does not see, s/he *is seen*. Mieke Bal thus gives a significant insight by differentiating between subject and object of focalization, i.e. the focalizer and the focalized.

Narration and focalization garner both overlapping and conflicting opinion in perspective or point of view studies. Genette in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* accepts that his only regret is that in questioning, "*who sees?*" he used "a purely visual, and hence overly narrow, formulation" and thus replaces it with the broader question of "*who perceives?*" (*Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 64). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan has argued for a further widening of the scope. Along with the perceptual facet, she adds the psychological facet to focalization whose determining components are the cognitive and emotive orientation of the focalizer towards the focalized (*Narrative Fiction*, 81). The cognitive component consists of knowledge, conjecture, belief, memory. In its emotive transformation, she says, "the 'external/internal' opposition yields 'objective' (neutral, uninvolved) v. 'subjective' (coloured, involved) focalization" (82). In this regard, Shlomith Rimmon makes an important observation that narrator can also betray some personal "point of view" which is true in the case of the narrator of *Apex Hides the Hurt*. She comments: "Obviously, a person (and, by analogy, a narrative agent) is capable of both speaking and seeing and even of doing things at the same time – a state of affairs which facilitates the confusion between the two activities. Moreover, it is almost impossible to speak without betraying some

personal "point of view", if only through the very language used. But a person (and, by analogy, a narrative agent) is also capable of undertaking to tell what another person sees or has seen. Thus, speaking and seeing, narration and focalization, may, but need not, be attributed to the same agent. The distinction between the two activities is a theoretical necessity, and only on its basis can the interrelations between them be studied with precision" (*Narrative Fiction*, 74). By narrative perspective, this chapter refers to opinioned information, given by an agent (a character or a narrator), which reflects and/or is influenced by his/her spatiotemporal location in the text as well as by his/her views, beliefs, values, desires etc.

It should be noted that a single type of focalization do not necessarily extend over the whole length of a narrative and as Genette points out, it may be restricted to "a definitive narrative section, which can be very short" (Narrative Discourse, 191). By studying the varying mode of narrative perspective in the novel, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, the aim of this chapter is to bring forth these interrelations between the two activities i.e. between narration and focalization and the agents behind them so as to understand narratologically why scholars like Trey Ellis and Bernard W. Bell consider the works of Colson Whitehead as part of New Black Aesthetic. Let us see how Ellis and Bell conceptualize New Black Aesthetic.

4.3 Conceptualizing New Black Aesthetic:

Trey Ellis who is a novelist, screenwriter, and Associate Professor at Columbia University explains this artistic movement in his essay titled "The New Black Aesthetic" in the following manner: "Just as a genetic mulatto is a black person of mixed parents who often can get along fine with his white grandparents, a cultural mulatto, educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world. And it is by and large this rapidly growing group of cultural mulattoes that fuels the NBA. We no longer need to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please

either white people or black" (235). He further writes that many "members of the NBA are the children of Civil Rights workers or black Nationalists, and we have inherited from our parents what Village Voice critic Greg Tate, 30, calls a "postliberated aesthetic." . . . Yet ironically, a telltale sign of the work of the NBA is our parodying of the black nationalist movement" (236). Ellis explains that "Like any new movement of artists and like most people in their mid twenties, part of the process of stamping our own adult identities includes rebelling against our parents; cautioning ourselves against their pitfalls" (237). Nevertheless, Ellis continues that avant-garde novelists like Ishmael Reed, Clarence Major, Toni Morrison . . . all helped forge our current aesthetic. Stripping themselves of both white envy and self-hate they (the NBA artists) produced super sophisticated black art that either expanded or exploded the old definitions of blackness, showing us as the intricate, uncategorizeable folks we had always known ourselves to be" ("The New Black Aesthetic", 237).

Considering Colson Whitehead, among a few others, as a New Black Aesthetic writer, Bernard W. Bell in his book, *The Contemporary African American Novel*, writes that demographic shifts in the Unites States "explain in part the recent popularity of discourses on multiculturalism as well as of the stylistic and structural experimentation in narratives with magical realism and postmodernism" ("The New Black Aesthetic", 301). In this light, Bell comments that "The shifting cyclical pattern of residual, emerging, and dominant aesthetic movements in literature continues among some artists and cultural workers in the twenty-first century as a New Black Aesthetic (NBA) that stresses racial, class, gender, and sexually transgressive hybridity and multiculturalism" (302-303). He further elaborates:

> "Assuming that African American literature is fundamentally a socially symbolic linguistic construct, I find that the aesthetics of Charles Johnson, Nathaniel Mackey, Trey Ellis, Percival Everett, and Colson Whitehead seek in different ways to displace rather than complement and expand African American proletarian and vernacular tropes of core black

> personal and collective identity with African American middle-class satirical tropes that privilege individualism and indeterminate multiculturalism and sexuality" (303).

The present study also finds out how this "difference in the struggle for authenticity, authority, and agency in the post-1983 narratives" pointed out by Bell, manifests narratologically in this novel of Colson Whitehead. And in order to explore how this novel creates individualism, multiculturalism and hybridized identity (Bell, 304); this chapter begins with a study of the novel's modes of focalization and structure.

4.4 Focalization and issues of agency, authority, and authenticity in *Apex Hides the Hurt*:

In the beginning, the novel is told in the third person from the point of view of the protagonist or we can say that it is told by a hetero-extradiegetic narrator (i.e. a narrator who is not a character in the story) with internal focalization focalizing the protagonist. In other words, the novel begins with third person narrative voice of a heterodiegetic narrator[4] (i.e. a narrator who is not a character in the story) who focalizes the protagonist. Later the novel adopts external focalization, yielding the floor to the other characters, i.e. the three members of the town's council, and a few other inhabitants of the town. Towards the end of the novel, internal focalization is resumed again where the protagonist is shown evaluating different point of views of these characters. The shifts and transgressions of characters' perspective at certain places give some useful insights to study the novel in creating individualism while exploring authenticity and agency.

The first sentence of the novel: "He came up with the names" (*Apex Hides the Hurt*, 3) indicates that the protagonist functions as a "reflector"[5] – that is, a center of consciousness through whom situations and events told about by a heterodiegetic narrator are refracted. Accordingly, although the narrator remains a distinct entity from the protagonist, the narration is filtered through the

protagonist's vantage point as he experiences events over the course of the novel. Such a mode of focalization is not consistent and every now and then we get the narrator's perspective or, in the words of Shlomith Rimmon, "betrayal of some personal 'point of view'". This is evident from the next sentences of the novel: "They were good times. He came up with the names and like any good parent he knocked them around to teach them life lessons" (3). The fact that the protagonist finds new names and plays with them is told by the narrator as objectively as he/she could but we do find the narrator's subjective focalization on the protagonist when he/she speaks of the manner in which "he knocked the words around": "like any good parent". The inference that the protagonist did this "like any good parent" could only be drawn by the narrator and not the protagonist himself at this point (the very beginning of the novel), as the reader has not been introduced to the protagonist yet without the narrator's mediation. Thus, here the narrator gives a personal point of view through a simile. Such personal opinions of the narrator are mostly reserved for the protagonist.

The next couple of passages concern the protagonist's perceptions of immediate situations, memories of past events, and inferences about his mental states; all told by this heterodiegetic narrator. Shortly after this, we find a further transgression in the following lines in which the narrator is appreciating the protagonist's professional efficiency:

> "They were good times. He was an expert in his field. Some might say a rose by any other name but he didn't go in for that kind of crap. That was crazy talk. Bad for business, bad for morale. A rose by any other name would wilt fast, smell like bitter almonds, God help you if the thorns broke the skin" (*Apex Hides the Hurt*, 5).

These lines give the reader an indication of the protagonist's belief regarding the names of things and the meaning people attach to them. In the second and third sentences: "He was an expert in his field. Some might say a rose by any other name but he didn't go in for that kind of crap" the use of third person pronoun "he", clearly shows that the narrator is just relating the protagonist's view. But the

absence of this pronoun in the next sentences: “That was crazy talk. Bad for business, bad for morale. A rose by any other name would wilt fast, smell like bitter almonds” comes across as if the narrator, speaking on behalf of the protagonist adopts (and by default, agrees with) his views. Bal’s observation could be applied here and it could be said that in these lines the focalizing has a marked resemblance to a "transposed view," and through analogy with "transposed speech," like free indirect discourse in which the narrator takes on the speech of the character (*Narrative Theory*, 280-281). Bal’s own words will help explicate what happens when a speech and a view are transposed: “In transposed speech the narrator takes on the speech of the character, adhering to it as closely as possible without effecting a change in level; in transposed focalizing, the focalizer assumes the character's view but without thereby yielding the focalizing. . . such speech is nothing other than narrating at its most mimetic” (*Narrative Theory*, 280-281). Put simply, the narrator starts the narration by telling a character’s views and then the narration transitions into telling it as if those views are of the narrator him/herself. This leaves the narration ambiguous for the reader as it becomes hard to decipher where the character’s views end and the narrator’s begin or whether the opinions belong to the character or the narrator. In the quoted lines, the narrator takes on both the inner speech of the protagonist and his view (and thereby making it his own) and delivers it to the reader by addressing him directly with second person pronoun “you” in the line: “God help you if the thorns broke the skin”. This adoption of view indicates at the very beginning of the novel, the narrator’s allegiance with the protagonist. By making the narrator directly address the reader with a “you”, the protagonist’s authority on naming things finds access from the mimetic or from the level of the story to the diegetic and even to the extradiegetic level, that of the readers.

Further, the narrative bestows privilege on the protagonist, as he becomes the focalized object (in the first degree) and a focalizer (in the second degree, i.e. at the level of hypostory). During a telephonic conversation with Roger Tipple, the protagonist’s boss, who calls him to take a new job offered by a client to decide a new name for a town, we are told that the protagonist “could almost see

the green walls of the office as Roger spoke" (7). Further, as he makes his journey to this town, the narrative filters through both, the physical eyes and the internal or the mind's eyes of the protagonist:

> "The ride was another hour and a half but he didn't mind. He thought about his retainer, which he had deposited that morning. It occurred to him that it was an out-of-state check and would take a few days to clear. Through the window he watched elephants stampede across the sky" (8-9).

Phrases like "he didn't mind", "he thought", and "it occurred to him" establishes the bond between the narrator and the protagonist showing the narrator's awareness of the protagonist's mental state. And the phrase "through the window he watched" shows that the narrator focalizes with the protagonist and sees and narrates what he sees. Even when we get a peek into the mental states of other characters, it is via the protagonist's perspective, for example by a tag "he gathered" in the following lines- "Lucky said, "This is a unique town." Lucky chuckled and Regina tightened her fingers. They were trying to stick to the script, he gathered" (16). In other words, inferences about others' mental states and dispositions are drawn by the protagonist and not by the narrator or the characters themselves. In addition, other characters are externally focalized, i.e. we only get to know how they are acting (Lucky chuckled and Regina tightened her fingers) and not what they are thinking or feeling. Since most of the events are seen from the protagonist's perspective, and no other character is being granted this much privilege, the narration provides the reader with a narratological emphasis on the protagonist. The narrator's choice when and how to describe or relate events through the protagonist's point of view could be seen as another way of providing the protagonist with the authority, agency, and authenticity of drawing conclusions regarding what other characters might be experiencing.

Later in the novel, this characteristic of the protagonist comes into full play when he draws up situations and scenarios from the past, imaginatively thinking of what it would have been like for the town's first black settlers, Goode and Field to have come to this town and call it Freedom. Before the protagonist contemplates what happened way back in history, we find Regina Goode, the

town's mayor, speculating out loud to the protagonist about why Goode and Field would have chosen the name Freedom and what would have led them to give up that name when Winthrop came to the town. Thinking aloud, she says:

> "Winthrop comes to town, he has the resources to build that thing. Most important he is white. What are Goode and Field going to say? They didn't have a choice, did they? Back then. What could they do? They lose this land, this land is what they are at that point. They lose that, they lose themselves. He's not threatening them, Winthrop. But he wouldn't have to say it. They did what they had to do. Give up their names for their lives – was that a little thing or a big thing after all they'd been through?" . . . "Well, I have a choice. And I choose the truth" (116).

She further relates to the protagonist what she speculates:

> "Sometimes when I have a hard day and I'm too tired to leave the office and I just want to put my head on my desk, I think about how they got here. In their wagons, all that way from the plantations that had been their homes. Places of degradation and death. So I get my ass out of my office because I have a house that is my own and that's what they fought for, why they came all this way. They didn't know where they were headed when they started or that they'd end up here, all they knew was what they had: Freedom. Which was a kind of home that they carried inside them, if you think about it. When they finally arrived here and looked around, what was the word that came to their lips? What was the only thing they can think of when they see this place they have chosen? The word on their lips?" (116-117).

Imaginative projections by Regina Goode and the protagonist calls upon hypothetical focalization, a mode of focalization theorized by David Herman. In this regard, Herman says, "At issue are narratives whose interpretation provokes, in a more or less direct or explicit way, speculation about some non-existent focalizor. At issue, too, are narratives that prompt speculation about focalizing activity that someone who actually exists in the storyworld may or may not have performed. In other words, some narratives are focalized such that recipients gain, as it were, illicit access to the aspects of the storyworld – aspects not, in fact, focalized, or not focalizable even in principle, from the perspective encoded as the actual vantage point for narration.[6] Such narratives modalize, or rather virtualize, their own representation of events into counterfactual belief contexts – that is, (sets of) possible worlds or candidate mental models – in which the events might

be represented as such" (*Story Logic*, 309-310). Garnering these pieces of information, the protagonist uses his own imagination to perceive and experience what Goode and Field and the other black settlers must have experienced. But initially the protagonist's imagination is influenced by his own opinion to call the town New Prospera and he conjectures how Goode would have responded to this name said and how his audience would have reacted:

> "He snickered, mulling over what Goode and Field would do in this situation. The Light and the Dark. Goode announces in preacherly tones, "We are Americans and the bounty of American promise is our due. It is what we worked for, it is what we died for, and we call it New Prospera." The audience moving their heads in solemn amen and hope. To that sweet music" (177-178).

Then he thinks of what Field would have said:

> "He pictured Field, but the vision was dimmer. He saw a lone figure, withdrawing into shadow after delivering a grim, pithy "Where you sit is where you stand." And really, what the hell were people supposed to extract from that?" (178).

Such speculations or hypothetically focalizing the perspectives of Goode and Field eventually makes the protagonist familiar with their different natures and approaches not only to name the town but also to deal with the whites. And we are told that "Even before he discovered the discrepancy, he had decided that Field hadn't voted to change the name to Winthrop. It wasn't in the man's nature" (197). This he does, in a manner of conjuring up history, especially by speculating around those facts/events which didn't find place in Gertrude Sander's, 'The History of the Town of Winthrop', the book which omitted the fact that on the day of voting for the town's name, out of the three members of the town's council, i.e. Goode, Field and Winthrop the Elder, Field was not even present. It is Regina Goode who later informs the protagonist that Field was absent on the day of voting and that he had proposed the name, 'Struggle' for the town.

Through the protagonist's perspective, the readers gain, in the words of David Herman, "illicit access to the aspects of the storyworld", the point of views of Goode and Field, who are non-existant focalizers. We are informed:

> "He'd been trying to get into the heads of those two men, but was having a hard time. They lived in a completely different context. What did a slave know that we didn't? To give yourself a name is power. They will try to give you a name and tell you what you are and try to make you something else, and that is slavery. And to say, I Am This – that was freedom. He imagined the vote again" (206).

Hypothetical focalization thus serves a crucial purpose not only for the characters within the storyworld but also for the author and the readers of the novel. Because it is through this process, that the protagonist gains some authority in: (1) gaining access to and understanding Goode and Field's viewpoints and; (2) coming to an understanding of his own choice and decision to name the town. This authority is evident in the following brilliant lines thought by the protagonist towards the end of the novel when he is about to leave the town:

> "As he packed, he had to admire Field for his principles, if not his understanding of the way people live. The man could read a map, read a compass, lead the people out of the wilderness, but he'd never make it as a modern-day nomenclature consultant. Given the choice between Freedom, and his contribution, how could their flock not go with Goode's beautiful bauble? Field's area of expertise wasn't human nature, but the human condition. He understood the rules of the game, had learned them through the barb on the whip, and was not afraid to name them. Let lesser men try to tame the world by giving it a name that might cover the wound, or camouflage it. Hide the badness from view. The prophet's work was of a different sort.
>
> Freedom was what they sought. Struggle was what they had lived through" (210).

And this is how; he chose the name 'Struggle'.

Another interesting thing to note in the passage quoted above is a merging of the ideological points of view of the narrator and the protagonist, which strengthens through the entire length of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist's own belief in his efficiency at naming things comes into picture when the narrator tells: "When the products flopped he told himself it was because of the marketing people. It was the stupid public. The crap-ass thing itself. Never the name because what he did was perfect" (4). Here we see a use of free indirect speech[7], what Dorrit Cohn calls 'narrated monologue' (*Transparent*

Minds). In these lines, the words of the narrator seem mixed with those of the protagonist, and one cannot really tell them apart. The lines begin with a sentence spoken by the narrator: "When the products flopped he told himself it was because of the marketing people". This is indirect speech. Then the speech representation shifts: "It was the stupid public. The crap-ass thing itself. Never the name because what he did was perfect". These lines may be a summary of the protagonist's thought given by the narrator. In that case, "It was the stupid public. The crap-ass thing itself" might very well be narrator's words, betraying his/her view of the protagonist's reaction to the people. But maybe the protagonist himself said: "It was the stupid public. The crap-ass thing itself. Never the name because what [I] did was perfect". Here the protagonist's utterance is rendered through free indirect speech and the narrator's stance toward this situation recedes into the background.

Later in the novel when the narrator gives the protagonist a center stage in terms of free indirect speech, such a mix up complicates the ideological split between the narrator and the protagonist demanding careful narratological scrutiny. While reading the local librarian, Gertrude Sander's history of the town of Winthrop, the protagonist reflects upon the limitation of words, names, and language to describe the fluid concept of race and racial identity. The section deserves to be quoted in full:

> "Colored.
>
> The silver of himself still in tune with marketing shivered each time Gertrude used the word colored. He kept stubbing his toe on it. As it were. Colored, Negro, Afro-American, African American. She was a few iterations behind the times. Not that you could keep up, anyway. Every couple of years someone came up with something that got us an inch closer to the truth. Bit by bit we crept along. As if that thing we believed to be approaching actually existed.
>
> It was her use of the word that got him thinking about it. You call something by a name, you fix it in place. A thing or a person, it didn't matter – the name you gave it allowed you to draw a bead, take aim, shoot. But there was a flip side of calling something by the name you gave it – and that was wanting to be called by the name that you

> gave to yourself. What is the name that will give me the dignity and respect that is my right? The key that will unlock the world.
>
> Before colored, slave. Before slave, free. And always somewhere nigger.
>
> What was next? In the great procession. Because things never remain still for long. What will we call ourselves next, he wondered. If he knew what was next, he'd know who he would be" (191-192).

Besides raising such strong questions as "What is the name that will give me the dignity and respect that is my right?" and "What will we call ourselves next"?, Whitehead questions the very existence of the thing which we believed would approach by giving it one name after the other, by labeling it with a different category again and again. The manifestation of free indirect discourse gives some interesting insights. The passage starts with the narrator telling us what the protagonist thought, and thus the use of the third-person pronoun, "he". This shifts to the collective personal pronoun "us" and "we" suggesting a representation of a larger group or community. This again shifts to singular, but this time first-person "me" and thus bringing to attention the individual; alongside or rather beside the group or the community to which that individual belongs. And thereby emphasizing the dignity and respect that is an individual's right.

Through such shifts, the narrator authenticates his views in the garb of the protagonist and thus brings authenticity into narrative practice. But bringing such a complicated notion of authenticity would have been a challenge for the author. A challenge, which could be understood in terms of the author questioning himself,: how to give narrative authority to an agency that itself questions the authenticity and brings to light the inefficacy of names and categories to capture the thriving variety of blackness and the differences existing among them? The author would have to avoid giving a monolithic notion of authority. And one way to solve this problem would have been to leave the identification of the focalizer open for interpretation, making the reader think - is this the narrator's perspective or the protagonist's? And another way would be to authorize and authenticate the protagonist's agency who himself questions the notion of authority and

authenticity. This ambiguity and paradox are in keeping with the practices of New Black Aesthetic. Such an attempt relates to how Ronald A. T. Judy defines the NBA. He says, "The NBA is about understanding authentic blackness as a practice and not status. It is the practice of generating new signs that transgress dominant cultural norms, and recognizing that every new expression, no matter how subjective, is historically hybrid - it is related genealogically to all those utterances that came before it and are around it" ("The New Black Aesthetic and W.E.B. Du Bois, or Hephaestus, Limping", 250). More precisely, the narrative representation of such a notion of authenticity, confirming to Ellis' definition of NBA, "expand(s) or explode(s) the old definitions of blackness, showing us as the intricate, uncategorizeable folks we had always known ourselves to be" ("The New Black Aesthetic", 237). Whitehead through his novel attempts to represent this quality of being "uncategorizable" and to bring out the limitations of language through the very medium of language.

By providing a door to the narrator's consciousness and his empathy towards the protagonist, this narrative technique suggests a creation for authenticity, wherein the narrator authorizes and authenticates the protagonist's perspective which itself questions these notions. This is similar to what Stephanie Li means when she speaks of "signifying without specifying" or when Toni Morrison speaks of "race-specific, race-free language". And maybe, to be able to maintain this difficult balance between signifying without specifying, between using race-specific and yet race-free language and between saying with the authenticity that the authentic itself is fluid, varied and multiple, is what makes the New Black Aesthetic new.

Such insights provided by free indirect discourse, calls to attention how the speech category approach to fictional minds has yielded important insights into the interface between narrative and consciousness. Together, this approach and this interface have been developed and discussed by narratologists like Dorrit Cohn, Alan Palmer, David Herman, and David Lodge[8]. I see some connections, however cursory and preliminary it is in this chapter, between theories of

consciousness representation in narrative and narrative manifestations of W. E. B. Dubois' "double consciousness" in this novel. Bernard W. Bell too points out in his book, that these novelists (the NBA writers) construct double consciousness of their imagined characters and their social and literary identities in narratives with code-switching and a hybridized language. This could also be seen in relation to James Phelan's observation when he says that "we have the counterpart in focalization to what Bakhtin has, in matters of voice, labeled *double-voicing*: dual-vision or dual-focalization" ("Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers" in *New Perspective on Narrative Perspective*, 60). Phelan too suggests that focalization provides some indication of self-consciousness (61). Zadie Smith in her wonderful essay, "Speaking in Tongues" brings out this dynamic of being double-voiced beautifully. Referring to the plight of Eliza Doolittle, of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, who sloughs off her native tongue in the process of learning and adopting a new dialect, Smith calls her "patron saint of the tragically double-voiced". She goes on to reflect: "How persistent this horror of the middling spot is, this dread of the interim place! It extends through the specter of the tragic mulatto, to the plight of the transsexual, to our present anxiety —disguised as genteel concern—for the contemporary immigrant, tragically split, we are sure, between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices—whatever will become of them? Something's got to give—one voice must be sacrificed for the other. What is double must be made singular". Zadie Smith takes this to a positive note when she speaks of how Barack Obama uses this double voice and how it resulted in the post-racial debate. If double consciousness gives way to such an in-between state, we find that within the storyworld of *Apex Hides the Hurt*, the nomenclature consultant struggles with multiple opinions and with double voice. At one point, he tries to convince himself that his initial choice to name the town New Prospera is right because it is "narcotic. Hypnotizing. New Prospera was the tune people knew the second they heard it" (*Apex*, 177). But then he had already listened to the arguments made by Albie Winthrop in favor of the name Winthrop and that of Regina Goode in favor of the name Freedom, so he weighs his options and reconsiders his choice: "Was he supposed to honor the old ways because they

were tried and true? Fuck all Winthrops, and let their spotted hands twist on their chests in agony. And forget the lovers of Freedom. Was he supposed to right historical wrongs? He was a consultant, for Christ's sake. He had no special powers" (*Apex*, 177).

It would be extremely important at this point to bring to attention the utility of the focalization module. Above observations would not have been possible without: (A) the distinction made between the two questions: who sees? and who speaks?; as answering these questions showed us the distinct entity of the narrator from the protagonist; (B) the distinction between the subject and object of focalization; which showed us the narrator's perception and awareness of the protagonist's opinions, thereby giving us an indication of the 'distance' or closeness between the two and hence the narrator's authority and authenticity to deliver information to the reader; and (C) the ambiguity in voices and opinions represented through transposed view and transposed speech, showing us the adoption of views and thus further strengthening the agency, authority and authenticity. In other words, without seeing the entire novel through the various modes of focalization, speech and thought representation, it would have been difficult to raise the questions and issues of narrative manifestation of agency, authority, and authenticity in the first place because these modes had made possible the structure and the theme of the novel.

4.5 Further discussion and perspective development:

Peculiar to the novel is the way characters are racially marked, specifically with respect to the color of their skin. Once again, the role of answers to the questions like 'who tells', 'who sees' and 'who is seen' informs the reader about the racial identity of the protagonist and the narrator. The white characters are racially marked by stating the color of their skin, whereas the racial identity of African American characters including the protagonist, is indicated by other racial markers instead of mentioning their skin color, implying that mere mention of the color fails to capture their identity. As visual registers are definitive and identities

are not, the author finds such racial marking defying his purpose and thus unnecessary. Thus, the racial identities are hinted at in a subtle manner. For instance, when the protagonist reaches Winthrop the narrator reports seeing a white man who gives the protagonist directions to Hotel Winthrop: "There was an old white guy in a purple plaid sweater vest who didn't care about the rain" (10). Interestingly, the racial identity of the focalizer (here, the narrator) is not made apparent until the reference to this "white guy". Therefore, when the narrator sees this man and speaks of him as "an old white guy", it implies his own racial difference. Similarly, racial identity of Lucky Aberdeen is overtly stated: "The white guy was Lucky Aberdeen, founder and CEO of Aberdeen Software" (15). Even Albie Winthrop is introduced as having a "white head with little white hairs" (63). On the other hand, only a suggestion of the protagonist's skin color is made available for the reader. The protagonist had lost a toe recently, he imagined it being thrown away as medical waste and being washed up on the shores of public beaches, and we are told: "That thing they thought was a baby fish nuzzling their thighs in the surf? It was his lost little brown toe, roaming the seas in restless search of its joint" (20). At another place, when the protagonist uses the multicultural bandage which he named Apex, to his wound, the reader is informed that "The brown adhesive bandage was such a perfect tone that it looked as if he'd never had a toenail at all" (131). The racial identity of the bartender of Hotel Winthrop, who appears to be the protagonist's alter ego, is also not stated directly but is denoted by his hairdo – "A streak of gray started at his forehead and fanned out into his Afro in a curly wedge, an ancient and hardwired pattern, in his genes" (21). Thus, the novel contextualizes blackness with respect to narrative perspective rendering unnecessary the overt tagging and providing of racial markers. In other words, the novel is narrated from a black gaze unlike the white gaze defining what Stephanie Li calls the invisibility of Ralph Ellison's protagonist, the veil that prevents the young W. E. B. Du Bois from joining his white classmates, the yearning of Pecola Breedlove for blue eyes and the liberating vision they promise (*Signifying Without Specifying: Racial Discourse in the Age of Obama*, 68). This shows that although such visual terms continue to

characterize the metaphors of race in African American literature the visual dynamics between 'who sees' and 'who/what is seen' have changed from the pre-1983 African American novels to post 1983 narratives.

The narrative of this novel is structured in a way that the protagonist listens to the arguments of the three members of the town's council one after the other; each one favoring a name of their choice and giving justifications for it. He then contemplates for a while the validity of each of these names along with his own agency and authority to judge and decide. At an initial stage in the story, when he has yet not listened to the arguments of the three members, and when mayor Regina Goode and software millionaire, Lucky Aberdeen puts a proposal before him to resolve the deadlock in naming the town, the reader is told that

> "And there he sat. He nodded. He wondered, are they seeing the man I wanted them to see? The devil-may-care consultant of yore? His hand was a fist on the table. He imagined a wooden stick in his fist, and attached to the end of the stick was a mask of his face, and the expression did not match" (18).

The content here although brings to attention the carefree attitude of the consultant, it also points towards a difference, a split in his consciousness. The difference lies in what the protagonist "is" and what he wants "them to see". He seems to struggle with his double consciousness and thus he feels like he is wearing a mask and the expression on his mask does not match the expression of his face. With the rhetoric of the mask, Colson Whitehead alludes to the veil of W.E. B. Du Bois. The visual metaphor again refers to the difference between Pecola Breedlove's eyes and her urge for blue eyes in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. It is also the difference between how the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* sees himself and how others see him. But gradually, through the course of the entire narrative, the protagonist's perspective goes through a transformation and we find him reflecting:

> "The object in question was a town. There was family and clan to think about, and their bickering. There was heritage and history involved, and

> their inscrutable demands. It simply made sense. He was a pro, they had called him in for a reason, and he did not want to waste his time" (31).

The protagonist's opinion evolves when he gradually gathers more knowledge on the town's history. The bartender informs him that the town of Winthrop was a colored town once founded by free black men who came from Georgia. Later Winthrop came and took over by establishing a barbed wire factory. Albie Winthrop tells him that before the name Winthrop the town was called by the name Freedom. The present town's librarian, Beverly informed him that before this town was named Winthrop "There were three people on the city council – Goode and Field, the two black guys who first settled here, and Sterling Winthrop, of the barbed-wire fortune" (94). She opined that Goode and Field joined Winthrop as they must have thought of the access a white person would provide to the outside world. They wanted to incorporate and be officially recognized by the state. A few years earlier they had been slaves and thus they named the town Freedom. Now they had rights and were officials. They wanted everything by the book and so they made the name-changing business a law. They made the law legal and then voted to change the name. Regina Goode informs him that Goode and Field at that point did not have the choice but to give their names for their lives as Winthrop had resources to set up the factory and most importantly, he was white. But she has a choice to retain the old name by voting for it. All this while the protagonist "wondered what his clients believed they could achieve. And what exactly he was doing here" (129).

As he gathers all these pieces of information, he merges his own insight gained from his personal history as a nomenclature consultant. When the bartender told him "You can change the name but you can't change the place" (26), the protagonist thought of his own professional belief by remembering the circumstances in which he applied for this job. He had neither any purpose nor a vocation and so he answered the ad in the paper. And Roger Tipple, the boss at this firm, took an interest in him just because he was a Quincy and the firm had been founded by Quincy men. Therefore, his association with Quincy, which was

a strong brand name in itself, favored the protagonist in getting this job. He also reflected on how he came up with the name, Apex for a brand of a multicultural bandage, which came in different hues of skin color. He thought of Apex as "the summit, human achievement, the best of civilization, and of course something you could tumble off of. . ." (90). But just as the tagline of the Apex ads says 'Apex Hides the Hurt', this point to which history has risen itself could only hide the hurt brought by race and racism and could not heal it. The consultant came to know that the book, "The History of the Town of Winthrop" written by Gertrude Sanders and from which he gathered important facts about the name changing law was commissioned by George Winthrop who made her change it and hide some significant details. Librarian Beverly then gave him the first draft of this book, which mentioned that along with the law of naming the town, the council made another law that you need a majority on the city council to do anything. They thought it would always be the same way –two on one side and one on the other. Just as each of the present three members wanted the town to have a name of his/her choice and the council was in a deadlock; at that time too, Goode, Field, and Winthrop wanted the town to be named after their individual choices. But on the day of voting Field was not even present. He later asked Regina which name Field suggested. Although the reader is not immediately told what Regina answered, towards the end of the novel, the consultant contemplates how people will talk about this town being named, 'Struggle'. Towards the end, we again see a merging of voices and views of the protagonist and the narrator when it is told that the protagonist "had to admit that Struggle got to the point with more finesse and wit. Was Struggle the highest point of human achievement? No. But it was the point past which we could not progress, and a summit in that way. Exactly the anti-apex, that peak we could never conquer, that defeated our ambitions despite the best routes, the heartiest guides, the right equipment" (210).

Thus ultimately, we see that the protagonist chooses neither the name, 'Winthrop', nor 'Freedom' and nor 'New Prospera' but the name 'Struggle', suggested by Field with whom he identified. With this, he also recognized his own subject position, that of a black nomenclature consultant. Throughout his

entire career, he searched for true names for things, not the right names, but true names that get to the heart of things and by choosing the name, Struggle he got closest to the heart of the entire name changing business.

4.6 Conclusion:

Colson Whitehead creates in the protagonist a cultural mulatto (Trey Ellis) and a hybridized identity (Bernard W. Bell) by making him see the reason behind the arguments made by various characters, both black and white. With this Whitehead seems to convey that we have risen to a point in history from where we can survey all that came before, we can evaluate and decide for ourselves that instead of reaching an apex, we are and had always been a part of a struggle. And narrative perspective not only becomes a tool or methodology for analysis but also a subject, the medium itself for creating New Black Aesthetic wherein we see a development in perspective of the protagonist as he reassesses his point of view. Such an approach differs from previous scholarship on *Apex Hides the Hurt* in particular and the novels of Colson Whitehead in general by focusing on the novel's narrator and the ways employed to present the different point of views of the characters. A theoretical synthesis of emergent issues pertaining to New Black Aesthetic and theories on narrative perspective and focalization demonstrate the ways in which studying the 'how' of the novels' narration can lead to understanding the 'what' of the novel's aesthetic. Focalization and the manifestation of varying modes of narrative perspective (at both the diegetic and the extra-diegetic level of the novel) give insight into how the author creates New Black Aesthetic. Seen in this way, narrative perspective becomes not only a tool for analysis and interpretation but also an elemental mode for New Black Aesthetic.

Notes:

1. The verb "perceive" here and in the entire chapter is to be taken in a broad rather than narrow sense. It refers to what Gerald Prince defines it in his chapter, "A Point of View

on Point of View or Refocusing Focalization". To "perceive", according to him, means, "to apprehend with the senses (to see, hear, touch, etc.) or with the mind, or with something like their equivalent. In other words, what is perceived may be abstract or concrete, tangible or intangible – sights, sounds, smells, or thoughts, feelings, dreams, and so on." (*New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, 44).

2. Narrative perspective, as defined by Gérard Genette is "the second mode of regulating information, arising from the choice (or not) of a restrictive "point of view" (*Narrative Discourse*, 185-186). Genette introduced the term "focalization" as a replacement for "perspective" and "point of view". Willie Van Peer and Seymour Chatman provide a simpler definition in the introduction to the book, *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*. By *perspective*, they mean, "the location from which events in a story are presented to the reader" (5). They further explain, "'Location' here can have both a literal and a figural meaning. Literally, "perspective" refers to the spatiotemporal coordinates of an agent or observer; figuratively, it signifies the norms, attitudes, and values held by such an agent or observer" (5). My definition of perspective tries to capture both, the regulation of information and the location from which events in a story are presented.
3. At the very outset of the chapter on Mood, Genette refers to the *Littré* dictionary in defining the grammatical meaning of *mood*. It is the 'name given to the different forms of the verb that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express . . . the different points of view from which the life or the action is looked at," (*Narrative Discourse*, 161). It seems pertinent to note the definition here in terms of degree of information as Genette goes on to explain, "one can tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells, and can tell it *according to one point of view or another*; and this capacity and the modalities of its use, are precisely what our category of *narrative mood* aims at. Narrative "representation," or, more exactly, narrative information has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in more or less direct way, and can thus seem (to adopt a common and convenient spatial metaphor which is not to be taken literally) to keep at a greater or lesser *distance* from what it tells" (161-162). This definition, which also refers to *distance* showing how much information the narrator gives about a character and how he/she gives it, could also give a sense of how much informational/narrative authority and agency the narrator him/herself possesses and how much he/she gives to the character. This definition, thus, bears some potential to address the question of authority and agency discussed later in the chapter.
4. Genette defines heterodiegetic narrator as one who is "absent from the story he tells" (*Narrative Discourse*, 244). Glossary of *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* defines heterodiegetic narrator as "a narrator who has not participated in the circumstances and events about which he or she tells a story" (278).

5. Reflector is "a term coined by the novelist Henry James to designate the center of consciousness through whose perceptions events are filtered in a narrative using third-person or heterodiegetic narration. A paradigm case would be Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*." (*The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 281).
6. Here, in a note provided with regard to HF or Hypothetical Focalization, David Herman writes: "HF might be construed as a special case of what Genette (1980) terms "paralepsis," i.e., "giving more [information] than is authorized in principle in the code of focalization governing the whole" (195). Genette (1988) later described paralepsis as "an infraction, intentional or not, of the modal position of the moment" (74-75). My purpose here is to analyze in detail the paraleptic effects of HF specifically – effects that may suggest less the infraction of a code than grounds for rethinking the principles on which the code itself is based" (*Story Logic*, 410). In a slightly different take, Manfred Jahn notes that "Genette's allusion to a technique of focalizing through "an impersonal, floating observer" (*Narrative Discourse*, 192) has led David Herman to develop a general theory of "hypothetical focalization." (*The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 99). One should also note that HF could not be described in the terms provided by older frameworks in classical narratology. In this regard, Herman himself explains: "the nonlocatability of HF within structuralist typologies indicates the limitations of classical models, or more precisely shows that those models achieve descriptive adequacy only within certain limits. In particular, HF suggests that researchers can gain new insights into narrative meaning by substituting for a discontinuous model based on the distinction between internal and external focalization, between "personal" and "impersonal" narration, a continuous model in which a range of perspective-taking strategies are distributed along a scale. These strategies, any number of which may collocate in a given narrative, encode different degrees of certainty with respect to objects, participants, and events in the storyworld" (*Story Logic*, 310).
7. Extending speech categories to though representations, Michael Toolan describes Free Indirect Thought in the following way: It "is all to do with the strange feeling we sometimes have, as we read a passage of narrative, that the narrator's "voice" has been supplanted by some character's, even though the character is still being referred to as a *she* (or *he*) and the "voicing" is still in the narrative tense. It's almost as if we are reading two "voices" at once, even though that sounds unnatural, and impossible to prove" ("Language" in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 241). Toolan's analysis complements the discussions of dialogue and consciousness representation by Bronwen Thomas and David Herman.
8. Dorrit Cohn's most prominent work, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1978), studies how

characters' consciousnesses are reflected in fiction. This is further discussed by David Lodge in *Consciousness and the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), David Herman in *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) and in a chapter on "Cognition, emotion, and consciousness" in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Alan Palmer in *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

Chapter 5

Narratological Reflections on *The Colossus of New York, Sag Harbor* and *Zone One* and a Case Study of Morrison's *A Mercy*

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter uses concepts and methods from cognitive narratology to interpret the later fictional and non-fictional works authored by Colson Whitehead. As in earlier chapters, these concepts are chosen not just as methodological tools, but also in recognizing their utilization by the author at the compositional level too. For instance, the technique of personification, which is extensively used by Whitehead in his non-fictional urban scenography, *The Colossus of New York* (2003), is striated using Mark Turner's notion of 'conceptual blending' (*The Literary Mind*, 1996), which allows the reader to cognitively map the terrain where people read, write and live their own versions of the city. In maneuvering the zombie genre in his post-apocalyptic novel, *Zone One*, Whitehead uses, what narratologist Jan Alber defines as, the unnatural i.e., physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios and events that challenge our real-world knowledge. Therefore, the section devoted to *Zone One* uses the framework of 'unnatural narrative'. The third section of this chapter offers a proposal for a future cognitive narratological study of *Sag Harbor*. This future work will see the applicability of research on narrative and emotions to explore the affective response of the novel's teenage protagonist Benji to the social perception of his sense of identity. The last section devoted to the cognitive narratological study of Morrison's novel *A Mercy* presents a case study to show the absence of perspective development in characters from a novel that is not categorized as post-black or post-soul. Therefore, although the study of Morrison's novel may seem out of place with regards to the focus of the thesis, it helps in highlighting the static nature of the characters' perspective in Morrison's novel as opposed to

the change we see in the characters of Whitehead's novel. At the same time, it shows the efficacy of narrative techniques such as multiple focalization, polychronic narration, and representation of the inconsistent information, enabling Morrison to depict the devastating effects of trauma – whether sexual, socioeconomic, or racial – on individual personality. A cognitive approach to study the novel provides an understanding of the behavior of the traumatized and the impact of slavery on black people's consciousness and identity. Moreover, the approach gives insight into the manner in which its narrative engages the reader cognitively such that they comprehend the relationship between individual trauma and social forces of injustice and oppression.

5.2 Section 1 - "The city knows you": Conceptual Integration and Spatial Consciousness in *The Colossus of New York*

This section of the chapter uses Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's (1994, 1998, 2002) theory of conceptual integration to understand why and how Colson Whitehead in his collection of essays, *The Colossus of New York*, enmeshes two different concepts of city space and human characteristics such that the city is personified. Personification is a type of a metaphor where non-human entities are endowed with human traits. According to Turner, personification is "perhaps the most thoroughly analyzed consequence of blended spaces" (*The Literary Mind*, 76). In *The Colossus of New York*, the city and its components are attributed with human capabilities of knowing, seeing, making stories, being wistful, and feeling confident. For example, the author says, "The city knows you better than any living person because it has seen you when you are alone" (8). The blend involved in this personification can be metaphorically formulated as 'The City is a Person'. Applying the theory of conceptual blending, as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner, helps in explaining how the author creates novel meanings by using imaginative scenarios to attain a symbiotic relation with the city. It also aides in understanding how the author attempts to transcend his perceptive limitations to

conceive urban activities operating at a grand time-space in a metropolis such as New York. The metaphorical meanings function on all levels of the text, notably, in the real world scenario where the urbanites respond to the city, at the textual level where the author narrativizes the city, and at the level of the readers, who cognitively map the narrative terrain. Most importantly, conceptual blending helps in interpreting the purpose of personifying the city, which is to attain a perspective beyond our limited perceptions to deal with its constantly changing nature.

5.2.1 Introducing Conceptual Integration:

Recent studies in the field of cognitive linguistics, investigating the relation of language and mind, have increased a range of possibilities for linguistic and cognitive research regarding language and culture. With George Lakoff's (1987) experiential theory of meaning and with Mark Johnson's (1987) work on embodied cognition, it was claimed that most of our cognitive processes are metaphoric in nature and depend on metaphors derived from our preconceptual bodily experiences as infants. Together they also proposed that certain basic analogies structure the lexicon of English. Their hypothesis claims that most abstract concepts arise from preconceptual physical experiences by metaphorical projection (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:267–8). For example, metaphorical projection from the bodily experience of up and down help conceptualize abstract concepts like 'amount'; giving rise to a number of lexical metaphors, like "My income rose/fell last year" and "If you're hot, turn the heat down" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:14). Within Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) 'conceptual metaphor theory', the notions of 'source domains', 'target domains', 'mappings' and so forth have become common for discussing the linguistic and conceptual phenomena of metaphor. A more developed framework, proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1994; 1998) unify the analysis of metaphor with the analysis of a variety of other linguistic and conceptual phenomena. This framework is referred variously as the theory of 'blending', 'conceptual blending', and 'conceptual integration'.

In their book, *The Way we Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*, Fauconnier and Turner say that our mental operations of identity, integration, and imagination are "basic, mysterious, powerful, complex, and mostly unconscious" and "are at the heart of even the simplest possible meaning" (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 6). They show that they are the key to "the invention of meaning and that the value of even the simplest forms lies in the complex emergent dynamics they trigger in the imaginative mind" (*The Way we Think*, 6). They argue that these basic operations are more generally the key to both everyday meaning and exceptional human creativity. In his book, *The Literary Mind*, Mark Turner too states that "conceptual blending is a fundamental instrument of the everyday mind, used in our basic construal of all our realities, from the social to the scientific" (93). As blending is fundamental to our meaning-making processes, their theory has found a wide range of applicability and usage in both arts and sciences. Blending develops through the composition, completion, and elaboration of mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998). According to Fauconnier and Turner, mental spaces are "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" ("Conceptual Integration Networks", 137). 'Mental space' can be understood as a partial and temporary representational structure which speakers construct when thinking or talking about a perceived, imagined, past, present, or future situation ("Blending and Metaphor"). In the next section, we will address Whitehead's use of personification using the notion of conceptual integration.

5.2.2 Personification and *The Colossus of New York*:

In the thirteen essays, comprising Whitehead's non-fictional, *The Colossus of New York*, we see many instances where urban administrative bodies and public places, such as the Port Authority and the Central Park are personified. Personification was traditionally defined as a literary figure or a rhetorical device used for decorative purposes occurring only in literary creations. However, Lakoff and Johnson's book, *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) which has become a classic, revolutionized our thinking in this regard. In the book, they point out the

conventional thinking about figures of speeches and then explain how their finding is different. They say, "Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish - a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor" (4). They found, on the contrary, that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (4).

Considering personification as a kind of metaphor, Fauconnier and Turner say, "Perhaps the most obvious ontological metaphors are those where the physical object is further specified as being a person. This allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities" (33). Their theory tells us how we integrate concepts, giving us the science of our imagination. Their book, *The Way We Think*, "started with the ambitious claim that we are now entering an age in which the key intellectual goal is not to celebrate the imagination but to make a science of it. Imagination is at work, sometimes invisibly, in even the most mundane construction of meaning, and its fundamental cognitive operations are the same across radically different phenomena, from the apparently most creative to the most commonplace. These operations are characteristic of the human species. Though taken for granted by human beings, they are extraordinary by any other standard" (89). They further say that conceptual integration is at the heart of imagination. "It connects input spaces, projects selectively to a blended space, and develops emergent structure through composition, completion, and elaboration in the blend. This fundamental cognitive operation has not previously been studied" (*The Way We Think*, 89).

Let us look at some of the instances of personification in *The Colossus of New York*. Human attributes are transposed on urban bodies in the essay, "Port Authority". The site capturing the bus passengers' attention is "the confident skyline of a smaller city than the one named on their ripped tickets" (17). An

urban inanimate feature such as the skyline is personified by imposing the attribute of being confident, which pertains to animate beings. Even things like bags, which become inexplicably heavier when someone goes to get something out of them, appears as "if they repacked themselves when you weren't looking" and their "zippers won't close, hang open in half smiles" (17-18). Bags repacking themselves and smiling zippers reflect the felt abstractions of the passengers. In a similar vein, the author expects the bus to feel and respond as a human would, and therefore, he observes, "without gratitude the bus speeds past the factory that manufactures them" (18).

Personification animates the urbanites' response to the city. In the essay named on the famous street, Broadway, we are told that an anonymous person traverses it once a year. Either owing to unconquerable navigational difficulties or because the pedestrian has memorized the routes very well, he decides: "He will ask no question this day. The street will not scheme this day. Let it happen. These are the terms of truce he has made with Broadway." (73) The street, personified as a kind person, makes an exception on this day by not plotting against him. Imagining the street to be considerate, allows the pedestrian to make a truce with Broadway. Therefore, one blended space creates another blended space. In other words, one blended space can serve as an input to another blended space. The author elaborates and extends such an integration of mental spaces or concepts throughout the narrative. Accordingly, a street capable of scheming also forces the author to think that no one can outsmart it and "Only suckers try to double-cross Broadway and it always ends up in one-way tickets out of town" (73). Outside the textual space, we would not think of a street as a person whom one can cheat, but blending makes such a creative scenario possible. The blend of two different concepts (a street and a person) is extended to other elements present on the street, for example, the weeds growing on the sidewalk. Through the pedestrian's perspective, the narrator says, "Look down at all that stuff in the cracks in the sidewalk. Let us organize a salute to all the plucky weeds in this town, all those anonymous flowering strivers, with their intrepid shoots and improbable points of purchase. Such exemplary citizens" (74). The quality of

striving for life and capability of growing in grime elicits respect for the weeds such that they become "exemplary citizens". Many such observations and imaginations permit the author along with the pedestrian to think that this place is falling apart and its residents are contributing to its ruin day by day. He says, "You think this place sucks the life out of you but in fact it is the opposite" (74). These are the significant results granted by conceptual blending which provide us crucial insights into our own nature and the nature of our relationship with the city. The blended space, where a city behaves as a person, can itself become an input space for other blended spaces ensuing into novel meanings. A space with a city dweller as a person and a space with the city as a person can fuse together resulting in a space where two persons can respond, understand and live co-dependently in a better way. Put simply, personification opens up a vista of possibilities within the text, possibilities in which the author's imagination functions as both raw materials as well as products of creation.

New York City life as depicted in Whitehead's text would not even be possible without the mental process of conceptual blending. Without contextualizing the text via the theory of conceptual integration, we as Whitehead's readers will miss seeing how the author's imagination, blending and personification operates within the text and what purpose it serves. The author is able to accomplish the goal he sets out in the first essay of the text, 'City Limits'. The limits of the city, as pointed out in the essay, are as much the limits of his comprehension. The aim is to transcend his sensory limitations, a perceptual singularity shared with other city dwellers and to overcome a constant sense of loss felt when one lives in an incessantly transforming city. In accordance with the overarching goal of blending, which is to achieve human scale (*The Way We Think*, 312), this blend eased the comprehensibility of the humungous spatiotemporal scale of a metropolis like New York by bringing it down to human scale. Once the city becomes familiar to its citizens, just as they would be well acquainted with any other person, it becomes easy for them to deal with it. Now, we will look into how conceptual integration helps us understand the way, the

narrator attains a perspective broad enough to conceptualize a metropolis such as New York.

5.2.3 Conceptual Integration and Perspective Development in *The Colossus of New York*:

Colson Whitehead deals with the challenge of representing a city, which incessantly transforms itself. In the collection's first essay, "City Limits", the image of the city that lives in memory mediates as well as interferes with the emergent urban experience. Mark Turner's concept of 'integrated spaces' from *The Literary Mind* (1996) helps to focus on forms of seeing prevalent in Whitehead's text. The city is comprehended through urban metaphors populating individual memories and mirrored in a narrative that crucially allows the author to move beyond his own "single viewpoint" (*The Literary Mind*, 117), transcending the static places of the artifactual.

In the essay, "City Limits", seeing the city fosters a personal relationship with it leading to the author's claim that; "You start building your private New York the first time you lay eyes on it" (*The Colossus of New York,* 4). Moreover, perceiving the urban space gives a sense of security and control over the immediate environment, unlike when the "place multiplies when you are not looking" (6). Even then, one's sensory experience remains partial. This incompleteness arises because, "as sensory beings, our view is always single and local" (*The Literary Mind,* 117). For Whitehead, urban identity is acquired by looking at the city in relation to the memory of past urban experiences. A degree of fondness associated with specific memories forces him to disregard the constantly changing urban image. He says, "My first city memory is of looking out a subway window . . . It's the early seventies, so everything is filthy. Which means everything is still filthy, because that is my city and I'm sticking to it" (5). By representing urban nostalgia, Whitehead seems to make a unique addition to "the main tradition of black American literature", which according to Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert Butler "has been persistently pro-urban in vision" (*The City in African American Literature*, 9). Whitehead goes on to emphasize "Never

listen to what people tell (you) about old New York, because if you didn't witness it, it is not part of your New York and might as well be Jersey" (5).

The city dweller's fixation with the memory of the space of habitation, work and the practice of the everyday poses a problem in responding to a city in transition. Tamar Katz in her article, "City Memory, City History: Urban Nostalgia, *The Colossus of New York*, and Late Twentieth-Century Historical Fiction" sheds light on the correlation existing between "the rhetoric of loss and of the forms of remembering" and "the way we think about and in cities" (811). She points out that "the city's constant novelty matters most for the way it generates a perpetually vanishing past. Thus while urban change makes us confront the new, such change still more importantly causes us to inhabit a world by definition gone" (811). In the essay, "City Limits", Whitehead laments the disappearance of his old neighborhoods and shares the sense of loss with fellow inhabitants when their favorite places are suddenly replaced. But he also urges them to retrieve the image of the city from their memory. "It is all still there, I assure you" (6), he says. In this way, he makes an effort to compensate for a loss, which is the legacy of urban transformation. Interestingly, E. B. White's *Here is New York* (1949) which is the source text for Whitehead's collection falls short of representing New York City, which alters itself at an almost unimaginable pace. In the foreword to his 1949 book White notes, "I have not tried to make revisions in the hope of bringing the thing down to date. To bring New York down to date, a man would have to be published with the speed of light. . . I feel that it is the reader's, not the author's, duty to bring New York down to date" (17). Thus, White's description remains a stylized portrait of New York from a particular time reported through the single perspective of an author seeing the city from his hotel room, whereas Whitehead presents the city as simultaneously viewed but differently seen by the people strolling the streets of New York.

Although Katz points out that urban change guarantees that we see a city that no longer exists, she does not provide an explanation of how Whitehead's text finds a way to accomplish a sense of compensation for this loss. Conceptual integration explains that from the emerging meaning derived from the blended

space of personified city, a city dweller also learns that it is not only the city which is changing but the inhabitants are constantly changing as well. This realization provides the New Yorkers a sense of comfort and a better way to deal and respond to the city because the blended space, where the city is viewed as an organism like us, equips us with the knowledge that a mutual symbiosis exists between the city and its denizens and both are constantly transforming and affecting each other.

Discordance in perspective problematizes the creation of a composite narrative necessary to understand the nature of the city. Although they co-habit the same urban space, "not one of them see(ing) the same thing" (7) which leads Whitehead to comment that "There are eight million naked cities in this naked city – they dispute and disagree. The New York City you live in is not my New York City; how could it be?" (6). Even in his first novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999) Whitehead's character, James Fulton aspires for an ideal urban space through the imagination of a subject gazing at future cities from the temporal locations of the past and the present. In the novel, Fulton writes in his book, *Theoretical Elevators*, Volume One: "Perspective is the foot-soldier of relativity. Just as the barbarian would gaze upon our future cities and future buildings with fear and incomprehension, so would we gaze upon our future cities and future buildings" (*The Intuitionist*, 37). Like Fulton, our imaginative ability enables us to "create an integrated space that is meant to be transcendent and unitary" (Turner 117). This space, which mentally blends concepts, unifies different temporal viewpoints and helps us to perceive the city from long spans of time. Towards the end of the essay, Whitehead recognizes that "Maybe we become New Yorkers the day we realize that New York will go on without us" (9-10), thereby defining the limitation of our "single, local view" (Turner 116). In order to expand this singularity of perception, Whitehead imagines the city returning the gaze of its inhabitants.

Personification, thus, becomes crucial to Whitehead's narrative as authorial subjectivity breaches the apparent singularity of the city. By doing so,

Whitehead establishes what Turner calls 'role connection', which is a "way of developing constancy over a great variety of mental spaces" (133). Once the city is recognized as an "*animate agent*" (133) the inhabitants begin identifying themselves with it. The author says, "The city knows you better than any living person because it has seen you when you are alone" (8). He arrives at an understanding of the swiftly altering disposition of the city dwellers by speculating upon the narrative possibilities offered by the city that is capable of telling stories. He addresses the readers, "You picked up yoga, you put down yoga, you tried various cures. You tried on selves and got rid of them, and this makes your old rooms wistful" (9). Recognizing an urban subjectivity also allows Whitehead to seek solace from the city, imagining that it might also register the image of its inhabitants' transient existence, as "all our old places are proof that we were here" (9). This equips him with a reflexive rhetoric of respect where "we try to fix the city in place, remember it as it was, doing to the city what we would never allow to be done to ourselves" (10). As Turner opines, "story – is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it" (4), it is through imagining and representing stories told by the city that the author comes to terms with it.

Mark Turner's concept of integrated spaces brings to light the intermediary position of Whitehead's text that straddles representative extremes, that of depicting people's disproportionate response to the changing urban image and describing it as a static space. Whitehead narrates the crisis of representing a rapidly altering metropolis where places are replaced by new structures, and where each day one needs to strive for recognizing familiar cityscape. Whitehead overcomes the limitation of his own perception and that of the reader's, by juxtaposing the image of the city as a public artifact with the intimacy of private memories that help to reference and reflect on endemic urban change. At the end of the essay, he expresses his intention of "Making this a guidebook, with handy color-coded maps and miniscule fine print you should read very closely so you won't be surprised" (10-11). He points towards the possibility that he along with the reader could be 'neighbors' not by fact of residing in the same city but by a

more fictive perspective that sees and recognizes the city from the vantage point of the narrative, "that we walk past each other every day, and never knew it until now" (11).

Yet another essay, 'Brooklyn Bridge', exemplifies our ability to recruit emergent mental spaces that are a part of the larger conceptual domains of perception, experience, and representation. The essay illustrates the reveries of an anonymous female pedestrian whose "whole history hordes behind her with its unfashionable area code and immigrant spice[s]" (99), as she traverses the span of the bridge. Arrested movement suggested by the drifting island on which the bridge stands echoes the pedestrian's attempt to deal with expectation and responsibility: "Various anchors hold the island in place so it won't drift away. You'd try to flee too, if everyone heaped their dreams upon you" (99). This state of suspension mirrors the transient nature of the pedestrian's performance as she adds her part to the everyday urban flows channeled by the bridge.

The blended space stages the motif of 'talking cities' where "the city knows you" (8), it sees, and it "remembers, too" (9). The motif is extended when the blend contextualizes the dialogic interplay of urban artifact with the pedestrian as the "bridge takes a while to get to the heart of its argument and for a while she is seduced by honey talk" (99), anticipating a vision of the cityscape where she emerges into its consciousness. The "exemplary rhetoric" provided by the bridge augments the space of narration where "this rather spectacular leap of faith" (100), from artifact to locale, is realized in the duration of the spatiotemporal 'span'. Here the metaphor, "leap of faith," finds resonance in the capacity of the pedestrian to inhabit "outlaw territory, between places" (102), as she bridges the zone of exile in her movement across the elevated span.

Movement and interrupted motion, in the form of a pause, performed by people walking on the bridge are key features in facilitating different spatial perspectives, affording the reader insights into their mental states. A pause taken while walking is enough to cause awe and fear of the skyline as it serves to remind the pedestrian of her insignificance: "Let's pause for a sec to be cowed by

this magnificent skyline. . . Joggers speed past walkers, seeing nothing but their inner skylines, long indifferent to the miracles around them" (101). Whitehead blends movement in the trope of 'the journey' with a rationale for life itself as the narrative voice encourages the pedestrian to "keep moving forward. Please move it along. By making this journey making the case for life or weakness of conviction" (102). The implication of successive change in the pedestrian's location metaphorically suggests a city in transition where "you start building your private New York the first time you lay eyes on it" (3). As mentioned earlier, E. B. White's *Here is New York* does not incorporate shifts in perspective within the structure of the cityscape but resorts to a static point of view by a narrator sitting in a New York hotel room reporting a city that he experiences as artifactual rather than personal.

Brooklyn Bridge in its role as protagonist looks forward to that moment "when the number of cars going into the island matches the number of cars going out of the island" (104). The bridge, in that moment of balance, rewards the anonymous pedestrian with the same prospect whereby "a scale inside her seeks equilibrium as she walks [the] larger scale" (104). The bridge not only makes the pedestrian conscious of her hopes but also makes her aware of her own shortcomings. The monstrous length of the island tells her "You have not thought this whole thing through. But she's never been one to take a hint. Hardheaded like streets and bridges" (105), the blend conflates the material characteristics of the bridge with the emotional state of the pedestrian; "She and the bridge have so much on them, possess a weight that will not be blown away" (107).

Explaining the nature of a blend, Turner opines "Crucially, blended spaces can develop emergent structure of their own and can project structure *back* to their input spaces" (60). The projection of the blend back to the pedestrian equips her with a belief in the possibility of a change, but as she steps back on solid ground, we are told that "The key to the city fell out of her pocket somewhere along the way and she's level again. Bereft again" (108). Significantly, Colson Whitehead projects this blend to the reader by juxtaposing

the pedestrian's journey on the bridge with the reader's journey through the narrative: "What did you hope to achieve by this little adventure. Nothing has changed. Nothing ever changes. Presentiment of doom. Closer you get to the other side, the slower you walk. On the other side there is no more dreaming. Just solid ground" (107-108). But the author does not let go the perspective acquired on the bridge and by blending his address both to the pedestrian and to the reader in the pronoun "you" he suggests that there is time enough to breach the limits of the span, "put it off for as long as possible" (108), and perhaps the bridge will continue and so will the pedestrian.

5.3 Section 2 - "New life in the midst of devastation": Natural and Unnatural Narrative of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*

Colson Whitehead's novel, *Zone One* (2011) chronicles a post-apocalyptic world where civilian units are deployed by the United States government to clear off the walking dead, called "skels", from lower Manhattan. This section uses the notion of unnatural narratology as proposed by Jan Alber and offers a preliminary study the novel's treatment of 'zombie' as an unnatural element. The aim is to arrive at an understanding of its use as a meditation on the relevance of race in a post-racial scenario and as a critique of American consumer-driven life. The theoretical framework to study this novel proposes at the same time to interact with the concept of natural narratology, as explicated by Monika Fludernik, embracing the cognitive parameter of "prototypical human experience" emanating from the novel's storyworld. The novel presents gruesome scenes of flesh-eating and the savior unit's encounter with a subset of zombies called "stragglers" who do not attack or kill but have become statues trapped in routine activities of their former consumer-driven lives. The savior unit including the protagonist intermittently engages, not only in nostalgic brooding over their lives but also entertain optimism for a zombie-free future. Thus, the section aims to bring out the function of the novel's juxtaposition of natural and unnatural elements, giving rise to irony, which is skillfully used by the author to satirize corporate capitalism,

mindless consumerism, and the government's effort to reconstruct civilization by the very means, which brought about cultural decay in the pre-apocalyptic phase. The method helps to evaluate the blurring boundaries of the natural and the unnatural through the novel which conventionalizes its unnatural elements, bringing them in contrast with something as natural (but made unconventional) as fear and hope by processing a storyworld where familiar cognitive frames of references have been rendered estranged.

The novel is set in Manhattan, which is plagued by zombies. The plague has divided people into two categories: the living who are uninfected and the living dead who are infected. The government in Buffalo gives orders for reconstruction of the city by destroying the infected. Civilians volunteer to help the government in this task. Mark Spitz, the protagonist of the novel is a member of one such civilian team. The task of his team is to "sweep" the "skels" i.e. the zombies and the "stragglers", a subclass of nostalgic zombies who when got infected have either become statues of their former lives or have become trapped in repeated actions of their fond activities. The narrative of the novel covers three days, with description alternating between the team's fight for survival, and flashbacks when characters recount their lives before the zombie plague affected the city.

The third-person narrative voice of the novel engages in external focalization where the extradiegetic narrator, who is not part of the story, introduces the protagonist as a child visiting his uncle's apartment in New York and conveys his internal point of view at the very beginning of the novel: "He always wanted to live in New York" (*Zone One* 3). From the refracted perspective of the narrator, the reader is informed about the likings and observations of the protagonist who is named Mark Spitz by his fellow teammates: "He liked to watch monster movies and the city churning below. He fixed on odd details. The ancient water towers lurking atop obstinate old prewar and, higher up, the massive central-air units that hunkered and coiled on the striving high-rises, glistening like extruded guts" (5). Such informative pieces of Mark Spitz's likings and

observations not only sets the "mind style" (Elena Semino) of the protagonist but also hints the horrifying apocalypse experienced by the characters. The notion of "mind style", according to Elena Semino, "can be seen as complementary rather than synonymous with the notion of "ideological point of view". The notion of "mind style", according to Semino, is "most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics (for example as a result of a similar mental illness or of a shared stage of cognitive development, as in the case of young children)" (*Cognitive Stylistics* 97). Mark Spitz's observation of odd details when he was still a child, gradually led to the development of his perspective and "mind style". His "mind style" which was influenced by monster movies, also shaped his imagination. When he used to visit his uncle's apartment on rainy days, which obstructed the view of the city, he used to imagine the city just as it would have been a part of a monster movie:

> With the sidewalks hidden from the view, the boy conjured an uninhabited city, where no one lived behind all those miles and miles of glass. . . The city as ghost ship on the last ocean at the rim of the world. It was a gorgeous and intricate delusion, Manhattan, and from crooked angles on overcast days you saw it disintegrate, were forced to consider this tenuous creature in its true nature (*Zone One*, 6).

The use of unnatural narratology as a methodological tool can help in understanding the function of the zombie figure and their attack on humankind. According to Jan Alber, "An unnatural narrative violates physical laws, logical principles, or standard anthropomorphic limitations of knowledge by representing storytelling scenarios, narrators, characters, temporalities, or spaces that could not exist in the actual world." He further opines, "The unnatural may exist in two different forms. On the one hand, there are the physical, logical, or epistemic impossibilities found in postmodernist narratives that have not yet been conventionalized, i.e. turned into basic cognitive frames, and thus still strike us as

odd, strange, or defamiliarizing (in the sense of Šklovskij ([1917] 1965). On the other hand, there are also physical, logical, or epistemic impossibilities that have over time become familiar forms of narrative representation (such as speaking animals in beast fables, magic in romances or fantasy narratives, the omnimentality of the traditional omniscient narrator, or time travel in science fiction)." It is in this second sense that I attempt to interpret this novel as it features zombie apocalypse, entailing these physical, logical, or epistemic impossibilities at par with the 'real-world', but which has also become a familiar form of narrative representation, that of a zombie genre. Alber further explicates, "Unnatural narratives are a subset of fictional narratives. The unnatural (or impossible) is measured against the foil of 'natural' (i.e. real-world) cognitive frames and scripts which are derived from our bodily existence in the world (see Fludernik 1996: 22) and involve natural laws and logical principles as well as standard human limitations of knowledge." Reflecting on Postmodernist Unnaturalness and its precursors, Alber writes, "In comparison to earlier narratives, postmodernist texts acquire their specificity through the concentration and radicalization of unnaturalness." "During the course of literary history, numerous impossibilities have been conventionalized and turned into familiar aspects of generic conventions." In *Zone One*, the zombie figure is a conventionalized instance of the unnatural simply because it is the main constituent of the zombie genre. The author uses this figure to satirize the prevalent consumer mentality, bureaucracy, and overexposure to media culture in American society.

On the satirizing function of the unnatural, Alber comments: "Numerous manifestations of satire also involve the unnatural because satirical exaggerations, distortions, or caricatures are frequently so extreme that they merge with the impossible. . . In the case of satire, represented impossibilities . . . typically serve a didactic purpose: they mock and critique certain psychological predispositions or states of affairs" ("Unnatural narratology"). Whitehead's intelligent take on the zombie myth becomes such a satirical exaggeration and distortion of psychological conditions and afflictions when he makes the officials diagnose

survivors with Post-Apocalyptic Stress Disorder (PASD). He infuses humor and satire while commenting upon the ruined and chaotic lives of the Manhattanites: "Given the vast galaxy of survivor dysfunction—PASD in its sundry tics, fugues, and existential fevers—the Wastelanders' particular corner of pathology was, Mark Spitz decided, unremarkable. Everyone was fucked up in their own way; as before, it was a mark of one's individuality" (*Zone One*, 30). Interestingly, these lines also demonstrate the unremarkability of the symptoms of PASD and that the humanity suffered from similar psychological and emotional inertia and degradation even before the apocalypse.

In the same vein, the novel also shows that the living and the undead alike are trapped in memories of the past, those former moments, which are "the signifiers of one's position in the world" (131). Now a question arises, how will the living find their connection to life in a post-apocalyptic world? It is in nostalgia where people find their bearings in life; the idea of who they used to be that the living clings to and the undead have frozen into. The undead are zombies called as the "skels" in the novel. Death haunts the skels while the people are haunted by their pasts and by their dreams. But in Whitehead's world of shattered dreams and a city devastated by the zombie plague, what horrifies the most is that anyone familiar, a friend or a family member who is infected by the plague, can become monstrous (for instance Spitz watched his mother chow down on his father's intestines). Even more terrifying is the fact that one has to perform an act of mercy by killing them. Such is the mission in which Mark Spitz and his squad of three "sweepers" has signed up and their task is to clear lower Manhattan, called Zone One, of these zombie monsters. By introducing "stragglers" or the nostalgic zombies, Whitehead makes an innovative twist in the zombie genre whereby he improvises the notion of people caught in the web of nostalgia. And it is with this improvisation, the novel estranges, as Darko Suvin says, or defamiliarizes the reader from the conventionalized notion of zombie. The stragglers give the living the vantage of the dead, sentencing them "to observe the world through the sad aperture of the dead" and to suffer the gross parody of existence (*Zone One*, 227). This makes the humankind profoundly vulnerable as it

dwells in the past. Thus the reader finds in the novel, which covers just three days, plenty of flashbacks and stories from other characters as they are tied to their past in which they seek refuge.

The novel also provides the author's cinematic conception of ruined urban America in capturing the smallest of details in scenic sentences such as: "the women in the monster movies bolting through the woods or shriveling in the closet trying not to make a sound or vainly flagging down the pickup that might rescue them from the hillbilly slasher" (5). Such engaging passages instill in the reader, the fear of lurking danger in the corners and the feeling of escape to the next place of safety. However, amid chaos, Whitehead does provide hope intermittently between the swarming zombies and the sweeping operations. The army has managed to secure downtown Manhattan by building a wall between "skel" and human zones. The government in Buffalo has ordered for Reconstruction and delivery of supplies in the city. In providing these "contours of the new optimism" (35), Whitehead searches a secured future with respect to the past. This dwelling in the past can be placed with Morrison's concept of "rememory"? In this novel, the past is broken apart and the characters are nostalgically trying to bring it all together. The characters have their own personal stories to add to the larger story of the happenings of "Last Night". Last Night is the apocalyptic night where their stories found a commonality: "The stories were the same, whether Last Night enveloped them on Long Island or in Lancaster or Louisville" (86). It transformed their lives. For Whitehead, the mind recedes in the past not because it confronts similar situations but to "to seek refuge in more peaceful times, such as a childhood experience, as a barricade against horror" (71). Each retelling of one's Last Night story was a step toward another fantastic refuge, that of truth, which is horrifying in the wake of the apocalypse. This retelling is one of the survival strategies of the living to find bearings of life in the past.

The novel gives another surprise when it reveals the racial identity of the protagonist towards the end, suggesting the reader to reevaluate the relevance of

race and racial differences in an apocalyptic world. The author makes the reader look into the possibility of a breakdown of our social and racial categories when confronted with greater xenophobic fears. By not racially marking the protagonist almost until the end, the novel negates as well as asserts the blackness of the character and enters the realm of post blackness. Michael Eric Dyson in his foreword to Touré's *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness: What It Means to Be Black Now* notes the suggestivity of the term post-Black: "It clearly doesn't signify the end of Blackness; it points, instead, to the end of the reign of a narrow, single notion of Blackness. It doesn't mean we're over Blackness; it means we're over our narrow understanding of what Blackness means" (xv). Experimenting with the way race can be, or need not be represented, the author makes an attempt on, what Stephanie Lee says, "the development of innovative paradigms by which to understand who we are and how we relate to others".

The major challenge in studying the novel is to situate it in the context of African American Literature. If black literature is about the survival of the blacks and the African American culture, this book is a survival story. Mark Spitz is one of the few human survivors of the mysterious plague and the survival of the world depends on him. By giving death to the undead, Mark Spitz serves the purpose of his life, which is in giving life to the world. In the post-apocalyptic New York, Mark Spitz finds it unlikely that the racial, gender, and religious stereotypes are forgotten: "There was a single Us now, reviling a single Them" (231). But he wonders: "Would the old bigotries be reborn as well, when they cleared out this zone, and the next, and so on . . . Or was that particular bramble of animosities, fears, and envies impossible to recreate? If they could bring back paperwork, Mark Spitz thought, they could certainly reanimate prejudice, parking tickets, and reruns" (231). Forgetting racial prejudices and differences may seem unnatural but possible in this apocalypse where both blacks and whites work together to bring back order and peace.

Analyzing unnatural narratives, Alber makes a significant observation. He says, "In a surprising number of cases, the transformation of impossibilities into

cognitive frames goes hand in hand with the creation of new generic configurations. . . Once an unnatural element has been conventionalized, it can be used for a different purpose, which typically leads to the creation of further genre configurations." Studying the novel as an instance of unnatural narrative provides us with a lens to explore various possibilities and impossibilities pertaining to a racial and a post-racial world. The physical and logical impossibility of the presence of zombies has already been conventionalized in fiction. But the distortions and twists in the conventionalized zombie trope are used to satirize and critique corporate capitalism, mindless consumerism and the pathos of mundane lives. It helps us see more clearly and profoundly the cultural inertia and social collapse in the society. And the unnatural also makes possible a post-racial world even if it exists only in a fictional apocalyptic world.

5.4 Section 3 - Narrative and Emotions in Colson Whitehead's *Sag Harbor*

Whitehead's narrative canopies the representation of African American experience in the post-race or post-black era. In a similar vein, *Sag Harbor* (2009) depicts the influence of social perception on the teenage protagonist, Benji's sense of self. It becomes pertinent to study the formation of Benji's emotional world, which responds to the racial codes informing white stereotypical assumptions. Cognitive narratological study of the narrative representation of emotions in response to racial codes can shed significant light in the interpretation of the novel. Collaborative works between literary scholars, psychologists, and cognitivists have scrutinized narrative and the emotions in light of ancient and modern rhetoric, the poetics of affect and empirical evidence of literary response. Patrick Colm Hogan, a literary cognitivist and a professor of English, Comparative Literature and Cognitive Science at the University of Connecticut, maintains that literature provides a vast body of data that bear directly on the way different cultures imagine and experience emotion. Literary narratives represent the causes and effects of emotion as understood or imagined in a society and give

rise to related emotions in readers. Other scholars of cognitive poetics such as Suzanne Keen, while editing a special issue on Narrative and the Emotions in *Poetics Today*, stated that analysis of the feelings provoked and invited by reading narrative could illumine the workings of mental activity. Grounding its argument in the notion that emotion is a key feature of a reader's interaction with narrative, this section proposes a future study of the narrative construction of *Sag Harbor* (2009) to show how the perspective of a black teenage protagonist, Benji reviews racial stereotypes. This study will draw on the work of psychologist Keith Oatley who theorizes different modes in which we experience emotion through fiction. He believes that readers' personal experiences of patterns of emotional response provoke sympathy for characters, especially as readers identify with characters' goals and plans. The research will also draw on insights from the research done by post-classical narratologist, Alan Palmer on the importance of the emotions in the construction of fictional minds. According to him, emotions are inextricably linked with cognition and its presentation plays a vital part in the creation of a character. The study will attempt to show the potential such a cognitive narratological approach holds in offering a criticism of representations of African American experience in the post-black era.

5.5 Section 4 - A Cognitive Approach to the Trauma Narrative in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*

5.5.1 Introduction:

This section studies the trauma narrative of Toni Morrison's novel, *A Mercy (*2008), using a cognitive narratological framework. Various characters of multi-ethnic origins narrate the novel and certain events are told repeatedly from different vantage points. Thus, the narrative calls forth continuous efforts on the part of the reader to process the complex and bewildering information emerging from the novel's storyworld. Following Gérard Genette's distinction between 'story' and 'narrative', this section of the chapter considers 'story' as the content which is told and 'narrative' as the manner in which it is told. The distinction is

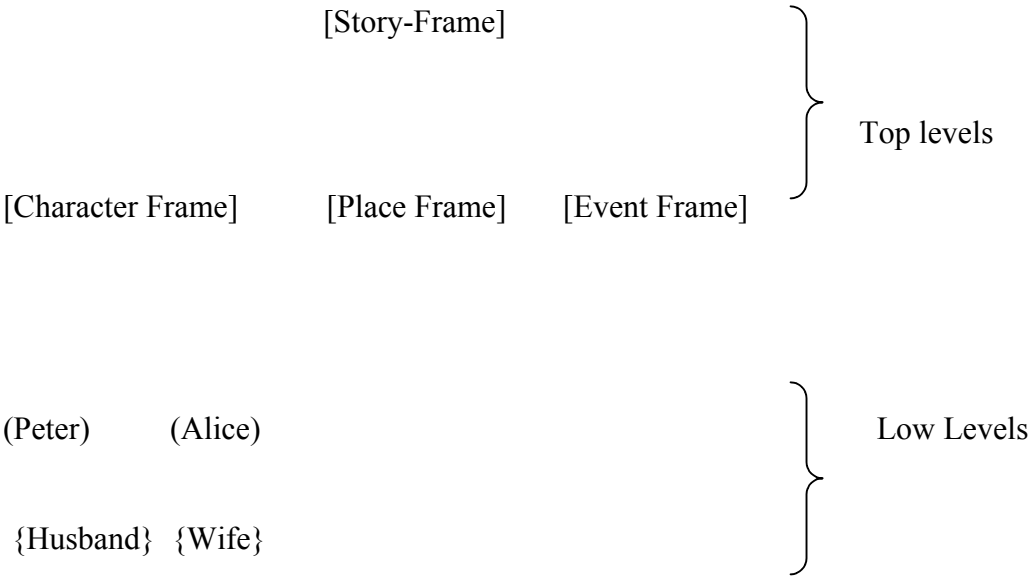
observed on the premise that the study of narrative offers an interpretive framework to understand and analyze the story. Nonetheless, it is considered, as stated by Cognitive Narratologist, David Herman in his article, "Limits of Order", that the "mode of telling also bear(s) crucially on - indeed, alter(s) - the matter told" (72). Interpretation of story and narrative require cognitive abilities that help us make sense of the world and thus cognitive narratological study forms the basis of the formation of storyworlds. Herman defines storyworld "as mental models of who did what to whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate – or make a deictic shift – as they work to comprehend a narrative" (*Story Logic* 9). The deictic shift is the ability of narrative to transport interpreters or readers from the here and now, or the space-time coordinates of a printed text, to the here and now of the world being described (14).

Cognitive narratology has developed with research in the field of cognitive sciences including fields such as psychology, linguistics, and the philosophy of mind. In his article, "Storytelling and Sciences of Mind", David Herman considers the trait shared by all research initiatives which can be grouped under the rubric of *cognitive narratology* is the connection between the study of narrative and the study of mind. This hybrid discipline explores frameworks developed in multiple disciplines for mind-related inquiry for the study of narrative. It also explores how insights emerging from the study of stories might contribute to cognitive science (327). The cognitive tools used in this chapter to study the narrative of this novel are knowledge structures termed as *frames* and *schemata*. Frederick Bartlett defines "schema" as a mental representation that grasps experiential information in terms of structures and structural relations (*MIT Encyclopedia of Cognitive Sciences* xlii). Human experiences stored in memory, form structures which serve as the basis for building emergent experiences.

5.5.2 Methodological Framework: Frames and Schemas

This section of the chapter uses Marvin Minsky's frame theory propounded in his paper, "A Framework for Representing Knowledge" (1974). Minsky's frame theory is a coherent theory of cognition and provides illustrations ranging from

visual perception, language processing, and story comprehension. For Minsky, a *frame* is a data-structure, which represents a stereotyped situation. Attached to each frame is information. Some of the information attached to such frames relate to what comes next. If the new situation does not confirm these expectations, then the information attached to a frame may change accordingly. Minsky explicates frame as a network of nodes and relations. The "top levels" of a frame represent things that are fixed and always true. The lower levels have terminals or "slots" which can assign conditions and specify data. This section applies his theory to explain the process of formation of the storyworld as the narrative progress. The conventional information that one may expect from a story-frame can be constitutive of characters, places, situations, and events. These can be assigned to the top levels of a frame. The lower levels of the frame must be filled with specific data. Emerging information from a narrative brings transformations in the frames and updates the story building process. This can be illustrated in the following manner-



Narratologist, Manfred Jahn in his article on "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-Person Narratives" uses Stanzel and Bal's formulations for the narrative situation and places terminal slots for four agents – narrators, narratee, reflectors and actors (443). I propose that if a narrator functions as a reflector as well as an actor, then the same frame can accommodate the functions of a reflector and an actor creating narrator actor.

Thus, a *schema* is a frame-like structure which represents knowledge stored in memory and which is accumulated through experience. Previous experiences maker structured repertoires of expectations about current and emergent experiences (*Story Logic* 89). The complexity and duration of the processing time are reduced when the emergent information is matched with the pre-stored repertoire of stereotypical knowledge. The reading process activates the same mechanism with the reader's pre-stored knowledge acting as the repertoire of expectations that match emergent details received from the story and which in turn constructs new frames forming the storyworld. In a multi-focal narrative, the story is conveyed from various perspectives, and thus, the reader receives overlapping information about, say, a particular event or character. The reader also confronts narrative gaps or inconsistent information owing to different versions provided by different characters. As new frames are formed along with the reading, these narrative gaps are gradually filled and narrative inconsistencies are adjusted. Such complexities are intensified in trauma narrative, which exhibits breakdown in the narrative (*Memory, War and Trauma* 62) and poses difficulties in building the storyworld. Such a storyworld is created through the narrative of *A Mercy* from various vantage points on people, places, things, actions, and events. A cognitive approach helps to analyze multi-focal (narration by various characters) and trauma narrative. After making an attempt at a cognitive study of the novel as a trauma narrative, this section will examine the novel's multi-focal narrative from a cognitive perspective.

5.5.3 Narratological and Psychological Approaches to Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*:

Morrison comments that her 2008 novel *A Mercy* is an attempt to separate racism from slavery, "to see how it was constructed, planted deliberately in order to protect the ruling class" ("Predicting the Past", *The Guardian*). Set in the latter part of the seventeenth century, it explores the time of early colonial Americas. Issues of race play out alongside the reality of gender, class, religion and geography. Its narrative structure permits multiple narrators to relate its plot in turns, a signature technique of Morrison's fiction, to which her readers have grown accustomed since her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (La Vinia Delois Jennings, 2009). A couple of critical works on the novel either carry narratological studies to offer new readings or, focus solely on the psychological aspects. For instance, James Braxton Peterson (2011) examines how a deft deployment of focalization generates eco-critical and cartographic readings. Anna Iatsenko's (2013) narratological approach investigates the mechanism by which characters hands over self-responsibility to another and sees a deep emotional lack being fulfilled only by an outside presence. On the other hand, psychological approaches to the novel have looked into its narrative as the author's way to revisit African-American history, to enable its characters to construct their black identities and psychic integrity (Vaiva Bernatonytė-Ažukienė, 2012 and Manuela López Ramírez, 2013). Most scholarly work on the novel recognizes the delineation of dispossession and trauma of slavery, but the very narratological foundation, which holds a mirror to this trauma, is sidelined even when acknowledged. The present study offers a bridge between narratological and psychological aspects to show how the narrative techniques deployed in the novel effectively reflect a character's traumatic state of mind. Moreover, a cognitive approach facilitates an explanation of the sorting process, which the novel demands during its reading.

5.5.4 Trauma and *A Mercy*:

Psychological insights into trauma are crucial for understanding the nature of its representation in *A Mercy*, which portrays the journey of troubled characters who are either going through or are recovering from trauma. Nigel C. Hunt sheds light on research, which shows that trauma affects basic cognitive processes such as attention and perception. Traumatized people are more attentive to and perceptive of, surrounding stimuli, which remind them of the traumatic event (*Memory, War and Trauma* 61). In the novel, Florens, a slave girl, is traumatized by her separation from her mother. She is employed by a Church of England Dutch trader named Jacob Vaark in his homestead where she finds Sorrow, another slave girl, who is pregnant. Sorrow's pregnancy worries Florens as she is reminded of the trauma emanating from the incident when her mother gave her away to Jacob Vaark. The sight of "mothers nursing greedy babies" reminds her of her mother nursing her little boy and the thought of "how their eyes go when they choose" (*A Mercy* 6) brings back the memory when her mother chose to keep the little boy instead of her. Thus, the trauma of being separated from her mother has made her attentive to visual stimuli in her surroundings, which frighten her.

Along with fear, people undergoing a trauma, experience a range of emotions such as helplessness, shame or anger. One of these emotions is a breakdown of identity, explicated by Hunt as an emotional concept called 'mental defeat'. "Mental defeat is a useful concept when discussing trauma and narrative, as it indicates a total breakdown in the narrative that is difficult to rebuild and restore" (*Memory, War and Trauma* 62). This breakdown in the narrative is caused because a traumatic event shatters one's beliefs, elaborated by Janoff-Bulman as our fundamental beliefs that the world is meaningful and benevolent and that the self is worthy (*Memory, War and Trauma* 62). Recovery from trauma involves rebuilding these beliefs or creating a narrative. Dissociation is related to a breakdown of beliefs, which help in dealing with the world. According to P. Janet, memories associated with trauma remain unclear and unconscious and begin to encroach into consciousness over time, until they translate into narrative

form through conscious processing. A traumatized person represses traumatic memories, but through constant repression, memories become subconscious and lives apart from consciousness leading to dissociation (*Memory, War and Trauma* 63). In the novel, memories associated with trauma repeatedly encroach into the character's consciousness. A narrative account on Sorrow, a traumatized character, reveals that she could not recall things following a shipwreck, but she also pretended not to remember. By pretending that she could not recall the memories of her life spent on the ship, she represses traumatic memories associated with the shipwreck. These repressed memories begin to live apart from her consciousness, separated from the rest of her personality and functions independently in her psyche in the form of an imaginary companion named Twin.

Twin's presence helps Sorrow to regain a sense of assurance and belief, which was shattered because of her harrowing experience on a ship where she lived before coming to Jacob Vaarks' homestead. Thus a dissociated identity, in the form of Twin, helps her to deal with the adverse conditions of physical trauma. Gil Eyal in his article, "Identity and Trauma: Forms of the Will to Memory", states that memory warrants identity. It is responsible for retaining the experience of "being a selfsame individual moving through time" and it helps to prevent the process of dissociation which psychic trauma sets in motion (7). As Sorrow retains no memory of her past life, her memory could not warrant her identity and existence. Loss of memory led Sorrow to rely on her dissociated identity, Twin, to be assured of her existence. When Sorrow was saved from the shipwreck, she believed that she was dead until she saw Twin.

Trauma, according to trauma theorist, Cathy Caruth, is a response to a traumatic event, which takes the form of repeated, invasive hallucinations, dreams or thoughts originating from the event (*Trauma: Exploration in Memory* 4). The narrative of this novel traces the repeated recollection of traumatic events. For instance, Florens repeatedly refers to the incident when her mother gave her away; the narrative accounts by Florens, Lina, Rebekka and Sorrow repeatedly refer to the deaths of Rebekka's children; Rebekka's nightmares as a child were

made permanently vivid by years of retelling by her parents. In this way, the novel evidently renders repeated recalling of traumatic events, which intrude into the character's consciousness. This repeated retelling of events lends a multi-focal (narration by various characters) and polychronic (repeated narration of a single event) nature to the novel's narrative. Such psychological insight into the nature of trauma not only makes explicit the process through which trauma narrative is constructed but also reveals how it is conceived by the reader.

5.5.5 Polychronic and Multi-focal Narration in *A Mercy:*

Polychronic narration is achieved through recollections of memory. Montgomery, in his article, "Got on My Travelling Shoes" says that memory functions as a catalyst for the stories that fictional characters recount (628) as they repeatedly recall past traumatic events. This repeated recollection of events causes a disrupted sequence of events in the novel. For example, Rebekka, experiencing physical trauma, confuses events and time and thus her narrative breaks the linearity in time. From recalling her conversation with Lina, she suddenly recalls her journey in a ship then remembers her daughter and recounts the time when she was two years old. This disparity in temporality has to be constantly accommodated in the time frames that a reader constructs and eventually need to be matched with those related by other characters. The reader, reorganizing the time frames given by Rebekka, assigns the time when she was two years old as the time which occurred in the story before she made a journey by ship. The next time frame is slotted for the event of her daughter's birth and then the event of her having a conversation with Lina.

For an understanding of the novel's multi-focal narrative, it is significant to perceive the effects of a shift in focalization (i.e. shift in perspective) in the creation of the storyworld. Perspective formation is regarded as a major source for building the storyworld (*Story Logic* 301). In narratology, perspective building is comprehended in terms of focalization. *A Mercy* skillfully employs focalization by creating varying perspectives through multiple characters. According to Gérard

Genette, if a story is told from the point of view of a character, it is known to be focalized through that character (*Narrative* Discourse 10). Genette classifies *focalization* into three types: *nonfocalize*d narrative or narrative with *zero focalization*, *internal focalization*, and *external focalization*. Internal focalization is further divided into three categories: a) *fixed*- referring to narration from the point of view of a single character; b) *variable*- when the story is related from the point of view of one character then shifts to another and then again from the point of view of the first character; or c) *multiple*- where the same event is related several times according to the point of view of several characters (190). A narrative is externally focalized if the reader is not allowed to know a character's thoughts or feelings and the narrator plays the role of a witness.

Joseph Flanagan in his article "Knowing More Than We Can Tell: The Cognitive Structure of Narrative Comprehension", while conceiving narratological research at the intersection of different disciplines, states that cognitive perspective of a narrative views it as a mentally produced organization dependent upon the cognizing activities of an experiential or perceiving subject (324). These experiential or perceiving subjects are characters in the story through which the reader perceives the storyworld. In this novel, though Twin is a dissociated identity of Sorrow, she provides a unique vantage point to the reader. The third-person narrative account on Sorrow introduces and contextualizes Twin as a character who has control over Sorrow's actions and perceptions. Twin's consciousness and her conversations with Sorrow are presented in the form of *direct thought*: "Sorrow . . . crying, "Don't! Don't" (122); and "I'm here," said the girl" (124). Direct thought, as defined by Alan Palmer is a kind of representation of fictional thoughts. Direct thoughts are thoughts of characters, which are tagged (marked with labels such as "crying" or "said the girl", and presented with quotes) as emotions, sensations, dispositions (*Fictional Minds* 13). Readers bearing stereotypical knowledge of the fictional world neglects thought report (thoughts devoid of inner speech and conveyed without tags and quotes). Therefore, in contrast to thought report, more attention is paid to direct thought,

which is regarded as direct speech, and it aids in giving strength and intensity to the character. This also brings to light Twin's control over Sorrow's actions and emotions. Through Twin's direct thought, the reader gets access to what she is thinking. By shifting the reader's perspective to Twin's thoughts, the narrative compels the reader to assign Twin the status of an entity capable of thinking independently.

In the novel, focalization shifts from one chapter to another, with first-person and third-person accounts of characters. The novel begins with the first-person narrative of Florens, a slave girl in search of her lover, the blacksmith. A third-person narrative brings about a shift in focalization and provides stories for other characters like Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, and Florens' mother. Together the two modes of narration provide overlapping accounts of certain events, places, and characters. David Herman's intervention in the mode of 'perspective taking' bears a resemblance to Genette's views of focalization as both structure perspective formation as the acquisition of vantage points provided by a character's point of view. An understanding of both the concepts helps to infer that the storyworld is constructed part by part through a combination of frames defined by "contextual coordinates" (*Story Logic* 303) which establish a point of view. Contextual coordinates, which define cognitive frames, are pronouns, articles, verbs of perception and cognition, and lexical items (303). An illustration from the novel will help explicate how pronouns play the role of perspective taking. The novel begins with Florens' first-person narrative: "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you . . ." (*A Mercy*, 1). No lexical item has yet specified the frame for pronouns, "my" and "you" as specific characters at this point in the narrative. The referent of "my" (the speaker who addresses) emerges as an extradiegetic narrator i.e. a character which is presented with no intermediary narrating agent (*Handbook of Narrative Analysis* 81). Similarly, the referent of "you" (the addressee) has also not been specified. As the reader finds no referent for "you", he/she assumes him/herself to be the addressee of the narrative. Another reason, which leads the reader to make such an assumption is the stark

imperative sentence – "Don't be afraid" which, calls the reader's attention. Thus, an immediate connection is established between the narrator and the reader, when the referent of "you" is assigned as the reader. This configuration can also be explored through a number of possibilities that the narrative posits:

A. I = the author and you = the reader;
B. I = the narrator and you = the reader;
C. I = a character and you = the reader;
D. I = a character and you = another character;
E. I = a character and you = the dissociated identity of a traumatized character (Such frame construction is possible in Sorrow's narrative account).

With such possibilities, the narratee can either have an immediate presence implied in the form of the reader or the narratee can be absent when not referred to immediately as a character but one which in all probability could be assigned later and reconfigured from the emerging details of the narrative. When *A Mercy*'s narrator gradually starts to tell a story with "The beginning begins with the shoes" (*A Mercy* 2), she becomes an intradiegetic narrator i.e. a narrator who is also a character in the story. With this emergent information, the narrator's frame is re-framed to accommodate the character frame for Florens. The difference and shift between the two frames ('Florens = narrator' and 'Florens = character' frame) becomes significant for the larger storyworld as it gives Florens an advantage over the entire narrative which is evident from her first-person account placed before and after the third-person account of other characters.

Emerging information about characters and situations constantly force a reanalysis in the construction of frames. For example, the possibility of 'you' being a reader is eliminated as soon as the sentence: "So when I set out to find you…" appears. The 'I' is set out to find someone, i.e. another character. Therefore the frame: "you = reader" is reformed as "you = a character". It is to be noted here that "I", even at this stage, remains an unnamed voice in the novel. The

above frame (i.e. the frame for "you") expands along with the narrative and is not specified until page 42 of the novel, where it becomes "you = the blacksmith". So, the blacksmith is introduced directly at a very late stage in the novel despite the fact that he was indirectly introduced via conversations and recollections by other characters. Although the frame for "you" is finally resolved here (i.e. page 42), the frame for "I" is indirectly assigned as "a love-disabled girl" instead of being assigned as "Florens" through a third person account of Lina's thoughts: "Why, she wondered, had Mistress sent a love-disabled girl to find the blacksmith?" (42). Combining these two frames (for "I") the final frame is deduced as – "I = Florens = a love-disabled girl". By employing such an oblique style of narration, Morrison increases the reader's interpretive competence. The reader's cognitive abilities are evoked which enable him/her to comprehend the mutual relationship between the characters and how they establish a relation with the reader.

Another contextual coordinate which plays a crucial role in the construction of the storyworld is the role of "a" in the Portuguese "a minha mãe" used by Florens to refer to her mother. Translated into English, the phrase means "my mother". However, a reader unaware of this usage may latch on to the indeterminate article in English "a", and the phrase will be interpreted as 'a mother' and not 'my mother'. This may cause an initial indeterminate slotting of 'the mother frame' (ambiguity between "a minha mãe = a mother" i.e. someone's mother and "a minha mãe = my mother" i.e. Florens' mother). This uncertainty skillfully stages the ambiguous relationship between Florens and her mother and presents the separation between the mother and the daughter as a major traumatic event in the narrative of the novel.

The first chapter of the novel also deals with intermittent instances of internal focalization, with Florens being the internally focalized object as well as internally focalized subject. Focalization can also be understood in terms of the perceiver and the perceived. When Florens relates her emotions, thoughts, beliefs and perceptions, she becomes the object of internal focalization. Whereas when she relates and acts as the medium for the reader to perceive other characters

through her point of view, she becomes the subject i.e. the perceiver. On the other hand, in the third-person account on Sorrow, the narrator functions only as a perceiver, the subject who narrates. Bouson in his paper, "Speaking the Unspeakable", states that Morrison represents with almost clinical precision the impact of shame and trauma on the individual psyche owing to racist practices on African-Americans (126). It would have been more interesting if Sorrow or Twin's first person account were also narrated. The first person account would have rendered them as subjects who perceive, foregrounding the psychological impact of trauma on an individual's psyche without an intermediary third-person voice.

A cognitive approach to an analysis of focalization provides crucial insights into the psychological nature of Sorrow's narrative. While recalling her first encounter with Sorrow, Florens in her first-person narrative account points out that Sorrow was not happy to see her. The reader, from the limited perspective of Florens, believes that Sorrow was not happy to see her. The same event of their first meeting is revisited through Sorrow's third-person narrative, which informs the reader that Sorrow was curious and happy to see Florens. Here, internal focalization brings Twin's consciousness to the fore. We are told that Twin was jealous watching Sorrow's happiness for Florens. Sorrow extended her hand to touch Florens and Twin cried "Don't! Don't!" (122). As Twin is Sorrow's dissociated identity invisible to others, she is not perceived by Florens. However, Sorrow, understanding Twin's jealousy waves her face away. This led Florens to feel that Sorrow was not happy to see her whereas she was. The inconsistent information that the reader receives from these two different accounts is incorporated in the following manner: The initial frame for Sorrow's mental state is fixed as being happy and is structured to expect the same from emerging details. But these expectations are not matched due to contrastive details and thus, two separate frames representing two different mental states (of Sorrow being happy and not being happy) are constructed. These two frames are not combined but modified as per the new information provided by internal focalization on

Sorrow and Twin. The third person narration on this incident not only gives an insight into the mental state of Sorrow but also that of her imaginary identical self-named Twin. Twin's perspective can be considered as Sorrow's reflected perspective. Here the narrative technique combines multiple internal focalizations (Peterson 17) by focalizing Sorrow from two perspectives – that of the third-person narrator and that of Twin.

Through an inventive use of narrative discourse, Morrison joins the stories of all the characters who in the collective recollections of memories bring together their stories of migration and experience of trauma. The repeated telling of the event when Florens was given away by her mother to Jacob Vaark bridges the psychic gulf between the fictional minds of the three characters and provides three different perspectives (that of Florens, Jacob Vaark, and Florens' mother) on the act of "a mercy" to the reader. Florens is constantly plagued by the image of her mother with the little boy - "Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip" (5). Vaark recalls the same event when he saw a woman with a little girl wearing a pair of way-too-big woman's shoes. This woman, the mother of the little girl requested him: "Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter" (24). Here the little girl is immediately identified as Florens and her mother as "a minha mãe". Towards the end of the novel, we find the mother's first person narration of the same event addressed to Florens where she explains to her that she sent her away with Vaark to save her from a lewd Portuguese planter. *A Mercy* thus engages in a "polychronic" style of narration, in which events are recounted in multiple ways by different characters (*Story Logic* 219). Making a chronological sequence of events in such a narrative becomes a "part of the process of interpreting the story itself" (*Story Logic* 212). A constant process of reorganization on the part of the reader helps reveal the disorder created in the narrative and how it functions to narrate trauma. Trauma emanating from racial abuse and slavery necessitates chaos in Morrison's novels that serves the purpose of establishing order and recovery from trauma. Elizabeth B. House in her article, "Artists and the Art of Living" points out that "without chaos, creation would be

impossible" (44) and Morrison, by employing a multi-focal and polychronic style of narration, calls forth the reader's cognitive abilities to organize this chaos created by trauma in her narrative.

The narrative technique of the novel also exploits "different ratios between story time and discourse time to create different narrative effects" (*Story Logic* 215). Story time is the time represented by a narrative while discourse time is the time, which is taken to narrate a story. The first person narration relating Florens' journey in search of the blacksmith proceeds slower than the third person narration of other characters. The longer duration of Florens' narration directs the reader's attention to her journey, and through a recollection of past events, the reader is acquainted with other characters, their mutual relationships and the events that occurred in their lives. The novel also employs analepsis and prolepsis. Analepsis, according to Genette is an evocation of an event, which occurred earlier than the point in the story in which it is evoked (*Narrative Discourse* 40). On the other hand, prolepsis consists of "narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (*Narrative Discourse* 40). Teresa Bridgeman in her article, "Thinking ahead: A Cognitive Approach to Prolepsis" says that prolepsis or telling before time determines the nature of the information provided (125-126). *A Mercy* provides many instances of prolepsis, which at the point of their delivery are not realized as prolepsis by the reader. The reader is able to construct a fuller understanding of the event, place, and character, which has been the subject of prolepsis, only when he/she encounters more information later in the narrative. When the reader confronts a proleptic account, he/she is only able to frame an incomplete mental representation, which is retained in memory and evoked at a later point in the reading process. The death of Sorrow's daughter is recounted earlier in the narrative timeline, presented in the form of Sorrow's recollection "of her baby breathing water under Lina's palm" (121). This information is provided earlier than the information of her birth. In this way, a painful response to the death of Sorrow's child is elicited which lingers during the reading of the account of her birth. The narrative strategy, in this manner, tactfully and effectively directs the reader's response. Similarly, producing a

cathartic effect, the novel first engages in Florens' confessional tale of maternal rejection and its effect on her life but the cause of maternal rejection is revealed in the end. As suggested by Herman in his article, "Limits of Order", by employing a polychronic mode of narration, where different characters relate a single event, the novel thus arrives at causes, only after a painfully extended exploration of their effect (73).

5.5.6 Conclusion:

A Mercy challenges the unnarratability of the silence that results from trauma (*A Companion to Narrative Theory* 224) not only by giving voice to this silence but also by foregrounding it through multiple characters. This makes the narrative of the novel multi-focal (i.e. narration by many characters) and polychronic (i.e. repeated narration of a single event) which structures trauma narrative efficiently because the mental disarray ensuing from trauma is suitably represented by the disorder generated by these narrative techniques. In other words, the structure of this narrative resembles the psychological nature of trauma. Trauma disrupts a person's general knowledge, which consists of a person's beliefs, values, assumptions and perceptions about the world, and the novel gives the reader an insight into this disordered world. Even when one reads traumatic experiences of fictional characters, he/she unconsciously matches the frames constructed in the reading process with a personal repertoire of trauma experiences (*Towards a Cognitive Theory of Narrative Acts* 42).This could be a possible research project for understanding the process of how trauma narrative is construed to be aligned with the reader's personal repertoire of trauma experiences. It is the cognitive ability of the reader, which allows him/her to recognize the disorder in the narration and organize it to interpret the story. This process of organizing information has been described with the help of formation and modification of frames. In this way, a cognitive approach to the study of the novel's narrative addresses the reader's role in comprehending how we internalize the social forces of slavery, injustice, and oppression operative in the systems of power.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Scope for Future Research

The objective of the thesis was to find appropriate concepts and methods from cognitive narratology and apply them to each of the novels of Colson Whitehead. The thesis aimed to find how cognitive narratological concepts inform his work on developing the post-soul aesthetic. The analysis and results thus obtained interacted with the emerging issues of authenticity, authority, agency, and individualism in the post-black, post-soul, or post-racial discourses. It was also found that characters in each of Whitehead's novels go through a process of developing and changing their perspectives, which presages a radical reimagining of black sensibilities in the 21st century.

By using Marie-Laure Ryan's concepts of embedded narratives and 'possible worlds theory', chapter two concludes that the possible worlds generated towards the end of *The Intuitionist* force the characters to imagine a world free from the racial and political logics of our world. The chapter illustrated that such a transition from a deeply intrigued perspective to an unfettered perspective allows Whitehead to remain rooted in the past by maintaining the 'signifying' nature of the African American novel. At the same time, it allows him to establish the post-soul idea of looking beyond the African American literary traditions by envisioning a future where racial logics may become irrelevant. We also saw that unlike other detective characters of hardboiled detective fiction, even when Lila Mae assumes the role of a detective agent, she herself becomes a sub-agent in the schemes of other characters. Lila Mae's W-world is defined by racial assumptions, which she harbors for her fellow workers and for herself. The novel can thus, be seen as an evocation to the way political assumptions and racial prejudices creep into our mental embedded narratives. Whitehead thus forces his readers to investigate deeper the scope of their reasoning faculty, to consider what could be, even though it does not seem to be,

i.e. to look into alternate possibilities. He asks his readers to look into the limitations of our worldview and re-read, and re-view the social constructs we form, just as Lila Mae "learned how to read, like a slave does, one forbidden word at a time" (230). The chapter also inferred that the characters change their perspective and realize their erroneous speculations when they become cognizant of certain facts. The concepts of possible worlds and embedded narratives also gave complementary insights with other approaches to the novel that are consistent with the technique of historiographic metafiction and the cultural mindset of the post-soul aesthetic. Whitehead, in this novel, creates and then nullifies those social, political, racial, and ideological constructs, which are stereotypical and irrelevant. By monitoring the construction of embedded narratives, this chapter attempted to see the presumptive thoughts, which can lurk in an individual's mental domain. Looking at the novel through Ryan's possible worlds theory and embedded narratives, it becomes an examination of both the actual and the possible pathways to the world, and an attempt to actualize what we think can happen.

Using Theory of Mind and the concept of metarepresentation, it is concluded that the author in *John Henry Days* taps into the reader's metarepresentational ability to decipher its protagonist, J. Sutter's behavior and demands individual judgment on J.'s inclination towards John Henry's story just as J. assesses the John Henry myth. The third chapter, therefore, concludes that Whitehead imparts the idea of individualism not only within the novel's storyworld but also to the reader by making her evaluate the "truth" of John Henry's story just as J. Sutter is involved in doing the same. Metarepresenting J. Sutter's mental states reveal that he goes through a process of not only believing in a larger cultural myth but also associating it with the purpose and meaning of his life. The development of his perspective is characterized by uncertainties and self-evaluations one goes through while connecting with a historical myth, rather than by receiving it passively as a given cultural product. Using J. Sutter and Pamela Street as mouthpieces, Whitehead, also points out the disadvantages of mediums of communication and technology that devalues humans. The various forms of

technologies in the novel – be it the steam-drill from the industrial age, the postage stamp, vinyl records, and the innumerable artifacts collected by Pamela Street's father, or J. Sutter's web report in the digital age – is brought into question, for its limitations and for the role of its users, as producers as well as consumers of that technology. Coming to an understanding of the obsoleteness of our systems of communications from a postdated point of view is itself reflective of perspective development shown by the characters of the novel. The chapter, however, argues that along with depicting the continuous superseding of technologies, Whitehead simultaneously attempts to bring out human beings' propensity to assess mediums of representations, which enables us to resist passive submission to these external technologies of communication and foregrounds our inherent tendency to feed on and concoct stories and narratives.

Looking at how narrative perspective and/or focalization manifests in *Apex Hides the Hurt*, we see that Colson Whitehead creates in the protagonist a cultural mulatto (Trey Ellis) and a hybridized identity (Bernard W. Bell) by making him see the reason behind the arguments made by various characters, both black and white. By evaluating the point of view of all other characters, the unnamed protagonist of the novel forms his own opinion and names the town as 'Struggle' according to his individual decision. With this, Whitehead seems to convey that we have risen to a point in history from where we can survey the past, and can evaluate and decide for ourselves that instead of reaching an apex, we are and have always been a part of a struggle. Therefore, narrative perspective not only becomes a tool or methodology for analysis but also the medium itself for creating New Black Aesthetic. A theoretical synthesis of emergent issues pertaining to New Black Aesthetic and theories on narrative perspective and focalization demonstrate the ways in which studying the 'how' of the novel's narration can lead to understanding the 'what' of the novel's aesthetic.

The first section of the fifth chapter uses Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's (1994, 1998, 2002) theory of conceptual integration to understand why and how Colson Whitehead in his collection of essays, *The Colossus of New York*,

enmeshes two different concepts of city space and human characteristics such that the city is personified. The city is personified to attain a perspective beyond our limited perceptions to come to terms with its constantly changing nature. The preliminary study on *Zone One* in the second section arrived at an understanding of the use of 'zombie' as an unnatural element to meditate on the relevance of race in a post-racial scenario and as a critique of American consumer-driven life. Grounding its argument in the notion that emotion is a key feature of a reader's interaction with narrative, the third section proposes a future study of the narrative construction of *Sag Harbor* (2009) to show how the perspective of a black teenage protagonist, Benji reviews racial stereotypes. This study will draw on the work of psychologist Keith Oatley who theorizes different modes in which we experience emotion through fiction. The last section studies the trauma narrative of Toni Morrison's novel, *A Mercy (*2008), using a cognitive narratological framework. It argues that multiple focalization, polychronic narration, and representation of the inconsistent information enable Morrison to depict effectively the devastating effects of trauma – whether sexual, socioeconomic, or racial – on individual personality. Various characters of multi-ethnic origins narrate the novel and certain events are told repeatedly from different vantage points. Thus, the narrative calls forth continuous efforts on the part of the reader to process the complex and bewildering information emerging from the novel's storyworld. A cognitive approach to study the novel provides an understanding of the behavior of the traumatized and the impact of slavery on black people's consciousness and identity. Moreover, the approach gives insight into the manner in which its narrative engages the reader to revisit concentrically characters' static impression of the social forces of injustice and oppression. With this, a difference in the depiction of perspective is found in two authors, wherein, a static traumatized perspective of characters in Morrison' *A Mercy* stands in contrast with the evolving perspective of the characters in Whitehead's novels.

In 2014, Colson Whitehead published his second book of nonfiction, a poker memoir called *The Noble Hustle: Poker, Beef Jerky & Death*. The book resulted from Whitehead's journey, when in 2011 Grantland magazine, owned and

operated by ESPN, sent Colson Whitehead to Las Vegas to participate in the seven-day World Series of Poker. Grantland gave him $10,000 entrance fee in exchange for a report on his experience. Giving a first person account, the author, who had never competed in a casino tournament, chronicles his experience as a novice in the World Series. Although the book may or may not interact with post black aesthetic, its interpretation can certainly benefit from conceptualizing narrative transportation as a state of detachment wherein the reader separates herself from the here and now of the actual world and gets engrossed in the narrative world of social satire and self-loathing, which the novel evokes. It would be interesting to see the author's changed perspective of life in general by engaging in existential concerns through the game of poker.

Whitehead's forthcoming novel, *The Underground Railroad* will be published in September 2016. His publisher, Penguin Random House describes it as, "a magnificent tour de force chronicling a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South" ("About *The Underground Railroad*"). The approach taken to study Whitehead's novels in this thesis can be extended further to examine the narrative of Cora, the protagonist's escape to the antebellum South and the secret network of tracks and tunnels, which is discovered beneath the southern soil. Appropriate cognitive narratological methods can also be used to study the works of Whitehead's contemporaries and a range of representative novels by earlier African American writers, to look at the pattern of perspective delineation.

Madelyn Jablon in her book, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature* (1997) while combining discussions of metaficion with African American literary tradition notes that black metafictionists "seem to advice that it is better to find out who you are by looking into the eyes of others than into the eyes in the mirror. Better yet, find out who you are by looking at the people you came from and listening to their stories" (54). She also notes that they refuse to be trapped by the gaze and black metafiction constructs its own reading of self-consciousness. Similarly, Maus notes that the self-consciousness is

important not only because it provides a retrospective cultural basis for identity but also because it simultaneously offers a forward-looking impulse for aesthetic, personal, and social transformation (*Understanding Colson Whitehead*, 9). The thesis brought into conversation the dynamics of gaze via perspective and its function in achieving self-consciousness. The thesis too concludes that by considering different opinions of the characters, the protagonists of Whitehead's novels develop their perspectives and become self-conscious of their own identity and history. The thesis, through a sustained conversation about literature, culture, and cognition sought a common ground with existing literary-theoretical paradigms. It shows how universally shared features of human cognition plays a role in specific forms of cultural production and how such dialogues can open up new venues for a similar investigation. It is found that human cognitive processing, as it manifests in storytelling and narrativizing, interacts with the cultural and historical contexts in which not just African Americans but humans, in general, find themselves.

By giving further depth to the existing literature on Colson Whitehead and adding to the existing conversations on new black or post-soul aesthetics, the thesis concludes that cognitive narratological concepts and methods, such as embedded narratives, possible worlds theory, metarepresentation, focalization, and conceptual integration, function at the thematic and structural level of Colson Whitehead's novels. Their application is insightful in understanding the way emerging issues in post-black or post-soul aesthetics, such as authenticity, authority, agency, and individualism, are translated not just thematically, but also through the narrative techniques deployed by the author. By forming embedded narratives, by imagining possible worlds, by metarepresenting a confluence of information, by shifting their perspectives and by conceptually integrating concepts, the characters in Colson Whitehead's novels develop their perspective. The characters' perspective development channels an evaluative stance, a self-critical tendency, and a move away from essential notions of blackness, not to sever the vital link, but to look into the future of African American experience.

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