

On the Survival Predicaments of African Americans in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* from the Perspective of Nietzsche's Tragedy Aesthetics

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Abstract

Colson Whitehead (1969-) is a celebrated contemporary African American writer who was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, in 2017 and 2020. His eighth novel, *The Underground Railroad*, has received widespread acclaim since its publication in 2016. It is a gripping tale of a girl's unflinching will to free herself from the yoke of slavery through a real subterranean railway in the antebellum south. While there are numerous reviews of this book, they generally focus on its narrative strategies, artistic techniques, historical and cultural connotations, motifs, and African Americans' traumatic experiences under psychoanalysis. However, few critics pay attention to a critical philosophical point of view that this paper will explore. Based on Nietzsche's tragedy aesthetics through text analysis, this paper aims to address three research questions pertaining to the survival predicaments of African Americans: 1) In the Apollonian dream state, what beautiful illusions and visions have African Americans and white people created to cover up a cruel reality? 2) On the terrifying side of Dionysus, what barbaric violence have they all committed to tear the beautiful veil? 3) On the joyful side of Dionysus, what strategies of redemption have they all employed to deal with the barbarism that they have all faced? This paper concludes that the survival predicaments of African Americans seem to have been solved with the Apollonian spirit. In the Dionysian state, however, this moderating effect only points to the fact that many of them are superficially respected and tolerated. In effect, African Americans have been arduously struggling against social prejudice and racial discrimination all along. Hence, it is hoped that this paper may arouse people's awareness of this deep-rooted social problem, so as to alleviate the survival predicaments of African Americans in a white-dominated American society.

Keywords

Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, Illusions and Visions, Barbarism, Redemption, Survival Predicaments

1. Introduction

A Harvard University graduate, Colson Whitehead (1969-) is a well-renowned 21st century African American novelist. *The Underground Railroad* (2016), is his masterpiece and has won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and the 2016 National Book Award. This novel, conceived 16 years ago, tells a story of a girl's heroic struggle to escape the ferocious chain of slavery through an actual underground railroad. The Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865, was fought to determine if slavery would be outlawed in the United States. In the novel, the heroine Cora's runaway journey traverses nearly all of the eleven southern states that supported the institution of slavery, also known as "the Confederacy," encompassing states such as Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Indiana. Set in the antebellum American South, this novel touches upon the tragic legacy of slavery and a dark period of American history.

Since its publication, this novel has received highly favorable reviews at home in China and abroad. At home, researchers have become interested in this novel ever since the release of its Chinese translation in 2017. Numerous researchers have paid heed to the novel's narrative strategies, artistic features, historical and cultural connotations, and motifs. Similarly, critics abroad have also focused on the novel's narrative strategies and artistic techniques. Moreover, critics both at home and abroad have explored the traumatic experiences of African Americans based on psychoanalysis.

However, despite its winning of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2017 and its universal acclaim, systematic research on *The Underground Railroad* is comparatively scarce; few critics have reviewed this book from a philosophical point of view. Thus, this novel still requires comprehensive studies at home and abroad. In addition, although Barack Obama was elected as the first African American president, racism still persists in this country. Many African Americans continue to suffer from the history of slavery. As a group, they are only superficially respected and tolerated in America. Fundamentally, they continuously struggle against social prejudice and racial discrimination. The aftermath of slavery is extraordinarily far-reaching in virtually every social sphere. Thus, to abate this long-standing societal problem that has plagued America since its inception, a comprehensive study of this new novel featuring abundant cultural and historical connotations is crucial to African American literary studies.

Given that, this paper attempts to explore the survival predicaments of African Americans in light of Nietzsche's tragedy aesthetics through text analysis. Moreover, this paper raises three research questions: 1) In the Apollonian dream

state, what beautiful illusions and visions have African Americans and white people created to conceal a cruel reality? 2) On the terrifying side of Dionysus, what barbaric violence have they all committed to tear the beautiful veil? 3) On the joyful side of Dionysus, what strategies of redemption have they all employed to deal with the barbarism that they have all faced?

This paper consists of five parts. The first part is the literature review. It sums up relevant research on this novel in China and abroad. Through the review of the literature, a research gap in the perspective of Nietzsche's tragedy aesthetics emerges. The second part is the theoretical framework. It presents the Apollonian spirit and the Dionysian spirit, respectively, which are adopted throughout the research. The subsequent parts constitute the main body of this paper, which is composed of three sections. The first sheds light on the Apollonian illusion and visions of African Americans and their white masters in the Apollonian dream state. In this state, they construct the Apollonian illusions in an objectively miserable world. Nevertheless, Dionysus breaks all the beautiful veils created by Apollo on his terrifying side. Thus, the second exposes the Dionysian barbarity of compromised African Americans and their white masters. However, on his joyful side, Dionysus encourages people to pursue redemption. Consequently, the third unfolds the Dionysian redemption of radical African Americans and white abolitionists. In the end, this paper draws a conclusion that the survival predicaments of African Americans seem to have been solved in the Apollonian state. However, in the Dionysian state, this moderating effect only points to the fact that many of them are superficially respected and tolerated. Hence, the collisions between the Apollonian spirit and the Dionysian spirit demonstrate the survival predicaments of African Americans in the white-dominated American society.

2. Literature Review

The Chinese edition of the novel came out in March 2017. Shortly afterward, Chinese critics started reviewing this novel, pointing out the high value and the practical significance of its publication (Geng, 2017; Qiao, 2017). Lately, critics at home in China have primarily focused on this novel's narrative strategies, artistic techniques, historical and cultural connotations, and motifs. Likewise, researchers abroad have also focused on its narrative techniques, especially neo-slave narratives, and artistic techniques. In addition, critics have paid full attention to the traumatic experiences of African Americans in light of psychoanalysis.

2.1. Current Studies on *The Underground Railroad at Home in China*

Many Chinese studies on the novel have focused on its exquisite narrative strategies and masterful artistic techniques. Cheng (2018b) analyzed the spatial narrative and multiple narrative focalizations in this novel to reconstruct the history of slavery and satirize the American Dream. Her paper also touched upon American history, race, and human rights. Similarly, Guo (2018) examined the spatial politics under Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad theory to demonstrate that the space

constructed in this novel is not a static physical container but a social existence containing power relations. Moreover, Liu (2019b) asserted that this novel exhibited the qualities of a literary map with its geographical and narrative spaces. Interpreting this novel from a literary map perspective, she presented the history of American racial issues and the vista of African American literature by analyzing Cora's body as a critical element in the narrative. Furthermore, she illuminated the themes of literacy and freedom in terms of the neo-slave narrative in her article entitled, "Rewriting History in Contemporary Context: Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* as a Neo-slave Narrative." (Liu, 2019a) Using Phelan's rhetorical narratology, Zheng (2019) analyzed such three types of narrative judgments as interpretive judgments, ethical judgments, and aesthetic judgments, and their interactions made by characters, narrators, authors and readers to the event. This paper elaborated on the narrative progression, ethical positions and aesthetic features by seeing Cora's escape and other people's help as the novel's kernel event. As a result, this study also glorified people's pursuit and dedication for justice from all nations, conveying the mellifluous voice of post-racialism. Additionally, some master theses also studied the post-modern narrative techniques in this novel (Zhao, 2019; Zhou, 2019).

Numerous critics have also elaborated on the historical and cultural connotations of this novel from various viewpoints. In light of Michel Foucault's heterotopias, Zuo & Zhou (2019) explored such three types of heterotopias as heterotopias of deviation, heterotopias of illusion, and heterotopias of crisis through Cora's journey of escape. They asserted that Whitehead portrayed "African Americans' difficult situations and their impressive efforts to fight for survival by the exquisite construction of heterotopias, which showed his strong sense of historical responsibility and profound humanistic care." (Zuo & Zhou, 2019) Moreover, Shi (2020) applied Joseph Hillis Miller's theory of repetition covering the Platonic repetition and the Nietzschean repetition to analyze the historical reconstruction and the modern metaphors in *The Underground Railroad*. According to her paper, the shadow of racism is far from fading away for African Americans. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault's thoughts, Lin (2020) observed these literary metaphors pervaded in the novel, which convey historical and cultural implications. These metaphors attack the slavery system and profoundly reveal the complexity of human nature.

Other critics have concentrated on motifs of human nature and transgression in this novel. Pang (2018) depicted the radical evil, the banality of evil, and the interlock of evils and virtues in this novel in light of Hannah Arendt's evil theory, aiming to denounce the distortion of human nature and the subversion of human civilization in slavery through highlighting the plurality of human nature. Similarly, Sun (2018) discovered the darkness of human nature against the backdrop of racial conflicts by depicting Cora's pursuit of love and her image as a bystander. Likewise, Li (2020) also examined human nature in her paper and pointed out the different aspects of human nature that affect the formation and

development of slavery and criticizes its long-standing influence on human beings and society. These papers are crucial to the construction of a rational and harmonious society. As to transgression, Zhang (2019) illuminated three slaves' struggling process of literacy politics and transgression under the American slavery system from the perspective of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and Georges Bataille's concept of transgression. Similarly, Du (2019) addressed in her master thesis the boundaries and transgressions in this novel based on Michel Foucault, Chris Jenks, and Mikhail Bakhtin's thoughts of transgression. Zhang (2019) and Du (2019) both concluded that transgression was going to be conducive to racial uplift and play a positive role in the evolutionary process of American ethnic relations.

Lastly, some critics have employed psychoanalysis to interpret the traumatic experiences of African Americans in this novel. Cheng (2018a) expounded on the trauma and wounds imposed by slavery on the individual and the whole marginalized groups from trauma theory. In her argument, this novel "satirizes the American dream and articulates the contemporary intellectual's concerns on slavery history, racial issues, and human equality." (Cheng, 2018a)

2.2. Current Studies on *The Underground Railroad* Abroad

Unlike studies at home in China, Whitehead's earlier works *The Intuitionist* and *John Henry Days*, have already caught scholars' attention abroad. However, although *The Underground Railroad* has received critical acclaim from media and celebrities, including Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, academic studies of this novel are comparatively scarce, primarily involving the study of narrative strategies, artistic techniques, and African Americans' traumatic experiences under psychoanalysis.

In addition to its highly favorable reviews, a few critics have carried out in-depth research on the novel's narrative strategies. Salván (2020) applied Robyn R. Warhol's narratological concept of the unnarrated to explore the interplay between the explicitly narrated and the existing gaps in the narration and the textual context of slave narratives. Ward (2017) explored the tradition of slave narratives and neo-slave narratives in *The Underground Railroad* by analyzing intertextual references, references to real historical events, and the tropes of time travel. Several aspects of freedom and equality remain unattained for African Americans, as reported in this paper. On the contrary, Li (2019) held a distinctive viewpoint that *The Underground Railroad* is not a contemporary narrative of slavery but a genre troublemaker. She contextualized it against the slave narrative genre because Whitehead offers a muddled escapist narrative that teases readers with violence instead of confronting historical sufferings. Employing critical race theory and intersectional feminism, Ambrose (2018) conducted a relatively creative study, examining the art forms, including narrative and visual components in Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, JAY-Z's song *The Story of O.J.*, and Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*. By associating this novel with

songs, she addressed “how the mass incarceration of black bodies helps reinforce white supremacy and the racial caste system in the United States.” (Ambrose, 2018) Her thesis demonstrates that perhaps the only way for African Americans to gain freedom in the US is to abolish mass incarceration.

Besides focusing on the narrative strategies used in this book, researchers have also paid close attention to Whitehead’s remarkable artistic techniques. From the viewpoint of speculative aesthetics, Dischinger (2017) coined the term “speculative satire” to analyze the poetics deployed in this novel, thus exploring the possibility of reparative justice.” Likewise, Mellis (2019) argued that Whitehead created the novel in the “magical realist” genre by adding elements and language of conjure and hoodoo that interspersed throughout the novel. Whitehead’s use of “African-based spiritual practices, particularly Voodoo, hoodoo, conjure, and rootwork,” is tied to “an original African identity, and a locus of resistance to an oppressive society.” (Mellis, 2019) Additionally, some critics have concentrated on Whitehead’s striking use of metaphors, “manifested as a material infrastructure of subterranean tunnels, tracks, and train stations, reinforcing the novel’s spatialized representation of American history.” (Dubey, 2020)

Lastly, like studies at home, some critics have paid attention to African Americans’ traumatic experiences from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Richmond (2017) combined Eyerman’s cultural trauma theory, Rothberg’s postcolonial trauma theory, and Freud’s theory of the uncanny to interpret the main characters’ trauma in Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* and Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*. According to her thesis, the two novels depict the significance of movement and journey by presenting specific trauma. Also, it demonstrates the complexities of African American society and American society as a whole. Likewise, Washington (2020) also implemented trauma theory as the theoretical approach to analyze African American female children and adolescents in literature, covering Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*, and other works in her Ph.D. dissertation. Specifically, this study also indicates that “African American female children and adolescents are at risk of trauma in both rural and urban settings.” (Washington, 2020) They are routinely perceived as disresponsible, which brings about “their isolation, vulnerability, and neglect, despite their location.” (Washington, 2020) Her dissertation bears tremendous significance for understanding the long-standing marginalization and inter-sectional complexities facing African American female children and adolescents.

To sum up, the publication of *The Underground Railroad* has earned remarkable acclaim at home and abroad, but current research aforementioned is relatively scarce, primarily focusing on this novel’s narrative strategies, artistic techniques, cultural and historical connotations, motifs, and African Americans’ traumatic experiences under psychoanalysis. However, few critics interpret this novel from a philosophical point of view. Hence, this paper will explore the survival predicaments of African Americans in this novel based on Nietzsche’s tragedy

aesthetics through text analysis.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is a German philosopher, cultural critic, poet, and modern thinker. *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) is his first philosophical work, and his best-known and most influential work, in which the aesthetics of music and myth plays a crucial role. Nietzsche opens his argument in this book by defining two competing but complementary impulses in Greek culture—the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

3.1. The Apollonian Spirit

Apollo is one of the sons of Zeus, and the offspring of the Titaness Leto. He gains the oracle at Delphi, thus coming to be known as “the god of prophecy and visions,” (Allison, 2001: p. 24) “a divine healer, and the god of light, sun, beauty, order, health, and harmony.” (Allison, 2001: p. 25) He is traditionally held forth as “a model of classical Greek beauty” (Allison, 2001: p. 24) and is often associated with “the source of all beauty and light, the sun.” (Allison, 2001: p. 24) In a broader sense, Apollo stands for “order, measure, form, clarity, and individuality of creation as well as uniqueness and singularity.” (Allison, 2001: p. 18)

Moreover, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims that “Apollo is ‘the god of all plastic energies,’ ‘the god of prophecy,’ and ‘the deity of light.’” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 21) He seeks to “provide consolation for the pain of individual through the creation of beautiful forms.” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. xviii) In addition, Apollo is even described as “the magnificent divine image of the principium individuationis, through whose gestures and looks all the pleasure and wisdom and beauty of appearance” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 21) become startlingly clear. He allows people to “delight in individuals” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 115) and “satisfy the sense of beauty which craves great and sublime forms.” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 115) In this sense, the Apollonian spirit disguises the gloomy, sad, and dark aspects of life with a beautiful veil.

Furthermore, Nietzsche uses an analogy to portray the Apollonian spirit as a “dream in comparison to ordinary waking life” (Allison, 2001: p. 34) because it is “an artistic interpretation of human reality.” (Allison, 2001: p. 34) In the Apollonian dream state, the newly envisioned world appears calm, modulated, and moderate, resulting that one can have a fancy vision that transfigures empirical reality. The individual is thus able to achieve a state of “calm repose” (Allison, 2001: p. 33) with the Apollonian spirit.

3.2. The Dionysian Spirit

Like Apollo, Dionysus is also a son of Zeus. He is the god of wine and “symbolizes wine and all things wine-related.” (Konstantinovskiy, 2020) By contrast, however, he is a complex god with “a dual personality,” (Konstantinovskiy, 2020) thus reflecting the dual nature of wine. In this sense, “he has the power to transport

his worshippers into ecstasy, and to drive his opponents mad.” (Konstantinovsky, 2020)

On the one hand, he is terrifying and delivers “brutal and blinding rage,” (Konstantinovsky, 2020) for he represents “the instinctual elements in human expression: the sometimes violent drives of intense emotion, sensuality, intoxication, of frenzy and madness.” (Allison, 2001: p. 19) In the Dionysian ritual, the individual consumes tremendous quantities of wine and occasionally narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs, resulting in orgiastic displays of mystical and sexual frenzy.

As per Nietzsche, the Dionysian terror can annihilate “the usual limits and borders of existence.” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 46) Driven by his terror, people break all taboos and boundaries to release their instincts and achieve self-realization. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche also draws an analogy of intoxication to describe the Dionysian essence. According to him, “the Dionysian state of intoxication is held to be more primal.” (Allison, 2001: p. 41) It is thus one of “abundance, plenitude, and excess.” (Allison, 2001: p. 41) In this state, the entire world of waking reality is brought forth. Hence, on the terrifying side of Dionysus, as the veil of the Apollonian illusion parts, the reality of existence emerges, and it is “at bottom necessarily painful.” (Allison, 2001: p. 37)

On the other hand, however, the tragic hero Dionysus has his joyful side and has the power to transport his followers into ecstasy. He can also “give the highest pleasures to his followers, not the least of which are the joys of fertility and wine.” (Allison, 2001: p. 23) “As the offspring of the divine Zeus and the mortal Semele, Dionysus would enjoy both human and divine attributes and be blessed with earthly and divine wisdom.” (Allison, 2001: p. 23) Thus, despite an existence punctured with pain, Dionysus also utilizes his wisdom to ultimately seek a final reconciliation of things because humankind could not long endure chaos or adversity. He then struggles to “put an end to pain, injustice, alienation, individuation, ostracism, and so forth—inevitably comes to grief.” (Allison, 2001: p. 54) Moreover, in a state of “incandescence, fulguration, and rapture,” (Allison, 2001: p. 42) Dionysus gives his “exultant strength and vitality” (Allison, 2001: p. 42) into full play to make existence redeem and validate itself at every moment.

4. The Beautiful Illusions and Visions in the Apollonian Dream State

In this novel, the slaves on the plantation are subject to racial violence, reduced to commodities and property. Their masters can whip and abuse them at will. On the one hand, slaves create magnificent illusions to survive the harsh reality of slavery by engrossing themselves in entertainment, obscuring the harsh reality behind a veil of beauty. On the other hand, in South Carolina, some white people deploy grandiose uplifting programs to create Apollonian illusions that control and subordinate African Americans. As a result, slaves achieve “a beatific vision for the glorification of their own life,” (Allison, 2001: p. 37) in the Apollonian dream state.

4.1. African Americans' Apollonian Illusions and Visions of Enjoying Entertainment

While they undergo immense torture and genocide, the slaves still hold revelries and running races on the plantations in Georgia and attend social gatherings in South Carolina to gain strength to survive racial adversity. In the carnival, they play all kinds of instruments and dance to music, temporarily lost in liberation. Under these circumstances, they gain a temporary respite and enjoy life with the Apollonian spirit.

In Georgia, living in a hostile environment teeming with ferocious violence, slaves still regularly hold feasts to celebrate birthdays once or twice a year. Although “everybody knows niggers don’t have birthdays,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 13) slaves manage to make a proper celebration for Jockey’s birthday. As the feast draws near, almost every slave is brimming with excitement. They “scurry to prepare, rushing through chores, mending and scavenging moss, and patching the leak in the roof.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 13) Moreover, the feast takes precedence over all-day labor. If possible, Cora contributes turnips or greens to the birthday feasts. Her friend Lovey even glories in these rare feasts, becoming the first to dance. Furthermore, slaves also arrange a race for children at the birthday party. While they are running, the Hob woman Nag “hustles about in her helpful way, rounding up little ones from their distractions.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 28) Many onlookers, including slaves young and old, “gather on the sidelines of the horse path.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 28) During the race, “huddles of men swap cider jugs and feel their humiliations slip away.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 28) Jockey presides at the finish to “give proper attention to the amusements held in his name.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 29) He drops a piece of ginger cake onto runners’ palms, “no matter what they place.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 29) Apart from the race, there are wrestling matches. A group of young men light torches for the matches. In the light, the spectators share corn whiskey and cider, feeding their enthusiasm. As soon as the music begins, slaves start moving forward and dancing. They “clap hands, crook elbows, and shake hips.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 33) Some of them dexterously play instruments like the tambourine, banjo, fiddle, and drum to rejoice. Carousing alleviates anxiety and nervous tensions, making slaves “dispel much of the ill feeling.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 33) Even if the music stops, slaves are still lost in “a brief eddy of liberation.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 34) Thanks to the feasts, “they can face the morning toil and the following mornings and the long days with their spirits replenished.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 33)

Furthermore, in South Carolina, slaves such as Cora and Caesar attend various evening gatherings to socialize and unwind. Although Cora and other girls are herded and domesticated in the eighty bunks, they still inject a ray of hope into life. As the evening gathering approaches, Cora and the girls in the bunk room are in a state of heightened excitement. Prior to the socials, Cora even primps herself and puts on her new blue dress, which “is the prettiest one at the emporium.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 121) She is thrilled at “the soft cotton on her

skin.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 105) Caesar also wears stylish evening clothes with increased confidence. At the socials, there is “the music and dancing, the food and punch, all unfolding on the green in the flickering lantern light,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 123) which make up “a tonic for the battered soul.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 123) The musicians are very talented and play the rags, making everyone happy. The fiddler and the banjo man hailing from plantations in another state fervently share their regions’ melodies.

To conclude, despite their suffering and cruelty, slaves still take pleasure in the beauty of images, with the Apollonian spirit. They hold feasts to celebrate birthdays, arrange tailored races for children, and indulge in revelries. Driven by their Apollonian dream, the painful reality of slavery’s existence is cloaked, exerting a healing effect.

4.2. White Masters’ Apollonian Illusions and Visions of Imposing Grandiose Uplifting Programs

Several white characters in this novel create Apollonian illusions for the African Americans, leading them to believe that white people are enlightened about slavery. They conduct a strategic sterilization and syphilis program to control the African American population, since they view them as “imbeciles and the mentally unfit” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135) and “habitual criminals.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135)

By treating their slaves with enlightened attitudes, the white people in the novel aim to “racially uplift” them. They allow them to learn the alphabet, treat them kindly, and assist them many times. All of these, however, are offensive maneuvers, just like “the way a farmer tricks a donkey into moving in line with his intentions.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 152) In reality, the white people use African Americans for controlled sterilization and research into diseases.

In South Carolina, “the number of blacks surpassed that of whites by more than a hundred thousand,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 193) so the state initiates a sizeable public health program to control the African American population and improve their breeding pattern. The government hires Dr. Stevens to perform this surgery, which involves putting the tubes inside a woman to prevent pregnancies. In this way, the state can erase the “imbeciles and the mentally unfit” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135) and “habitual criminals” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135) among African Americans. Ironically, doctors’ mission is to prolong people’s lives regardless of their race, age or gender, yet they strangle these babies and treat these African American women as property that they “can do with as they please.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135) In addition, the African Americans are beguiled into participating in the syphilis program, believing that they have a mandatory physical examination and are treated for blood ailments. In fact, however, “the niggers are participants in a study of the latent and tertiary stages of syphilis.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 145) “The tonics the hospital administered, however, are merely sugar water.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 145) To temper the African blood-

lines and extinguish the socially unfit, “the best medical talents in the country flock to South Carolina.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 146) Instead of extending life, they are obsessed with controlled sterilization and research into communicable diseases.

Nevertheless, in the Apollonian dream, the white people mask the terrifying truth with a beautiful veil, conning slaves into believing that they are living well. First, they allow the African Americans to have their first visit with a doctor and attend lessons. All doctors monitor their physical well-being with the utmost dedication. Dr. Stevens is a young white specialist who teaches local doctors surgery and offers its benefits to the colored population. He maintains a pleasant attitude, examining Cora carefully and meticulously whenever she visits him. He asks her about her dormitory life during the consultation to show concern for her. Throughout the physical examination, he maintains a calm demeanor. Upon knowing that Cora already has undergone intimate relations, he smiles, explaining to her “a new surgical technique wherein the tubes inside a woman are severed to prevent the growth of a baby.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 134) He also educates Cora that “the procedure is simple, permanent, and without risk.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 134) When she becomes recalcitrant, he still does not lose his “warm demeanor,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 135) elaborating that this health program is a chance for her to take control over her own destiny. Furthermore, in order to ease her concern, he encourages her to talk to her proctor for more information about the program.

The proctor Miss Lucy is a diligent white woman, working late even on a Friday. She actively encourages Cora to learn the alphabet upon meeting her, such as correcting her pronunciation of *Quarter* to *Dormitory*. Patting her arm, she encourages her to strive for continual progress. Before walking to her office, she even bows to “a colored girl.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 107) Thanks to her advice, Cora removes her primer from her trunk, practicing her letters and speech repeatedly. Additionally, Cora learns how to master posture over a number of months, making her relish the enlightened attitude toward colored progress. After three weeks in the dormitory, Cora knocks on Miss Lucy’s office door to ask her if the government keeps records of her mother Mabel’s arrival. To help her, Miss Lucy searches all the cabinets, drawers, and papers. Writing down her mother’s name, she also promises to check the master records. Meanwhile, to accomplish the government’s mission of racial uplift, she reminds Cora again of the lessons in reading and writing, asserting that this program is “especially for those with aptitude.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 117) Not only does she persuade Cora to give the birth control program a second thought, but she also asks her to talk to some of the other girls about the birth control program in words they understand. She hopes that Cora can take on “the mantle of leadership with the other girls,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 152) advocating that she could be “a true credit” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 152) to her race if she follows her advice.

Thus, in order to make Cora accept their “controlled sterilization,” (White-

head, 2017: p. 146) the doctor and the proctor conspire to hide their revolting and inhumane intentions. As she was treated well and counseled often, Cora is persuaded to work hard at the alphabet and speech and to undergo a tailored physical examination. In effect, however, all that they do serves their grandiose racial uplifting purposes. When spotting her rebellious streak, they reply to Cora calmly, educating her that this is a chance to discriminate her “between good, upstanding people and the mentally disturbed, with criminals and imbeciles.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 153)

In sum, the white people create a dream world for African Americans that consists of “a plastic logic of forms.” (Allison, 2001: p. 35) Due to their superficially enlightened attitude, the African Americans are temporarily free from “the raucous turbulence and strife,” (Allison, 2001: p. 35) but they are coaxed into participating in a strategic sterilization and syphilis program. By doing so, they obscure their real standing in the world by wrapping slavery in glorious color.

5. The Cruel Barbarity on the Terrifying Side of Dionysus

Amid the Dionysian terror, the compromised African Americans and their white masters indulge in drunkenness in which distance, limits, and boundaries are all broken. There are numerous slaves in this novel who are compromised and obey their white masters. They come to flatter their white masters and incite racial hatred toward their African American fellows. More miserably, white people commit collective acts of cruel genocide and torture against slaves and abolitionists, unleashing their desire without the bondage of principle.

5.1. Compromised African Americans' Dionysian Barbarity of Adulating White Masters and Inciting Racial Hatred

Under slavery, African Americans are repressed violently in a suffocating environment. Some survive the hardship through catering to their masters and stirring up racial hatred among their fellows. Thus, tensions arise between them and others in their community and even their family. As per Nietzsche, the compromised African Americans deliver “brutal and blinding rage” (Konstantinovskiy, 2020) and consequently discharge their Dionysian barbarity “in the absence of any restraint and of all social and civil codes.” (Allison, 2001: p. 41) Due to hardship and tribulations, several slaves and the freeman Mingo betray their own race to flatter white people, inciting racial hatred against their African American peers. There are two slaves named Homer, and Moses who fall into blind obedience to their masters and conspire with them to oppress their counterparts. Moreover, the freeman Mingo caters to white people by informing them of the fugitives on the Valentine farm. In the end, a white posse ransacks the farm, destroying their sanctuary for eternity and ending its relations with the underground railroad.

To begin with, the little “black boy” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 273) Homer “seems an emissary from a different country,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 273) even though he shares the same root and race with Cora. He is bought by Ridgeway for five dollars but obtains his emancipation papers the next day. However, as an African

American, he forgoes the free papers in order to prepare for his grim future. Thus, he joins Ridgeway's gang and is willingly obedient and loyal, riding with him to capture escaped slaves all his life. "Homer's duties encompass driving the team, sundry maintenance, and what Ridgeway termed 'bookkeeping'." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 242) In return, Ridgeway offers him food, clothes, and shelter, and he is exempt from random beatings. As the slave catcher's helper, he has a condescending attitude toward the runaways. For example, he gobbles down the fugitive Jasper's portion, taking no notice of Cora's staring, and deems that "Cora and Jasper might as well have been invisible most of the time, smaller than lint." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 242) After calculating Jasper's reward, Ridgeway shoots Jasper in the face because his bounty is so low. However, at the time when his peer is shot, Homer appears nonchalant, giving no indication of racial affinity or sympathy. "He opens his notebook and checks his boss's figures, saying he's right." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 255) Moreover, when he catches sight of the underground workers' intense combat with Ridgeway, Homer immediately comes to Ridgeway's defense and runs to get a gun. "It is he who eventually brings help to the slave catcher, out in the forest." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 323)

Furthermore, Moses maltreats women and other slaves on the plantation and grows violent after being promoted to a boss. Although he is whipped and his wounds are washed out with hot pepper, this abuse does not render him angry or mean. Instead, it makes him work faster than any other picker. However, not until Connelly promotes him to a boss does he become a monster. Moses acts as the master's eyes and ears over his own kind, making other slaves quake. According to Mabel, Moses forces her to the schoolhouse and rapes her. When she tries to resist, he smiles and threatens her that he will find Cora instead if she does not cooperate. For him, women are like animals, and he only has to "break them in once and they stay broke." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 350)

Lastly, there is a freeman named Mingo who refuses to harbor more fugitives on the Valentine farm. Instead, he advocates improving relations with the white people. In the end, he even betrays the runaways, which leads to a dramatic raid on the farm, ending its relations with the railroad. Mingo is a freeman with a West Indian complexion who has lived on the farm for a long time. Inwardly, however, he shows disdain for slaves and views them as innately inferior, claiming that they constitute a stumbling block in proving African Americans' intelligence as productive members of society. In a debate, he advocates for "a severe reduction in the slaves the farm shelters," (Whitehead, 2017: p. 297) including the runaways and the lost. In order to realize "his own notions about colored advancement," (Whitehead, 2017: p. 297) he calls for a gradual development of the tribe, thus denying slaves a sanctuary. Since Cora is a runaway who puts the farm in the spotlight, he keeps distant from her and shuns her upon hearing that she is a murderer. According to him, the farm cannot accommodate every African American or save every fugitive. Also, he presses the African Americans for improving relations with the white towns abutting the farm. More importantly, according to Sybil, he tells the constables that "the farm harbors fugitives and

provides the particulars for a successful ambush.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 333) In the end, a drastic raid engulfs the farm, breaking all slaves’ delusion.

In conclusion, to survive slavery, Homer, Moses, and a freeman named Mingo, blindly adulate white people through various methods. Homer has no affinity or sympathy for his fellows. He is obedient to the slave-catcher Ridgeway, helping him repress as many slaves as possible. After being promoted to a boss, Moses abuses women and other slaves on the plantation. The freeman Mingo conspires with a white posse to ravage the fugitives on the Valentine farm, eternally ending its relations with the underground railroad. By flattering white people, they fuel racial hatred against their African American counterparts.

5.2. White Masters’ Dionysian Barbarity of Perpetrating Cruel Genocide and Torture

On the terrifying side of Dionysus, people’s actions threaten the conditions of societal and political stability. Their actions are even considered “as a kind of epidemic madness, as an alien disease that seems to transgress all rational and social codes in the name of wanton abandon and excess.” (Allison, 2001: p. 42) In this novel, imbued with the Dionysian terror, white masters break all rational and social codes through the inhumane trafficking of slaves and the cruel genocide and torture of both slaves and abolitionists. As the veil of beautiful illusions and visions withdraws, the ruthless and brutal side of life emerges.

In Georgia, the slave Michael is endowed with the ability to recite long passages of the *Declaration of Independence*. His owner regards this ability as a novel diversion since it can delight his visitors. However, before long, he grows bored and sells Michael south to Georgia. In the end, his overseer Connelly beats him to death in exasperation because he is a “mediocre worker” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 38) and always complains about “noises and black spells that blot his memory.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 38) He also puts out a slave’s eyes for looking at words. As they cannot endure the drastic punishment, slaves struggle to escape “by the good full moon to sanctuary.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 340) However, their attempts rarely succeed. An escaped slave named Big Anthony is returned in an iron cage by the constables. In order to punish him severely, Terrance orders new stocks, which make the woodworkers toil all night long. Absurdly, he invites a band of visitors, including the slaves, to watch the scary punishment. While the revelers are savoring a sumptuous meal, Big Anthony is whipped and “doused with oil and roasted.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 55) When one man refrains from watching Big Anthony’s thrashing, Terrance slaps him since “it is customary for slaves to witness the abuse of their brethren as moral instruction.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 54) Thus, slaves not only suffer from tyrannical violence but also need to witness their friends’ lynching. More cruelly, they cannot show any sign of sympathy; otherwise, “it will be their turn at the foul end of the lash.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 54) Gradually, slaves are “tamed” by the white people and lose their humanity, sinking into nonchalance. “No one has moved since the beginning of Terrance’s address, not even to pinch their noses to keep out the smell of

Big Anthony's roasting flesh." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 56) In addition to this punishment, the white masters tailor all varieties of chains to "prevent fugitives from absconding, from moving their hands, or to suspend a body in the air for a beating." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 78) Thousands of "manacles and fetters, shackles for ankles and wrists and necks dangle off the wall in a morbid inventory. One row is devoted to children's chains." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 78) As long as slaves continue to "transgress," "their bloody backs will be scrubbed out with pepper water afterward." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 43)

In North Carolina, extreme bloodshed and violence penetrate every aspect of life, revealing the racism and physical abuse inflicted by white people on African Americans. On a journey to this state, the station agent Martin Wells shows Cora the road entitled, "the Freedom Trail," where "the bodies go all the way to town," (Whitehead, 2017: p. 183) and "some of them are naked, others partially clothed, the trousers black where their bowels emptied when their necks snapped." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 182) In addition to the bloody corpses hung from trees, the night riders hold the "Friday Festival" (Whitehead, 2017: p. 187) to celebrate their catch by swinging slaves in public. The girl Louisa escapes from her plantation and is captured by night riders after hiding for many months. Inevitably, she cannot escape her lynching. Two night-riders drag her first onstage and then "to the great oak in the middle of the park." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 191) The leading night-rider Jamison even calls for volunteers and people of all ages to watch this lynching. In full view, "she is led up the stairs," (Whitehead, 2017: p. 192) swinging in the air with the noose around her neck.

Besides the slaves, "the abolitionists and sympathizers who come down to Georgia and Florida are run off, flogged and abused by mobs, tarred and feathered." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 63) If they possess seditious writings, or aid and abet the African Americans, the white abolitionists will be sentenced to death. Also, the night riders are on patrol to round up strays and slaves in the local white people's homes. They are "dragged from their homes by their hair." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) Out of "sentiment or a quaint notion about property rights," (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) some slave owners are strung up. "A mob strings up a husband and wife who hide two colored boys in their barn." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 214) Moreover, "kindhearted citizens who hide niggers in their attics and cellars and coal bins" (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) undergo the same fate. Consequently, to repress the white "traitors," "some towns increase the rewards for turning in collaborators." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) Preoccupied by the bounty, "folks inform on business rivals, ancient nemeses, and neighbors, recounting old conversations where the traitors utter forbidden sympathies." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) For instance, to get a reward, schoolmistresses instigate children to "tattle on their parents." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 200) A couple "hide two colored boys in their barn." (Whitehead, 2017: p. 214) Nevertheless, their daughter is jealous of the attention the boy obtains from her parents and thus turns them in, which makes them strung up by a mob.

To sum up, on the plantation in Georgia, slaves suffer hardship and tribula-

tions from morning till night. They will be whipped, abused, and lynched if their white masters claim them as violating rules. In North Carolina, they are also treated inhumanely and are forbidden to set foot on this land. In this cruel state, “the negro race does not exist except at the ends of ropes.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 187) Also, the white abolitionists and the sympathizers who assist slaves or hide them in their houses will be informed on and then are run off or massacred.

6. The Mighty Redemption on the Joyful Side of Dionysus

The god Dionysus also has his joyful side and is called “the gentle god.” As the offspring of the divine Zeus and the mortal Semele, Dionysus is blessed with earthly and divine wisdom. He strives to end pain, injustice, and alienation, encouraging people to seek a final reconciliation through redemption. In this novel, radical African Americans and abolitionists are involved in the underground railroad mission. These freemen pursue justice and equality for their African American brothers and sisters. Through the underground railroad, white abolitionists also help transport and rescue slaves, leading to some of them sacrificing their lives. However, although they spare no effort to achieve salvation, the reality of dominant, systemic racial discrimination far outweighs their efforts and sacrifice. In the end, the protagonist Cora is still trying to escape. The promise of “all men are created but equal” is unfulfilled. Achieving equality and freedom is still a long way off for many African Americans today.

6.1. Radical African Americans’ Dionysian Redemption of Pursuing Justice and Equality for Their Fellows

There are numerous radical African Americans who are devoted to the abolitionist mission. They seek justice and equality for their fellows. Some of them sacrifice their lives to fulfill their missions. In this novel, three free African American men, including Royal, Lander, and Valentine, dedicate themselves to pursuing justice and racial equality for their fellows. Their mission is to rescue slaves, show empathy for them to boost morale, deliver antislavery speeches, and offer assistance at every opportunity. However, Royal and Lander are shot to death as a result of their efforts.

First of all, the free man Royal is engaged in the underground railroad mission to rescue slaves and runaways. After being involved in this mission, Royal serves as a conductor, making tremendous contributions to the abolition of slavery. For instance, he “scouts the city jail for runaways the lawyer might defend, runs messages between enigmatic persons, and distributes funds from antislavery societies to relocated fugitives.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 311) Moreover, although he “takes liberty with his first breath,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 310) Royal shows empathy for his fellows to raise morale. While they are first in this country as slaves, he believes African Americans will ultimately triumph and prosper one day. Royal also takes Cora to the ghost tunnel to show her the station, introducing her to “the newest locomotives and the obsolete engines.” (Whitehead, 2017: p.

318) He also assures her that the railroad is at his disposal. Unfortunately, later in the story, three bullets bite into his back as he runs. Still, he does not forget his mission. In the end, he convinces Cora not to be afraid, for the tunnel will save her.

Additionally, born into a wealthy family, Lander is “the most dignified and eloquent” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 329) freeman and becomes “the first colored student at one of the prestigious white colleges.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 303) However, although he could be a surgeon or a judge, Lander chooses to give abolitionist speeches in the end. Unfortunately, his radical speeches arouse sheriffs and judges’ attention. Sheriffs arrest him for sedition, and an honorable judge accuses him of “promulgating an infernal orthodoxy that imperils the fabric of good society.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 304) To make matters more dire, he is jailed for inciting riots and is beaten by white mobs. Despite all these obstacles, he continues to deliver anti-slavery speeches. During the debates over picking up stakes on the Valentine farm, he opposes Mingo’s call for gradual progress and closing the doors to those who are in need. Instead, he appeals to the residents to unite to save everyone because they rise and fall as “one colored family” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 342) and should “pick each other up when they fall.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 342) Since he recognizes “the grievous influence of slavery,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 341) Lander encourages those who already take refuge here to empathize with their African brothers and sisters, and not to close their doors to desperate runaways in need. However, the white posse observes that his rhetoric inflames passions and ferments a rebellion, hunting him for months. He becomes “the intended target” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 333) and is shot in the chest by them.

Lastly, the freeman Valentine, whom the white people take as their own, attempts to rescue slaves and offers them every assistance by virtue of his light skin. As he is a freeman, his mother never fears for his safety. He is at no risk of being snatched by traders to the South. However, he echoes Lander’s view, considering that “he is a freeman in name only,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 337) as long as one of the African American family “endures the torments of bondage.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 337) His farm connects with the office of the underground railroad, “busy with fugitives and conductors.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 316) Previously, his wife Gloria was a slave working on an indigo plantation. When he encounters her, Valentine buys Gloria’s freedom and teaches her the alphabet. In addition, with light skin, he strives to provide every assistance possible to “his friends with black faces, the former field hand, and the fugitives,” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 316) heading down to the county seat and buying parcels for them.

In conclusion, the freemen transport slaves and runaways through the underground railroad to help them escape their overbearing masters, struggling to mitigate the ravages of racial prejudice. Also, they empathize with them to enhance morale, provide fugitives with every assistance possible, and deliver anti-slavery speeches. Although the white posse raids the Valentine farm and ends its relations with the railroad, the three free men contribute a great deal to pursuing

justice and equality for their African American fellows.

6.2. White Abolitionists' Dionysian Redemption of Augmenting the Secret Underground Railroad Operation

A host of white abolitionists engage in the underground railroad mission to redeem African Americans. They carry out the underground railroad operations and serve as station agents and conductors for rescuing slaves. Without their determined efforts, slaves would not elude racial violence or escape to the Free States. The white abolitionists, however, are still a tiny minority. Despite their strength, they cannot compete with the dominant white people who still adhere to the institution of slavery. In the end, Cora is still trying to escape, which parallels African-American struggles for equality today.

Mr. Fletcher is a white Pennsylvanian who is already stooped and gray-haired. Old as he is, he is yet committed to abolitionism because of his strong aversion to “the monstrous system.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 62) Abhorring slavery as an “affront” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 62) before God, he becomes the first white abolitionist to extend help to Caesar and takes him into his confidence, “risking that the slave might inform on him for a reward.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 62) Upon spotting his literacy, he timely reminds Caesar to guard over himself since a “nigger” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 326) with a book is the only thing more “dangerous” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 211) than a “nigger” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 211) with a gun. He pledges to transport Caesar to the underground railroad as long as he can traverse thirty miles to his house. However, Cora unwittingly murders a white boy on their way to Mr. Fletcher’s home, resulting in Caesar’s apprehension. Mr. Fletcher lays “a reassuring hand” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 75) on Caesar’s shoulder to mitigate his fears of being lynched. Ingeniously, he gets the two runaways to the underground railroad and introduces them to the station agent named Lumbly. Before leaving, he even embraces the fugitives with desperate affection. Then, Lumbly “leads the two runaways to the edge of the platform.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 82) He discusses their departure with them and offers them two choices. Considering passengers’ time and schedule, he operates the underground railroad under certain constraints and overcomes all kinds of difficulties in coordinating the changes. Under his guidance, Cora and Caesar take the locomotive, lurching forward to South Carolina.

In South Carolina, the station agent Sam takes charge of the underground railroad. “The station is buried beneath his barn, as with Lumbly.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 111) He is “a white man of twenty-five years.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 108) When the two runaways arrive at the station, he then drives them to his home and offers them cotton clothes, food, and water to wash up. In order to disguise their identities, Sam gives the two runaways new names as Bessie Carpenter and Christian Markson and helps them rehearse. More importantly, he helps find them jobs, providing them with detailed directions to the Placement office. With his help, the two runaways get food, jobs, and housing. Gradually, the two fugitives make a go of things here and decide to stay, forgetting the “daily sting”

(Whitehead, 2017: p. 124) of the plantation and skipping the trains. However, the enlightened attitude toward slaves in South Carolina ends up being superficial. Sam discloses the hypocrisy of those white doctors and proctors. They are collaboratively conducting the syphilis program and the strategic sterilization among slaves to adjust their “breeding patterns” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 145) and remove their “melancholic tendency.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 145) In an emergency, Sam rushed down the stairs to assist Cora through the floor of his house to the platform. In spite of the slave catcher raiding his house, Sam continues to fulfill his final mission for the underground railroad. He brings his latest cargo to the Valentine farm, rescuing “a family of three who’d been hiding out in New Jersey.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 321) Apart from rescuing Cora and Caesar, Sam also drives runaways to Boston and New York. Furthermore, he even poses as a slave catcher to pry slaves from jail “on the pretext of delivering them to their masters, constables, and deputies.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 321) From his viewpoint, “racial prejudice rots one’s faculties.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 321)

In North Carolina, the new laws in the state have rendered the station inoperable. “Colored men and women” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 198) are prohibited from setting foot on North Carolinian soil. There will be no tolerance for agitation by abolitionists in this state. “The punishment for possessing seditious writings, or for aiding and abetting a colored person is in practice sentenced to death.” (Whitehead, 2017: pp. 199-200) Under these hazardous circumstances, the station agent Martin Wells, who is already in his middle age, still chooses to harbor Cora in the attic of his house, despite his nervous personality. He fully understands the peril and risk that harboring Cora can bring Ethel and him to ruin. Despite this, his commitment to the abolition of slavery outweighs even his love for his family. He wakes Cora when she collapses on the rocks and takes her to his house by his wagon. As she is confined to the attic, he frequents Cora regularly to bring her food, the day’s newspaper, and Ethel’s childhood Bible. As soon as Cora becomes ill, Martin notifies Fiona to take a few days off so that Cora can move down to the bedroom to recuperate in a more comfortable environment. To conceal the fact, Martin even comes up with a pretext that he catches the Venezuelan pox from a tainted bag of feed, and “the doctor forbids anyone to enter the house until it runs its course.” (Whitehead, 2017: p. 217) Unfortunately, the night riders find Cora under Martin’s old bed because Fiona betrays him and his wife. They are strung up, sacrificing themselves for the underground railroad mission.

All in all, white abolitionists surmount formidable obstacles and gruesome tortures to seek redemption for African Americans. As station agents and conductors, they have collaborated to transport slaves to the Free States through the real underground railroad. However, most of them are run off or massacred since they are too weak to fight against the systemic racism in the country.

7. Conclusion

Based on Nietzsche’s tragedy aesthetics, this paper addresses three research ques-

tions and explores the survival predicaments of African Americans in this novel through text analysis, aiming to increase people's awareness of this deep-rooted social problem that has plagued America since its inception.

In real life, slaves undergo brutal savage and bloody violence from morning till night. However, in the Apollonian dream state, they conjure a fancy hallucination where they revel in entertainment. In this sense, they cover their cruel existence with a beautiful veil, gaining a temporary respite from their daily struggle as slaves. Additionally, white people construct magnificent Apollonian illusions to subjugate African Americans. Some have a superficially enlightened attitude toward African Americans to glorify their revolting purposes, thus cajoling them into voluntarily participating in their grandiose uplifting programs.

The sublime expression of life, however, is not long-lived. On the terrifying side of Dionysus, the compromised African Americans and the white people transcend all social boundaries and norms. Some slaves flatter their white masters and incite racial hatred toward their fellows. Often, they fall into obedient blind obedience to their white masters and join forces with them to repress other slaves or inform on fugitives. In addition, white people execute brutal genocide and torture against slaves and abolitionists. Slaves will be whipped and lynched if they are deemed to be violating rules. White abolitionists will be informed on, and then massacred if they assist or abet African Americans.

In spite of exposing the painful side of life, Dionysus also has a joyful side and strives to end injustice and pain. African Americans and some white abolitionists in this state are seeking redemption through reconciliation. In addition to rescuing slaves, expressing empathy, delivering antislavery speeches, and offering assistance, these freemen ardently pursue justice and equality for their African American fellows. These individuals contribute significantly to abolitionist missions. Additionally, multiple white abolitionists cooperate to facilitate the operation of the underground railroad. Many of them devote their entire lives to this onerous mission, with some risking their lives to accomplish it.

As per Nietzsche, the content of all epic tragedies depends on the tension created by the interplay between the two spirits, which fuse in this novel. In the end, the protagonist Cora is still trying to escape. Dionysian barbarism overwhelms both Apollonian illusions and Dionysian redemption, preventing her from achieving freedom or equality. The conflicts between the two spirits in this novel have not been solved. This reveals that the survival predicaments of African Americans still linger on and remain a significant component of American society today. As a means of escaping their survival predicaments, they have battled social prejudice and racial discrimination time and time again.

Racial prejudice and discrimination may be on the decline, but they are far from completely disappearing. Superficially, most African Americans are not segregated from white people, and their housing, education, and employment have improved. However, all of this progress is a result of the Apollonian spirit. In the Dionysian state, discrimination against African Americans can still be felt in almost every social sphere, lurching below the soft surface of respect and toler-

ance. Many white people's attitudes toward them are still based on the mindset that they are biologically inferior. In addition, to some white Americans, African Americans are perceived to be lazy, criminal, and irresponsible.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a series of incidents, including Hurricane Katrina and the 2014 Ferguson Riot brought the painful specter of discrimination and racism for African Americans. Recently, George Floyd's death due to police brutality has sparked protests worldwide again, making Black Lives Matter demonstrations a central political issue in contemporary American society. Despite Barack Obama's unprecedented election as American president, many African Americans are still the victims of irrational racism in today's US. Given that, the fate of many African Americans has not improved. Thereupon, it is hoped that this paper will raise people's awareness of this deep-rooted social problem, which constitutes a significant and persistent issue jeopardizing American society.

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