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White Fetishism in *Meridian*: A Lacanian Interpretation

Meridian'da Beyaz Fetişizmi: Lacancı Bir Yorumlama

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Abstract: Fetishism, a term long explored within the field of psychoanalysis, has been subject to various theoretical interpretations for over a century. One such perspective is offered by Jacques Lacan, a prominent French psychoanalyst, who explored the connection between desire, lack, the symbolic order, and the fetish object. His main argument is based on the idea that human desire is not rooted in the pursuit of an object but is instead fueled by the inherent lack in the subject. Drawing upon Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, this article explores Alice Walker's novel *Meridian* (1976) in terms of Truman Held's symbolic desires and the complex relationships that shape his identity. This study applies a qualitative approach, deploying close textual analysis of key passages from the novel to identify instances of fetishism. The fetish, as a symbolic substitute for the unattainable object, emerges as a crucial element in comprehending Truman's coping mechanisms and attempts to reconcile his fragmented self. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel's psychological dimensions, illuminating the character's struggles for identity formation, agency, and liberation by uncovering the ways in which desire becomes a driving force within the broader socio-political context.

Keywords: Jacques Lacan, Fetishism, Alice Walker, *Meridian*, Lack, Desire.

Öz: Psikanaliz alanında uzun süredir araştırılan bir terim olan fetişizm, yüzyılı aşkın bir süredir çeşitli teorik yorumlara konu olmuştur. Bu bakış açılarından biri, arzu, eksiklik, sembolik düzen ve fetiş nesnesi arasındaki bağlantıyı araştıran Fransız psikanalist Jacques Lacan tarafından sunulmuştur. Lacan'ın temel argümanı, insan arzusunun bir nesne arayışından kaynaklanmadığı, bunun yerine öznenin doğasında var olan eksiklikten beslendiği fikrine dayanmaktadır. Lacan'ın psikanalitik kuramına dayanan bu makale, Alice Walker'ın romanı *Meridian*'ı (1976) Truman Held'in sembolik arzuları ve kimliğini şekillendiren karmaşık ilişkiler açısından incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, fetişizm örneklerini tespit etmek için romandaki önemli pasajların yakın metin analizini yaparak nitel bir yaklaşım uygulamaktadır. Fetiş, ulaşılamaz nesnenin sembolik bir ikamesi olarak, Truman'ın başa çıkma mekanizmalarını ve parçalanmış benliğini uzlaştırma girişimlerini anlamada çok önemli bir unsur olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Nihayetinde bu çalışma, romanın psikolojik boyutlarının daha derinlemesine anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmakta, arzunun daha geniş sosyo-politik bağlamda nasıl itici bir güç haline geldiğini ortaya çıkararak karakterin kimlik oluşumu, eylemlilik ve özgürleşme mücadelelerini aydınlatmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jacques Lacan, Fetişizm, Alice Walker, *Meridian*, Eksiklik, Arzu.

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Introduction

Fetishism, originally coined by Alfred Binet in the late 19th century and later incorporated into psychoanalytic discourse by Sigmund Freud, provides valuable insights into the multi-dimensional relationship between sexuality, desire, and the unconscious mind. To indicate the complex nature of fetishism, Freud, in the *Three Essays*, states that "no other variation of the sexual instinct that borders on the pathological can lay so much claim to our interest as this one" (1905:153). In his earliest discussions, as outlined in his essay *Fetishism* (1927), Freud lays the foundation for understanding this complex psychosexual phenomenon within the psychoanalytic framework by uncovering psychodynamic underpinnings and clinic manifestations of fetishism.

As per Freud's theory, fetishism is initiated by a traumatic experience involving the realization that the mother lacks a penis, which subsequently generates a pathological fear of castration and results in the substitution of a sexual object with another (1927). Hence, it is proposed that the origin of the fetishism "lie in a misconception of the lack in the female genitalia that leads to a substitute for the proper sexual object" (Dant, 1996: 496). The fetish object, typically an inanimate item such as a shoe, piece of clothing, or body part, becomes imbued with sexual significance and is used as a substitute for the maternal phallus, thereby facilitating the process to manage the castration anxiety. Freudian notion of fetishism, that is, as Böhm and Batta neatly put it, "can simply be seen as a problem and a perversion—a pathology that needs to be cured" (2010: 350). Certainly, it can be asserted that although Freud engaged in speculation regarding the symbolic genesis of sexual fetishes, he did not embark on a systematic inquiry into the significance of fetishes to the extent that he did when analyzing the content of dreams (Dant, 1996). The purpose of this study is to examine how Lacanian fetishism theory illuminates the symbolic significance of fetishistic objects and desires in Alice Walker's novel *Meridian*, offering critical insights into the development of identity and power dynamics within the novel's socio-cultural context.

1. Lacanian Fetishism

Taking its broader cultural meanings by the middle of the 19th century, fetishism is "a displacement of meaning through synecdoche, the displacement of the object of the desire onto something else through processes of disavowal" (Gamman and Makinen, 1994: 45). This delineation of fetish elucidates the progressive evolution of scholarly perspectives, with Freud's theoretical contributions on fetishism serving as a solid framework for comprehending this phenomenon, while subsequent psychoanalysts have both expanded and scrutinized his conceptualizations.

Within the realm of post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, a renowned French psychoanalyst who succeeded Freud, accepts fetishism as the symbolic significance attached to the object rather than its physical attributes. In his most influential work *Ecrits* (1966), Lacan placed great emphasis on the Symbolic order, wherein the Other, governed by linguistic and social constructs, is the realm where meaning and signifiers are generated. From his perspective, it can be inferred that the acquisition of symbol-making skills entails a simultaneous detachment from the surrounding childhood milieu of objects, resulting in the development of an autonomous selfhood, an experience that is often accompanied by a sense of loss (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 441). This lack stems from the separation between the subject and the symbolic order, which is mediated by language and it "can never be filled, and all human desire circulates around it, yearning to hark back to the lost unity" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 441). Evidently, a recurring theme in Lacan's theoretical framework centers on deficiency, contending that human desire is

not primarily driven by the guest for an object but rather by the intrinsic sense of absence within the subject.

In Lacanian terms, a fetish object becomes crucial in addressing the subject's lack and it serves as a substitute for the perceived void and functions to stabilize the subject's desire. Unlike traditional psychoanalysis, which often focuses on fetishism as a fixation on a specific body part or object, Lacan's emphasis on symbolic phallus is pivotal as it is not a mere representation of the genitalia but a symbol of power and presence within the symbolic order. He introduces the notion of the phallus as "the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" (1977: 288), emphasizing its symbolic significance in representing desire as opposed to being a direct reference to an anatomical organ. Fetish objects are imbued with this phallic symbolism, serving as signifiers of the subject's desire. To put it more plainly: the fetish object is not simply a replacement for a forbidden object but is, in fact, a representation of the very lack that generates desire. Central to Lacanian theory is the exploration of desire and lack, concepts that reverberate throughout his work, seeking to shed light on the enigmatic relationship between the two. In this sense, Lacan's exploration of desire moves beyond Freudian notions of libidinal energy and the pleasure principle, as he observes fetishism as a "more general linguistic and symbolic process of substitution" (Böhm and Batta, 2010: 352), exploring the complexities of desire's linguistic, symbolic, and social dimensions. It is in this exploration that Lacan posits that we are born into a world of lack, a world where the fulfillment of our desires is perpetually deferred and this deferral gives rise to a fundamental tension, driving the ceaseless pursuit of satisfaction.

This process, as Böhm and Batta state, "starts with the infant's 'mirror stage'[1] and, later in life, continues with the instances of fetishism when anxieties are transferred to social images and symbols" (2010: 352-53). Conceptualizing of lack as a driving force, often unconsciously, addresses a rich and unique perspective on the formation of desires and fantasies. Therefore, "a fetish is created through the veneration or worship of an object that is attributed some power or capacity, independently of its manifestation of that capacity" (Dant, 1996: 499). This fetish object, rooted in unconscious conflicts and societal structures, exerts a profound influence on the lives of its "human worshippers," (Dant, 1996: 499) subtly manipulating their conscious thoughts and behaviors. This underscores the inseparable connection between individual subjectivity and the broader socio-symbolic context.

In this vein, to understand the borders of such thought, as well as the politics of fetishism in cultural contexts, this study aims to analyze Alice Walker's second novel *Meridian* (1976) in terms of white fetishism. As a way of approaching fetishism within the context of racial dynamics, diverging from prevalent approaches in racial fetishism studies, this paper adopts a Lacanian interpretation, which aims to mark the white fetishism of black male character, Truman Held, signifying his enduring sense of absence, and yearning for this elusive attribute in the novel. Consistent with this effort, the subsequent part of the study will involve a concise overview of Alice Walker and *Meridian*, followed by an examination of the fetishistic tendencies exhibited by Truman Held.

[1]The mirror stage, initial departure from Freud, signifies the psychoanalytical roots and their evolution within Lacanian theory. He posits that human subjectivity begins to form when an infant recognizes itself in a mirror, and this self-recognition initiates a sense of identity, along with a concurrent sense of lack as the infant becomes aware of the disparity between its physical image and its subjective experience.

2.White Fetishism in *Meridian*

Hailing from Eatonton, Georgia, Alice Walker, born on February 9, 1944, stands as an influential figure in African American literature, well-known for her steadfast dedication to feminist and womanist ideologies. As she neatly writes in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983), "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female" (xi, emphasis in original) advocates for the importance of female solidarity and challenges traditional gender roles. Her unwavering commitment to feminism and womanism, one of the most notable aspects of Walker's literary personality, portrays the strength, resilience, and agency of women, particularly women of color.

Her early experiences with racism and discrimination were central to her life, leading her to become a fierce advocate for Civil Rights Movement and social justice. In her early poems, short stories, essays, and notably, her initial novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), she explores the themes of the Civil Rights Movement. However, it is in *Meridian* that her narrative acutely focuses on the nuances and complexities of the movement (Hendrickson, 1999). Written after the Civil Rights Movement, *Meridian* "can be read as an attempt to mend the ruptures and reconstructs an alternative black tradition from its contemporary American artifacts" (Nadel, 1988: 56). In a world shaped by the crisis of raciology, the novel is attuned to social, political, and philosophical problems raised by the Movement, which "reaffirmed African Americans' connection to each other as a people and to their history of struggle against oppression" (Hendrickson, 1999: 111). McGowan limits the scope of the narrative, as she prefers, explaining that it "represents a shift from a preoccupation with commemorating black women's suffering to a concern with probing an individual black woman's situation for its roots and possibilities" (1981: 25). Therefore, in the dynamic milieu presented, Walker delineates the story of Meridian, a young African American woman grappling with self-discovery during the 1960s. Her journey unfolds within the complexities of a love triangle involving her black boyfriend, Truman Held, and a white Jewish friend, Lynne, whom he ultimately marries. With these main characters, Walker "transcends the boundaries of the female gender to embrace more universal concerns about individual autonomy, self-reliance, and self-realization" (McDowell, 1981: 262). It is pertinent to note that the novel contains significant content warranting meticulous examination beyond the aforementioned issues. Within this context, fetishism, a focal point of investigation in this study, emerged as a nuanced thematic element in the story, interconnected with overarching theme of racism in Walker's narrative. While various studies have extensively examined primary themes within the narrative, such as racism, gender discrimination, and the Civil Rights Movement, Truman's fetishistic fixation on white women remains an underexplored matter in prior scholarly analyses.

Following an expulsion from high school due to pregnancy, Meridian, identified as possessing a high intelligence level through testing, subsequently enrolls at Saxon College, where she encounters Truman during her academic pursuits. Truman is enrolled in a men's institution situated adjacent to Saxon, and "he and Meridian are romantically and sexually drawn together" (McDowell, 1981: 269) through their shared engagement in the voter's rights crusade. In the narrative, another character, Lynne Rabinowitz, a white northern Jewish student activist, portrays the transformative power of suffering, which enables her to empathize with the obstacles of black community and transformed her "to a woman who now comprehends a deeper nature of oppression and who continues to work against it" (Danielson, 1989: 327). Her Jewish heritage makes her to understand black students' efforts and ambition to gain equality and the right to vote

during Civil Rights Movement. In this respect, their early friendship confirms one of the ideals of the Movement: *Black and White Together*! However, while Meridian and Lynne struggle to empower poor and illiterate black folks, Truman's hidden ambition is to "empower and enrich" (Tewkesbury, 2011: 625) himself while condemning white capitalists who own power and richness. This is precisely why he chooses to date white exchange students arriving from various parts of the world and according to Truman's view, these students "provide access to the wider world of white power" (Hollenberg, 1992: 84). In Truman's relationship with Meridian throughout the narrative, his attention consistently centers on her racial identity, using it as a rationale for not selecting her as a potential spouse: "I think I'm in love with you, African woman. Always have been. (…) Have my beautiful black babies" (Walker, 1976: 113)[2]. Truman's statement suggests that despite his love for Meridian and her black identity, his innermost thoughts are preoccupied with whiteness and potential privileges associated with it. Walker implies his intention is rooted in the fascination sparked by the distinctive color, positing that Truman's choice to exclusively date white women can be interpreted as a manifestation of a racist fantasy that serves to negate reality and operate as a way of disavowal.

David Marriott states in his *On Racial Fetishism* (2010), "the fetish acts as a defense against more intolerable forms of anxiety, while allowing subjects to enjoy this fear more or less secretly, more or less violently" (216) to indicate the driving force behind fetishistic tendencies. In Truman's case, he endeavors to alleviate the fear and anxiety associated with the perceived incompleteness of the black body by engaging with white women, associating this desire with the restoration of his sense of power. When Truman's friend, Tommy Odds, sustaining injuries during a confrontation with whites, Truman undertakes a visit to him, attributing responsibility for the incident to her wife Lynne based on her racial identity. The linguistic nuances employed by Walker in this segment of the narrative point Truman's heightened state of apprehension and unease: "It was as if Tommy Odds had spoken the words that fit thoughts he had been too cowardly to entertain. On what other level might Lynne, his wife, be guilty?" (131). Indeed, despite Truman's inclination, akin to that of his companion Tommy, to attribute adversaries solely to white individuals, his historical association with whites remains inseparable from his college years; he not only socialize with them but also endeavors to assimilate their behaviors and cultural norms. This would seem to indicate that the fetish serves as a means to derive pleasure from, or consume, the process of sublation. This hidden revelation is both imagined and perpetually reiterated (Marriott, 2010). And that, reciprocally, the loss or lack in Truman's case, reveals itself with Truman's efforts to complete what is missing in himself through these behavioral patterns.

Following Lynne's marriage to Truman and the birth of their child, the acceptance of her interracial family by black southerners was more immediate compared to the reception she received from her own parents. However, an undisclosed reality, unbeknownst to Lynne and later acknowledged by Truman, came to light. Truman's friends and social acquaintances embraced Lynne not out of genuine affection, but rather due to a sense of fear. In their perspective, Lynne symbolizes the qualities that are perceived to be lacking in their own women, casting her as a representative figure in their eyes. Walker emphasizes this perspective,

> "They did not even see her as a human being, but as some kind of large, mysterious doll. A thing of movies and television, of billboards and car and soap commercials. They liked her hair, not because it was especially pretty, but because it was long. To them, *length* was beauty." (135)

[2] From now on only page numbers will be given for the citations from *Meridian*.

Concomitant with his friends' perspectives, Truman actively strives to cultivate a close connection with them, motivated by the distinctive qualities present in individuals of white descent that black ones lack. His union with Lynne is founded upon this perceived absence. This conceptual vacillation aligns with Lacan's theories on identity, and Tura (2012) articulates this predicament, "Humanity's engagement with its own existence perpetually revolves within the realm of an illusory imagination"[3] (146). Truman's sense of lacking in his own existence hindered the development of an authentic self, prompting him to strive for validation by filling this void through his relationship with Lynne. Indeed, Lynne serves as a symbolic representation for Truman, encapsulating the deeper quest to overcome his perceived inadequacies through a connection with a woman of white identity, ultimately seeking a resolution to his racial identity struggles. Drawing on Lacan's perspectives, "the proposition that individuals can conceive their own reality through a societal reflection of themselves" (Tura, 2012: 147) elucidates the insufficiency and privation encountered by Truman and his fellow black friends. In a cultural context perpetuating the characterization of whites as the superior race and subjecting blacks to humiliation, the inevitability of identity conflicts is underscored, with these conflicts manifesting distinctively in each person. The occurrences of physical and sexual violence within the narrative are construed as outcomes of these identity ambiguities, whereas Truman's endeavor to address such confusion through fetishism illustrates distinct manifestations. In the "The New York Times" section of the narrative, Walker articulates Truman's feelings of inferiority toward Lynne with the following statement: "Truman had felt hemmed in and pressed down by Lynne's intelligence. Her inability to curb herself, her imagination, her wishes and dreams. It came to her, this lack of restraint, which he so admired at first and had been so refreshed by" (138). Nevertheless, prior to their marriage, Lynne captivates Truman, as these qualities proved highly appealing to him and stand as attributes distinct from those commonly found in women of his racial background, as well as in himself.

In his 1957 essay, Lacan eloquently states, "what we desire is always a signifier of something else" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 447), highlighting its role as surrogate for elusive yet tangible entities. In Truman's case, his desire for whiteness, representing the elusive element within himself, appears as a form of disavowal through the adoption of French attire and incorporation of French vocabulary in his speeches—actions emblematic of emulating the behavioral traits of a white man. In the pursuit of assimilating into the white societal norms, the desire to wed a white woman is driven by the intent to redress the repressed loss. During the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, marked by strict racial segregation between blacks and whites, his insistence to marry a white woman should not be construed merely as a romantic choice, but rather as a calculated response to broader socio-cultural dynamics. Following the tragic assault and demise of Camara, the daughter of Truman and Lynne, a conversation ensues between Truman and his former love Meridian. In this conversation, Meridian reproachfully tells him that he should stand by Lynne, while Truman's response reveals a lack of romantic intimacy or emotional closeness with Lynne:

> "I don't love Lynne the way I do you. You notice I don't lie and say I don't love her *at all*. She's meant a great deal to me. But you are different. *Loving* you is different—"
>
> "Because I'm black?"
>
> "You make me feel healthy, purposeful—"

[3] Translations from Turkish sources are my own.

> "Because I'm black?"
>
> "Because you are *you*, damn it! The woman I should have married and didn't!" (138, emphasis in original).

In this excerpt, Truman's admission not only signifies the suppression of his emotions for Meridian but also elucidates his genuine sentiments towards Lynne and the foundation of his marriage, based on a lie. Despite engaging in a sexual relationship with Meridian, and acknowledging her tranquil and consistent demeanor, Truman exhibits a preference for Lynne as a spouse. This inclination, according to Walker, is attributable to "Her awareness of wrong, her indignant political response to whatever caused him to suffer, was a definite part of her charm" (138). Belonging to a community where, as a black man, he contends with being regarded as a secondary individual and must actively advocate for his right to vote, Lynne appears to represent an appealing choice. The expression "whatever caused him to suffer" alludes to the challenges he faced due to racial discrimination, the verbal abuse he endured, and the persistent social inequalities. Truman, is aware of the likelihood of encountering recurring challenges associated with interracial relationships, opts for a union with Lynne, who is devoid of all these problems owing to her white ethnicity, instead of pursuing a relationship with Meridian, the woman he falls in love with. His persistent desire to be with white women, as depicted in the narrative, is explained to signify a desire to distance himself from the socioeconomic class and ethnic identity to which he belongs.

Frantz Fanon, one of the most significant writers in black Atlantic theory, points out, "The family is an institution that prefigures a broader institution: the social or the national group" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 465) drawing attention to children growing up in families of different ethnic backgrounds. Upon interpreting Fanon's statement, it would not be wrong to assert that the family serves as a conduit to broader social communities. Based on this interpretation, Truman's aspiration is discerned not merely as a desire to alter his nuclear family dynamics by marrying a white woman but, rather, as an inclination to assimilate into white society and be perceived as one of its members. Hence, his decision to initiate a family with Lynne is a deliberate choice, notwithstanding his earlier assertion to Meridian that he felt emotionally and psychologically secure with her. As a member of a marginalized group, he is cognizant of his shortcomings attributed by society and recognizes the advantages associated with Lynne's position. This situation can be further elucidated with Fanon's words: "The Negro's inferiority or superiority complex or his feeling of equality is *conscious*. These feelings forever chill him. They make his drama" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004: 466, emphasis in original). As Fanon claims, the inferiority or superiority complexes of the black individual are not repressed illusions but rather conscious and self-aware elements that exert influence over their entire life trajectory. In this regard, Truman's perspectives are shaped by the influence of factors stemming from his ethnic background and his upbringing within a society characterized by a racial mindset. Meridian, aware of Truman's deliberate and obsessive desires from the outset, expresses this choice of him, "In Lynne you captured your ideal: a virgin who was eager for sex and well-to-do enough to have had 'worldly experiences'" (140). Meridian's utterances may be construed as a verbalized representation of Truman's vision of the ideal woman, a concept he was unable to acknowledge even to himself. Indeed, after engaging in a sexual encounter with Meridian and gaining insight into her sexual conduct, he neither suggested a repeat of their intimate relations nor become aware of Meridian's pregnancy resulting from their relationship and aborted the child. His perspective posits that black women are defective in sexuality as in everything else, finding both a virgin and a sexually active

black woman, among blacks, nearly unattainable. Consequently, Truman directs his quest for the idealized female archetype exclusively towards white women, and Lynne crafted an impression embodying the qualities he seeks. Walker articulates Truman's pursuit of perfection as "He had wanted a woman perfect in all the eyes of the world, not a savage who bore her offspring and hid it" (140-41) to signify his idealized portrait of woman. He perceives the white women as embodying an idealized perfection that is globally acknowledged, considering their privilege in various aspects. The status of black and colored women consistently remains subordinate to that of white women. Truman's fetishistic thoughts can be interpreted as stemming from his aspirations to attain perfection and elevates his social standing through association with a white woman. Apart from the fixation on perfection, the use of the term "savage" in the quotation is noteworthy for its portrayal of the presumed distinctions between white and black women. According to Truman, black women are characterized as untamed and have a provincial mentality, whereas white women are perceived as civilized, modern, and receptive to progress. When Meridian questions Truman, who constantly flirted with white exchange students during his university years, about his attraction to them, Truman responds by stating, "They read *The New York Times*" (141, emphasis in original) suggesting that he perceives them as distinct from black women in terms of intellectual development.

The predominant theme in the conversations between Meridian, Truman, and Lynne revolves around the visual representation of his fetishization of white women, evolving into an obsessive desire. Despite his professed love for Meridian, his constant desire to be with her all the time, and his discreet creation of various portraits of her, these intentional choices are underscored by his fixation on color. Stein clarifies Truman's case as, "He is torn between his attraction to the black women whom he idealizes as fertile earth mothers and to the white women that he finds sexually appealing" (1986: 136). While Meridian struggles to comprehend this fixation on Anglo-Saxon image of blonde beauty, Lynne posits that it is merely a result of anger towards white people: "You only married me because you were too much of a coward to throw a bomb at all the crackers who make you sick. You're like the rest of those nigger zombies" (149). The oversight in Lynne's statement is that Truman, unlike a group of angry black men, aspires not only engage in a sexual relationship with her but also contemplates marriage. When Truman's friend Tommy Odds raped Lynne, he had the anger to take revenge on all whites, but Truman does not have such anger and sense of revenge. In the narrative, Walker refrains from suggesting that Truman's consistent companionship with white women, a ritual evident since his university years and possibly predating them, constitutes a pursuit of vengeance. Despite overt expressions of such motives by his friends, Truman does not affirmatively acknowledge or validate their assertions in his responses. An affirmation of Truman's conduct is discernible within the segment of the narrative dedicated to Lynne. During a (inner) dialogue between Tommy Odds and Truman, Odds characterizes Lynne, "*Black men get preferential treatment, man, to make up for all we been denied. She ain't been fucking you, she's been atoning for her sins*" (165, emphasis in original). This quotation serves as an articulation that emphasizes the emotional theme of revenge that black men may seek when involved with white women, but it also alludes to the inclination of women who are with black men to make amends for what their race has done. However, like his reactions to Odd's earlier allegations, Truman refuses to accept it, both on his own behalf and on behalf of Lynne. This is because his attraction to white women does not stem from a desire to redress perceived grievances, but rather from a sense of deprivation. Uslu (1998) states, "African Americans grapple with a profound sense of incompleteness, denial of their identity, and an aspirational longing to assimilate into whiteness" (27) to mark their emotional void. Certainly,

every black individual may exhibit a distinct approach to address their emotional void and sense of incompleteness and Walker illuminates these variations for the reader through the main characters in the narrative.

As this account shows, in the process of completing this emotional void or deficiency, Lynne and other white women are valued by Truman only as materials. In regard to this claim, Meese puts, "body is the site where the political and the aesthetic interpret the material" (1986: 117) suggesting that bodies reflect political, cultural, and aesthetic concerns in societies. Hence, within this narrative, Lynne's white body is emblematic of her own racial superiority, while for Truman and other black individuals, it can be considered as a symbol of their inadequacies and powerlessness. Lynne's "(…) of course he's a vampire. Sucks the blood of young white virgins to keep him vigorous" (149) characterization for Truman implies that he remains strong by being with white women and that he will lose his power if he does not continue to do so. As Stein neatly states it, "Truman Held, the 'true man,' the archetypal activist, oppresses the women who love him as much as any white capitalist does" (1986: 135). To put it more plainly, according to the sub-text of the narrative, Truman's sexual choices are dominated by a fetish, which empowers and distracts him from the deficiencies caused by his skin color and because of these color-based choices he oppresses and degrades women. This pathological process derives from a repression of instinct, among all other factors, reveals itself in fetishist's, Truman's, divided self in different situations and Danielson clarifies his manner, "Truman embodies the personal, racial, and sexual contradictions within the Movement" (1989: 324) by elucidating the behaviors that distinguish him from other blacks within the Movement. As further evidence of this, he wears "Ethiopian robes" but "extravagantly embroidered white" (149), prefers white girls to black, and mostly uses white people's language (French). Underneath all these observations lies a critique of the issue of whiteness, which "extends beyond skin color" (Anderson, 1993: 37). Caught between racial absences, Truman seeks the most convenient substitute to reach idealized white delicacy in every aspect. Given these affective dynamics and reasons, Walker, in *Meridian*, portrays that "politically oppressive societies induce psychological pain in numerous and inexorable ways" (Duck, 2008: 463), evoking the ways in which fetish emerges as a kind of defense, a mask that hides a lack, repressed instinct, disavowal, or egoic power to complete absences with substitutes, that is, it is a demand that seeks sameness and satisfaction.

Conclusion

The exploration of Lacanian fetishism in Alice Walker's *Meridian* provides a deeper understanding of the connection between lack, desire, identity, and power relations. Through the crucial concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis, this study has examined the ways in which fetishistic mechanisms operate within the novel, illuminating the character's, Truman's, attempts to reconcile the lack of access to the white world within the socio-political landscape of the American South during the Civil Rights Movement.

One key insight conceived from this analysis is the inherent tension between the Real and Symbolic in the character's construction of desire. Truman's manner, in particular, serves as a powerful metaphor for the quest to reconcile the fragmented self, with the fetish of color, whiteness, emerging as a coping mechanism to deal with the deprivation that permeates his life. His fetishization on color and white relationships becomes a symbolic attempt to establish a sense of coherence and stability in the face of societal upheaval and personal strife. Besides, the analysis has accentuated the role of lack in Lacanian framework, highlighting its power to shape subjectivity and desire.

Truman, in *Meridian*, grapples with oppressive forces of racism and internalized voices of self-doubt in expressing his innermost desires and the constraints imposed by cultural norms. In terms of these cultural paradigms, moreover, this study features the ways in which fetishism intersects with the issues of race, gender, and class in *Meridian*. Entangled with the socio-political concept of the Civil Rights Movement, Truman's fetishistic engagements offer a poignant commentary on the intersectionality of identity. Walker's distinctive portrayal of fetishism elaborates simplistic readings of the term, which mark a fixation on a specific body part or object, demonstrating its multilayered nature as a coping mechanism, a form of resistance, and a site of negotiation for marginalized individuals such as Truman. Within the narrative, Truman's endeavor to address all his suppressed desires, those constrained by his racial identity, through relationships with white women, including marriage, serves as an illustration of a particular defense mechanism. While he holds admiration for black women and is romantically involved with the main character, Meridian, his fixation on white women takes on symbolic significance according to Lacan's terms. That is why he yearns to forge connections with white women, emulate their behaviors, and adopt their perspective on life, all to alleviate his persistent sense of deprivation.

In essence, Truman believes that by integrating white women into his life, he can shed his black identity and assimilate into their world. Hence, white women become symbolic representations that mask Truman's perceived inadequacy rather than being the actual objects of desire. In conclusion, it has been confirmed, as the narrative unfolds, that, through symbolic objects and relationships, Truman seeks to fill existential voids to unravel the perpetual quest for wholeness.

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