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“WHITENESS OF A DIFFERENT COLOR”? RACIAL PROFILING IN JOHN UPDIKE’S *TERRORIST*¹

September 11 may thus be an instance where, tragically, “reality” seems to clash with the truth claims of postcolonial studies. If the credo of postcolonial studies is that hybridity is in itself an antidote to every form and kind of fundamentalism, the events of September 11 seemed to prove that hybridity can in fact coexist with fundamentalism. Not entirely in opposition to postcolonial studies but nevertheless trying to call for its extension in disciplinary terms, this paper suggests that there may in fact be a need for us to (re)turn to two paradigms in particular: the growing field of what is called “citizenship studies”, and the method of Critical Race Theory. Both paradigms, it could be argued, put emphasis on both the historical and the national. There may thus not only be a need for thinking “beyond” the postcolonial, but to inquire into the fields which postcolonial studies (despite its impressive disciplinary and geographical scope) tends to disregard; and to ask whether these fields may not in fact be seen as being complimentary to postcolonial studies or even as being productive alternatives to it.

In a book presumably concerned with giving us the psychology of a terrorist, why should there be an obsession with skin color? I believe that September 11, 2001, may not only be a historically traumatic event; it may also spell out an epistemological crisis which, for the humanities, may constitute a backlash of an unprecedented extent. September 11 may thus be an instance where, tragically, “reality” seems to clash with the truth claims of postcolonial studies. If the credo of postcolonial studies is that hybridity is in itself an antidote to every form and kind of fundamentalism, the events of September 11 seemed to prove that hybridity can in fact coexist with fundamentalism. The following paper is hence an attempt not only to think, as Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty have recently urged, “beyond the postcolonial”, but rather to inquire into the necessity of perhaps employing a different

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set of questions. Crucially, I believe that the very notion of the “beyond” may run the risk of rephrasing the same repertoire of questions with which postcolonialism has been concerned with its inception: the category crisis beleaguering the definition of the postcolonial itself; the question whether colonialism is really past, etc. The very title of the introduction proposed by Loomba et al., “Beyond what?” points to this deliberate open-ended definition of postcolonial studies, an open-endedness, it could be argued, which indexes the claim implicit in the agenda of postcolonial studies that it is able – methodologically and epistemologically – to incorporate all other disciplines and approaches. This is a claim, then, which I would want to contest in the following. The editors of the volume state:

The shadow the 2003 US invasion of Iraq casts on the twenty-first century makes it more absurd than ever to speak of ours as a postcolonial world. On the other hand, the signs of galloping US imperialism make the agenda of postcolonial studies more necessary than ever. In a context of rapidly proliferating defenses of empire ... by policy makers and intellectuals alike, the projects of making visible the long history of empire, of learning from those who have opposed it, and of identifying the contemporary sites of resistance and oppression that have defined postcolonial studies have, arguably, never been more urgent. (1)

Not entirely in opposition to this approach but nevertheless trying to call for its extension in disciplinary terms, this paper suggests that there may in fact be a need for us to (re)turn to two paradigms in particular: the growing field of what is called “citizenship studies”, and the method of Critical Race Theory. Both paradigms, it could be argued, put an emphasis on both the historical and the national. By focusing on these two dimensions, then, the set of questions which is employed in these two approaches may be strikingly different from the agenda which postcolonial theory continues to set itself. There may thus not only be a need to take up the phrase used by Ania Loomba et al., for thinking beyond the postcolonial, but to inquire into the fields which postcolonial studies (despite its impressive disciplinary and geographical scope) tends to disregard; and to ask whether these fields may not in fact be seen as being complimentary to postcolonial studies or even as being productive alternatives to it.

After 9/11, I will try to suggest in this paper, we are back, not to the future but to the past. The aim of this paper is thus to read the politics of John Updike’s 2006 novel *Terrorist* through the citizenship debate of the nineteenth century. If September 11 triggers long-submerged cultural fears – fears which, I will argue, are also racial anxieties – such a historical perspective may not only be useful, but necessary.

In the nineteenth century, both citizenship and naturalization were based on whiteness; yet, race and thus whiteness itself was not a stable category. Because the courts were in fact undecided which ethnic groups were white and which were not, there was a series of court cases, the so-called racial prerequisite cases, in which immigrants had to prove their right to be called white, and thereby assert their *racial* eligibility for citizenship. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, “[c]itizenship was a racially inscribed concept at the outset of the new nation: by an act of Congress, only ‘free white’ immi-

grants could be naturalized" (13). In this equation of naturalization with whiteness by nineteenth-century courts, however, there was a slippage between the judicial and the cultural. As Jacobson has demonstrated, for instance, the Irish could enter the country as "free white persons", fulfilling the "white person prerequisite" (Haney López) on which the granting of citizenship hinged, but as *Irish*, they were nevertheless culturally suspect. What is significant is that this cultural suspicion – the Irish were said to be slovenly and generally degenerate – entailed a racial classification or rather, reclassification. The Irish might have entered the country as "free white persons", but once in the country, they were seen as being of a lesser whiteness, a whiteness, as Jacobson puts it, "of a different color".

It is this slippage, this indistinct, indefinitely contoured space between, on the one hand, legal whiteness and the citizenship it brings and, on the other, a cultural suspicion that is also a racial one, which can be seen to return to the American cultural scene after September 11, 2001. It is this slippage, also, which haunts John Updike's 2006 novel. *Terrorist* is the story of a young Arab American, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, who is persuaded by his local imam to commit a terrorist attack. The narrative chronicles the events leading up to the attack – and the way in which at the very last minute, the attack is in fact prevented. At the end of the novel, Ahmad has been persuaded by his school counselor, Jack Levy, not to carry his plan through. What we are left with, however, is the enigmatic profile of a racial suspect; at the end of the novel, the terrorist threat – and thus the necessity of racial profiling – has not quite been dispelled. Where, then, does psychological profiling slip into racial profiling? I am concerned here with the way in which Updike's fictional psychology may be symptomatic of a much wider logic haunting the war on terror. I will argue that while posing as a psychograph of the killer, Updike's novel may in fact only be a psychograph of its author and of the political climate which gave rise to the psychographing of potential terrorists in the first place.

My hypothesis is, then, that when under extreme psychological duress, any culture will activate the particular manifestation of difference which is most genuine to it: in the US, this distinguishing marker, which seems to prove salient above all others, seems to be the distinguishing marker of race. It is here that postcolonial or ethnic studies may well meet the anthropology of culture.² For what may be interesting to explore is precisely which particular marker of difference will be triggered if a given culture finds itself under pressure; and how these markers, as anthropological constants, may differ nevertheless. As the events following September 11, 2001, once again prove, for the US, it is race which becomes the pivot of social differentiation; a differentiation hinging, in turn, of the distinction between whiteness and difference; between whiteness, literally, as the racial ground zero of American self-definition, and all other shades diverging from this touchstone of racial identity.

² For a discussion of the differences between, for instance, ethnic studies and approaches to an anthropology of culture, see K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, *The Protoliterary: Steps towards an Anthropology of Culture*.

Updike's novel, then, may well point to a singular turning point in American history, a juncture, I believe, which turns back the clock of both cultural and academic developments since the 1960s. After September 11, we are back to the ground zero of whiteness; and yet, this newfound obsession with whiteness is emphatically different from the historical development which, before 9/11 and after the Civil Rights Movement, gave rise to whiteness studies in the first place. As both Ian Haney López and Matthew Frye Jacobson have argued,³ whiteness studies – at their most productive – originated as an attempt to define the story of whiteness – a story which, following the Civil Rights Movement, had found itself beleaguered on all sides. If the entire history of the nation before the Civil Rights Movement had been nothing but the repetition of the same story of whiteness, the Civil Rights Movement and the *ethnic* stories it suddenly gave voice to, seemed to leave whiteness with nothing to say. For once, whiteness had no story to tell. According to Haney López, “Whiteness describes, from Little Big Horn to Simi Valley, not a culture, but an absence of culture. It is an empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't ...” (Haney López 168).

I believe that September 11, 2001, may well spell out the end of this storytelling contest, and the emergence of a newfound credibility of whiteness. 9/11, I would suggest, is devastating not only in the actual, the historical trauma it occasioned, but also in the epistemological consequences it entails. In one single day, September 11 has turned back the clock to a time when a multi-ethnic storytelling contest, a truly polyphonic concert in the Bakhtinian sense, seemed not only impossible to imagine, but pointless to begin with. It is in this sense that we may indeed be back to square one; and it is in this sense, also, that it may be no coincidence that in reading John Updike's *Terrorist*, we seem to have come back full circle to the citizenship debate of the nineteenth century. Updike's novel tells us that the only legitimate reason to tell an ethnic story is the attempt to draw a psychological profile of the killer, to reconstruct – and not simply to imagine, let alone invent – what makes cultural difference tick. What Updike's novel implies is that we may once more have become enamored with the hues of whiteness; and we may be enamored with the hues of (true) whiteness because all other hues have become suspect.

TRIALS OF WHITENESS

Terrorist is a novel obsessed with, and not only curious about, skin color; about the cultural meaning that race may in fact hold. It is here that I believe September 11 and the politics that ensued from it may have been a setback not only in cultural and political but also in racial terms; we may in fact have come back full circle to a politics of

³ In his most recent study, *Roots, Too*, Jacobson argued that following the Civil Rights Movement, a variety of communities belonging to the dominant culture “discovered” their own ethnicity as Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, etc. and hence went on to deny both their whiteness and the ensuing social and historical privilege. It is this process which Jacobson calls “white revival”.

“race” and racial difference which seems to be not a social, but a biological fact. Why else should the youthful terrorist’s olive skin color provide us with a clue to his psychology?

My point is, then, that the events – and the racializing practices following September 11 – may well be read through the naturalization debate not of the twentieth or twenty-first, but the nineteenth century. I would argue that in narratives both political and fictional, narratives of which John Updike’s *Terrorist* is but one example, Arab Americans are being denaturalized; and they are *denaturalized* through a calling into question of their *whiteness*. Then as now, in the twenty-first century as much as in the nineteenth, citizenship is hence tied to whiteness; then as now, it is the proof of a given claimant’s true, genuine whiteness which is the prerequisite for naturalization. Then as now, moreover, citizenship cannot only be granted by the judiciary, but it can also be revoked; then as now, the judiciary and the naturalization it grants to or withholds from claimants whose precise shade of whiteness has come under scrutiny is not divorced from the social, but intricately bound up with it. What is crucial, then, is that race is a social, never a biological category; cultural difference, in other words, serves to racialize those who possess it. It is for this very reason, it could be argued, that the racializing or denaturalizing, the inclusion or exclusion of Arab Americans from the polity of the nation, hinges on a practice that has nothing to do with race to begin with: that of religious sameness or rather, difference.

Then as now, it may thus be Christianity which becomes the pivot of proving the whiteness of a given community. In 1914, a Syrian by the name of George Dow set out to prove to the courts that he was indeed white and hence eligible for naturalization; and his argument was founded on the idea that whiteness and Christianity may in fact be synonymous. The racial prerequisite cases to which Dow’s belonged – the first of which was held in 1878 – are intriguing for a number of reasons. First, they are intriguing because they chronicle a judiciary staring at a given claimant, trying to decipher the meaning of his skin color. In this confusion, the judges may in fact be said to cry for help. In their rulings, they admit, either explicitly or implicitly, that race is in fact a fiction: the most supremely persuasive one perhaps, but a fiction nonetheless. As Jacobson goes on to note, one court ruling ran thus: “The court greatly hopes that an amendment of the statutes will make quite clear the meaning of the word “white” ...” (223). In this memorable, albeit perhaps accidental phrase, the court admits to what is in fact an “epistemological crisis” (223). For it is the judiciary upon whose verdict the distinction depends – with all the political and legal consequences this distinction entails – between what, or rather, who is white and who is not. A *judge*’s pointing out that the meaning of “whiteness” is in fact entirely unclear to him is thus both tragic and ironic: ironic, because it implies the helplessness of the judiciary in what is in fact an insoluble situation; and tragic because the eventual court ruling – the necessarily arbitrary decision which may relegate one claimant to the wrong side of whiteness – is nevertheless legally binding.

The racial prerequisite cases, then, revolve around the enigma of whiteness. As another judge puts it in 1878:

The very words ‘white person’ ... constitute a very indefinite description of a class of persons, where none can be said to be *literally* white, and those called white may be found in every shade from the lightest blonde to the most swarthy brunette (Jacobson 227).

For the purposes of this paper, moreover, it is interesting to note that in their very helplessness, their struggle to define just who is white and who is not – a struggle which led to one court’s ruling a Japanese claimant eligible for citizenship on the grounds that his skin color was lighter than that of the average Sicilian – in this groping for definition, the judges’ verdicts may well be said to border not on the judicial, but on the poetic, the metaphorical. Epistemological crisis, then, leads to a shift in register. For as the court rulings indicate, it seems impossible to define skin color without resorting to metaphor. The analogies the judges used were those of poetry, not of the law; only Nature itself seemed to provide the most fitting analogy for describing to a given claimant’s skin color. As Jacobson notes, “When another Syrian, Faras Shahid, petitioned for citizenship in South Carolina (1913), the court observed that ‘in color, he is about that of a walnut’ ...” (236). While Jacobson adds that “such an assessment did not bode well in South Carolina” (236), a walnut being racially suspect in the South, I am less interested in the outcome of the actual court case, than in the judiciary’s slippage in register. Regardless of whether it is used to include or exclude a given claimant from the solace of national belonging, metaphor signals cultural helplessness; regardless of the goal to which it is employed, the use of metaphor always implies a shift in epistemology. It implies the inability of the judiciary to grasp what must in fact be an entirely fictitious racial classification.

To return to George Dow, the Syrian who applied for citizenship in the early twentieth century, what becomes the only serviceable classification for the enigma of skin color or what is in fact a suspect whiteness is the resorting to cultural practice. It is in this sense that Dow tried to beat the court with its own weapons. If cultural practice – the reference to a given claimant’s cultural or religious difference – is employed by the judiciary in order to withhold the privilege of citizenship from this claimant, Dow argued that this linkage could also be reversed. By evoking cultural – or rather, racial – sameness in his plea for being considered eligible for naturalization, Dow attempted to beat the court at its own game.

George Dow’s strategy for convincing the courts of his whiteness is certainly one of the most memorable in the history of the racial prerequisite cases. Dow argued that as a Syrian, he originated in the same geographical area that historically Jesus Christ came from; to deny citizenship to him, George Dow, would hence amount, metaphorically speaking, to turning down an application for American citizenship by Jesus Christ. If anything is more memorable than this reasoning, then, it is the judges’ response to it. Their ruling may in fact be said to prove just how compelling Dow’s argument was, just how close to home his strategy had managed to come. The judges turned down Dow’s petition by ruling that his very argument was inadmissible because it constituted an emotional blackmailing of the court. As Haney López notes,

Judge Smith refused via the rhetorical charge of emotivity to engage the question regarding the racial eligibility of Christ for citizenship, a very interesting question indeed given that in much White supremacist ideology, Whiteness and Christianity are nearly synonymous (75).

The judge's reasoning is also memorable, however, not only for its implicit acknowledgement of the compelling nature of Dow's racial logic, but also for its admission of the *emotional* nature of the case itself; the admission that the trial of race or rather that of whiteness, is never just epistemological, but it is emotional as well. The judge's ruling did not prove that there was a flaw in Dow's logic, but that *logic* had nothing to do with the trial in the first place. The verdict proved the supremely compelling nature of Dow's strategy precisely by dismissing his case – and by dismissing it on grounds which were altogether divorced from logic.

It seems to me that at the beginning of another millennium, an entire century removed from George Dow's memorable court appeal, it is this hazardous mixture of a suspect whiteness with emotional vulnerability that we have returned to. For Updike's novel racializes his own suspect, Ahmad Ashmawy, by dwelling both on his skin color and his religious practice, and by driving home the fact that both remain enigmatic. Updike's novel, then, turns the question of whether or not Arab Americans can lay claim to the privilege of whiteness into a literary trial: his book, we may well argue, is itself a racial prerequisite case trying – and ultimately rejecting – an Arab American's claim to whiteness and hence to cultural citizenship.

NARRATIVE CAMOUFLAGE

In pretending to provide us with the psychology of a Muslim terrorist, Updike leaves us with mere racial profiling. It is hence no coincidence that in this confusing but symptomatic slippage between the racial and the cultural, the citizenship debate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may provide us with a clue to deciphering the racialist obsessions of the twenty-first. For in trying to give us the psychological profile of the killer, Updike provides us with the enigma of the suspect's skin color, a color which in its hybrid, suspect whiteness, turns out to be crucial:

Ahmad himself is the product of a red-haired American mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student whose ancestors had been baked since the time of the Pharaohs in the muddy rice and flax fields of the overflowing Nile. The complexion of the offspring of this mixed marriage could be described as dun, a low-luster shade lighter than beige ... (13).

Updike's novel, it may well be argued, engages in fictional profiling, a fictional profiling that is also racial: "Racial profiling, also known as ethnic profiling, is the inclusion of racial or ethnic characteristics in determining whether a person is considered likely to commit a particular type of crime" (Wikipedia). What is key here, then, is precisely the slippage between ethnicity and race, between visible racial difference and alien cultural practice. It is this slippage, arguably, which haunts American cul-

ture; and which has resurfaced with a vengeance after 9/11, tipping the scale, as Updike's novel illustrates, to the *racial* side of alien classification.

The politics of homeland security which the narrative at one point ironically portrays from the perspective of imaginary (true) whites being harassed by a (multi)ethnic security force are thus reversed by the narrative:

To the well-paid professionals who travelled the airways and frequented the newly fortified government buildings, it appears that a dusky underclass has been given tyrannical power. ... Where once a confident manner, a correct suit and tie, and a business card measuring two by three and a half inches had opened doors, the switch is no longer tripped, the door remains closed (46).

If the politics of surveillance, the narrative seems to imply, are curiously democratic in the patting down of potential suspects – an idea which is itself contestable – the narrative itself reverses this democracy. The door of Updike's fiction, unlike the real airport doors which his narrative fictionalizes, spring open only for those whose whiteness is beyond reproach. The gaze of Updike's fictional gatekeepers, unlike that of his fictional security force, is a white one. The level of national alert, in Updike's narrative, can thus be measured in racial terms. It is this prediction, I would argue, which is so disturbing about *Terrorist*; and which turns it from a psychological into a racial psychograph.

In this scenario in which true whiteness is the ground zero of national security, whose hand trips the switch? My point is that unfortunately, Updike's portrayal of State Secretary Mr. Haffenreffer, the head of homeland security, is not quite ironic;⁴ even if he is depicted from the perspective of Hermione Fogel, his spinster assistant who has been in love with him for years:

⁴ The question of irony, of course, is key to the argument I am trying to propose here. Could *Terrorist*, one may wonder, be read as a *satire* of racial profiling rather than, as I am proposing here, a novel engaging in racial profiling, taking "terrorist" difference at face value? My point here is that even if there is irony in some passages of the novel, this irony is curiously absent from Updike's description of the Arab American cultural (as well as racial) suspect. Moreover, the uneven quality of the metaphors used to describe the respective characters as well as the abstaining from irony with regard to Arab Americanness (which would tie in with the differential use of metaphor) may be regarded in the light of Updike's past work, especially his focus on New England identity and problems of human existence, such as the fear of death, marital infidelity, etc. These topics recur in *Terrorist*, but they are limited to what I am reading as the "truly white" characters of the novel (including, ironically, the Jewish American counselor, Jack Levy, who is hence mainstreamed through a common use of metaphor as well as Updikean topicality). For an overview of such topicality, see, for instance, *The Cambridge Companion to John Updike* edited by Stacey Olster (2006). For discussions of *Terrorist* which stress the idea of psychological profiling (and hence implicitly, the absence of irony), see Erik Tarloff's review. Crucial for my purposes here is that Tarloff's review is entitled "A masterful failure"; and he argues that "John Updike has largely failed to convey the interior life of an Arab-American terrorist". Tarloff's reading would thus converge with the one I am proposing in this paper not only in that such an attempt to "convey a terrorist's interior life" is indeed Updike's goal, but also in that Tarloff, too,

With a Herculean sigh of weariness, the Secretary turns from the camera. He is a large man, with a slab of muscle across his back that gives the tailors of his dark-blue suits extra trouble. . . . His Pennsylvania accent is not a broad, syllable-swallowing growl like Lee Iacocca's or a piercing honk like Arnold Palmer's; of a generation younger than they, he speaks a neutral, media-friendly English, which only in its tense solemnity and certain vowel shadings betrays its source in a Commonwealth renowned for its seriousness, for earnest effort and stoic submission, for Quakers and coal miners, for Amish farmers and God-fearing Presbyterian steel magnates (44–45).

The hand which pushes the switch, then, which ups or turns down the level of national alert, is hence a muscular white one; a whiteness whose religious credentials, pace George Dow, are clearly beyond reproach: “[Muslim terrorists] hate the light,” Hermione tells [the Secretary] loyally. . . . ‘Like bats. *The light shone in darkness*,’ she quotes, knowing that Pennsylvania piety is a way to his heart, ‘*and the darkness comprehended it not*’” (48). In Updike's portrayal of Mr. Haffenreffer, then, whiteness and Christianity, as Haney Lopez wrote in his comment on the George Dow case, are indeed synonymous.

It is this synonymy, also, which excludes Ahmad Ashmawy not only from the narrative, but also from a fictitious American nation newly founded on the credibility of whiteness. On the level of the plot, Mr. Haffenreffer's genuinely white hand trips the switch to admit into the country those who are beyond suspicion. My point is that on the level of narrative form, not only that of plot, there may in fact be a similar mechanism of admission. On the level of narrative form, too, there may be a hidden judiciary, a judiciary pronouncing the verdicts of a true and of a lesser whiteness, respectively. And it is here that the narrative performs its most important twist: the narrative judiciary is in session, as it were, only behind closed doors; and it is a seclusion maintained through what might be called narrative camouflage. For while the narrative argues – and regrets – that present-day airport scenes will invariably involve the patting down of truly white passengers by a “dusky underclass”, the novel implies that in the case of the narrative itself, there are no such gatekeepers. While I am proposing here that the gatekeeper of Updike's narrative is a hidden whiteness, a covert judiciary, Updike's novel argues the reverse. The racializing gaze, the novel implies, is that of the racial suspect's, Ahmad Ashmawy, not that of the narrative itself.

By making Ahmad racist, then, the narrative can in fact perform its own inspection of “dusky” bodies; it is these dusky bodies, all equally suspect in racial terms, which have to file through the gates of the narrative's own security. It is through Ahmad's paranoia, his fear of whiteness, that the narrative manages to distinguish true from lesser whiteness. We see white bodies through the gaze of the non-white character who is said to disdain whiteness, even his own mother's: “[His mother's] flesh mottled with pink and dotted with freckles, seems unnaturally white, like a

sees this attempt as a failed one. Finally, the appearance of a host of novels similarly engaging in what I am reading as fictional racial profiling, would also seem to support the idea that Updike's racial politics are far from ironic. See, for instance, Frederick Forsyth, *The Afghan*.

leper's; his [own] taste ... is for darker skins, cocoa and caramel and chocolate ..." (170). To get at true whiteness, then, we only need to reverse the terms; Ahmad's own racializing gaze may in fact become a stand-in for the narrative's own quest for true whiteness. Ahmad's racial obsession becomes what might be termed a reverse blueprint for the narrative's own obsession with true whiteness. What Ahmad despises, the narrative cherishes, and it is this non-suspect whiteness that we, the readers, may cherish with it. The implicit charge here, of course, is that of reverse racism, of Ahmad himself being a racist; and it is this charge underlying Updike's narrative perspective which brings me back full circle to whiteness studies. For whiteness studies, *at its worst*, dismisses the power inequalities inherent in the concept of racism and charges the other side with victimizing, with *minoritizing*, whiteness. Narrative camouflage – the use of Ahmad's racializing gaze as a stand-in for whiteness – may thus in fact also serve to veil what is in fact a deeply reactionary undercurrent in Updike's narrative.

Presumably, then, it is through Ahmad's eyes and not the narrative's white gaze that we glance at Tylenol, Ahmad's African American classmate; it is through Ahmad's brain, presumably, that we contemplate Tylenol's mother, and thus an African American woman's lack of cultural literacy: "[Tylenol's] mother, having delivered a ten-pound infant, saw the name in a television commercial for painkiller and liked the sound of it" (15). It is in the description of Tylenol, the African American character named after a headache tablet, that the narrative effaces the distinction between its own gaze and Ahmad's. Yet, there is one more twist to the logic of racial surveillance because Ahmad, the text's suspect, is said to profile not only his non-white Others, but also himself: "How can the boy not cherish his ripened manhood, his lengthened limbs, the upright, dense, and wavy crown of his hair, his flawless dun skin, paler than his father's but not the freckled, blotchy pink of his red-haired mother?" (18). What better way, then, to camouflage the narrative's white gaze, its own white intent, than to have the racial suspect profile himself?

What is positively uncanny, then, is that Updike's novel seems to be an exact replay of the nineteenth-century racial prerequisite cases in the very *criteria* it marshals to prove, or rather to disprove, Ahmad Ashmawy's whiteness. Then as now, racial and cultural differences are inextricably tied to one another; then as now, one presupposes the other. It is in a claimant's dress code, paradoxically, that a nineteenth-century judge found the answer to the question of whiteness. Jacobson describes the case of another Syrian, Tom Ellis.

Incidentally, the relatively high proportion of naturalization applications by Syrians can be explained by the fact that for early twentieth-century jurisprudence, Syrians possessed what Jacobson calls a "borderline whiteness" (231). Like that of Arab Americans at the beginning of the twenty-first century,⁵ then, the whiteness of Syri-

⁵ See Yvonne Haddad, *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States*. For the shifting nature of the racial as well as legal classification of Arab Americans prior to September 11, see Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab Americans and the Meaning of Race".

ans was both racially suspect and potentially naturalizable. What is interesting to examine, then, is just what particular aspect, what particular *marker* of difference, constitutes the weight that will tip the scales. Ironically, Jacobson points out that the notion of cultural practice may include not only religious denomination but also, perhaps surprisingly, dress code. A given claimant's dress, too, constitutes a visual marker for the judiciary to judge. Dress is intricately linked, for the legal eye, to a claimant's "social bearing", a link which may prove either beneficial or detrimental. As Jacobson observes with regard to Tom Ellis:

In identifying Ellis as a "markedly white type", the judge appears to have intended Ellis's literal color, but he could have been referring to any of a number of things, and he was likely referring to much more than he knew – Ellis's social bearing, his proficiency in English, his dress, his manner, his style, his demeanour, perhaps his class. In any case his reference to Ellis as markedly "white" and his inference that Ellis was a "white person" were very closely aligned. Ellis did not appear to the court to be the kind of person who should be excluded, therefore he could not be the kind of person who must be excluded. (239)

The fact – or perceived reality – of Ellis's social intelligence, his ability to assimilate into the everyday of social and cultural practice, was thus proof of his whiteness. What, then, of Ahmad's dress code? It is here, too, that the narrative seems to evade (racial) responsibility because the standard that Ahmad's clothing deviates from what is said to be a non-white one. Once again, there is no judge gazing at Ahmad's dress code or so the narrative wants to make us believe. Ahmad's immaculately "white shirt" (9), the narrative implies, is suspect not to a white judiciary or a judiciary judging the nature of his whiteness by his dress, but to the imaginary inhabitants of an inner city where white shirts are diametrically opposed to what can only be ghetto look:

His [white] shirts come back stiffened by cardboard from the cleaners, whose bills he pays out of the money he earns clerking at the Tenth Street Shop-a-Sec ... But there is, he knows, vanity in his costume, a preening that offends the purity of the All-Encompassing (9–10).

Resisting the novel's own narrative camouflage, however, we may well argue that by referring to the racial suspect's *dress code*, Updike turns his narrative into a twenty-first-century court room. If the novel is our twenty-first-century court room, moreover, Ahmad appears before us – the fictitious, the readerly judges that Updike's novel turns us into – in a get up that is clearly suspect. Where Tom Ellis wore a suit and won himself naturalization, Ahmad does not know how to dress in the inner city; he does not know how to fit in even in an inner-city ghetto.

It is this inner-city ghetto which the narrative, in another camouflaging move of what I believe is its true intent, proceeds to pass off as truly American. Updike has Ahmad appear before us in his bizarre white shirt, but his narrative pretends that it is not before our white gaze that he appears, but before that of his non-white peers. The novel thus evokes the scarecrow of the "browning of America" by donning the gaze of

what is implied to be sympathetic detachment. In the following passage, however, it is impossible not to detect a certain nostalgia for whiteness:⁶

This city was named New Prospect two centuries ago, for the grand view from the heights above the falls but also for its enthusiastically envisioned future. ... Those who occupy the city now are brown, by and large, in its many shades. A remnant of fair-skinned but rarely Anglo-Saxon merchants finds some small profit in selling pizzas and chili ..., but they are giving way to recently immigrant Indians and Koreans who feel less compelled, as darkness falls, to flee to the still-mixed outskirts of the city and its suburbs. White faces downtown look furtive and dingy (12).

Despite this alleged sympathy for the brave new world of a multiethnic America, I would argue, the racial sympathies on which the narrative relies reveal this very detachment as false. For Ahmad is suspect not only to his inner-city peers, but also to a white judiciary which hides behind this multi-ethnic gaze; a judiciary which may in fact be deeply distrustful of such multi-ethnicity.

As the early twentieth-century judges suspected in the case of Tom Ellis, moreover, a claimant's dress code may indeed be intricately bound up with his "social bearing", his demeanour and thus also his speech. The oddness of Ahmad's speech matches the peculiarity of his starched white shirt; both spell out a discord between his own social bearing and that of the dominant culture. Ahmad tells the girl he likes, Joryleen: "There is nothing in Islam to forbid watching television and attending the cinema, though in fact it is all so saturated in despair and unbelief as to repel my interest. Nor does Islam forbid consorting with the opposite sex, if strict prohibitions are observed" (70). To reverse the judge's court ruling *in re* Tom Ellis from 1910, one might argue that as Updike has him appear before us, the readerly judiciary, "Ahmad Ashmawy [does indeed] appear to ... be the kind of person who should be excluded, therefore he could ... be ... the kind of person who *must* be excluded" (Jacobson 239; my changes). And exclude him the narrative does: by correlating Ahmad's strange get-up with his convoluted speech, Updike's novel refuses to grant him naturalization, or rather, what is worse, it revokes his American citizenship.

THE BLUNTNES OF METAPHOR: FROM SHOWING TO TELLING

Yet, to return to my initial argument about the slippage in register, it is not only through narrative perspective, but also through metaphor that the verdict of whiteness is pronounced. For there is a curiously uneven quality to Updike's metaphors, a quality which – surprisingly – may also concern the cover of Updike's book. Why should the top part of the pages be tinged with red? I am concerned here with the ways in which a marketing strategy may turn out to be symptomatic of a narrative logic as

⁶ In the framing of an interview with John Updike, *Der Spiegel*, too, speaks of an element of urban "decay" ("der Niedergang amerikanischer Städte"), which I am associating here with a decline of whiteness. See *Der Spiegel* 32 (2006): 142–45.

well: with the ways in which Updike's *narrative*, and not only his cover, slips into the bluntly symbolic, *not* the metaphorical.

My point here is that this slippage from metaphor is far from accidental. If Updike has been canonized as a major figure of US contemporary writing, he has been lauded not only for his ability to capture, as in his *Rabbit* series, the minutiae – cultural as well as psychological – of New England life, but also for the very nature of his writing. It is on the fact of the craftsmanship of Updike as a writer that critics seem to agree; an agreement which links the *New York Review of Books* to *Time* magazine:

Page for page, voluptuously pleasurable to read ... No one else I know of, simply no one, writes this well. ... What you recall is that reading Updike has always provided the pleasures you hoped were in store when you went to the trouble of learning to read. (John Banville; Richard Lacayo; dustjacket)

My claim here is not only that the idea that our only reward for learning how to read should be our ability to read John Updike is frightening. Rather, I am concerned with the ways in which in *Terrorist* craftsmanship, John Updike's writerly ability and aesthetic mastery, slips into its absence, degenerates into a mere gesturing at what may indeed be obvious, even stereotypical facts about what the war on terror calls "Muslim identity". For the *angst* in Updike's novel is that of the New England Jew, not that of the Muslim terrorist:

Jack Levy wakes, now that he is sixty-three, between three and four in the morning, with the taste of dread in his mouth, dry from his breath being dragged through it while he dreamed. His dreams are sinister, soaked through with the misery of the world. ... Now Jack Levy's sole remaining task is to die and thus contribute a little space, a little breathing room, to this overburdened planet. The task hangs above in the air, just above his insomniac face like a cobweb with a motionless spider in the center (20).

The psychological portrait that Updike provides us with is that of the Jewish American guidance counselor, not the Muslim terrorist.

It is in his slippage from metaphor, then, that Updike, the literary master, may be said to transgress against the very laws of good fiction, to cross Wayne Booth's line between showing and telling.⁷ It is here, incidentally, that we may return to the cover

⁷ My own argument here uses Booth's theory in a somewhat eclectic sense here. Booth stresses the fact that while there is a distinction between "telling" and "showing", one is not necessarily more artistic than the other. He writes, "Sometimes, ... the complex issues involved in this shift [from showing to telling] have been reduced to a convenient distinction between 'showing', which is artistic, and 'telling', which is inartistic ... But the changed attitudes towards the author's voice in fiction raise problems that go far deeper than this simplified version of point of view would suggest. Percy Lubbock taught us forty years ago to believe that "the art of fiction does to begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself". He may have been in some sense right – but to say so raises more questions than answers" (8). My aim, then, is to wonder at what moment, a moment that is not only cultural but also racial, and not only aesthetic but cultural, Updike's narrative shifts from showing to telling,

of Updike's novel itself: For why should its pages be drenched in red? Why is telling, in other words, not enough? This, then, is the difference between Updike and the nineteenth-century judges who in their desperate attempt to pin down the nature of race and of whiteness resorted to metaphor: for at this crucial juncture of his own narrative, on the verge of a terrorist attack, Updike no longer trusts metaphor. He resorts instead to both the sensational and – paradoxically – the *real*.

It is in this light that we may as well return to Tylenol, Ahmad's African American classmate. Ironically, in Updike's fictional trial on the nature of whiteness, Tylenol, too, is likened to a walnut; and yet it is significant for the purposes of my argument here that Updike's use of metaphor, in Tylenol's case, should be reserved for skin color, not state of mind: "Tylenol has a square face the color of walnut furniture-stain while it's still sitting wet on the wood" (15). To speak of furniture stain the color of a walnut, then, is not quite to invoke an image taken from Nature. There is thus a categorical difference separating the subtly psychological metaphors delineating Jack Levy's angst from the quaint, walnut description of an African American who, after all, is named after a painkiller. It is in this sense, the sense of both skin color and the bluntness of metaphor that, as in the case of Faras Shahid's application for citizenship in early twentieth-century South Carolina, being compared "in color" to "that of a walnut" (Jacobson 236) does not bode well for Tylenol in what I am reading as Updike's twenty-first century replay of the racial prerequisite cases.

It is in this sense, I would posit, that the resonances which link Updike's novel to the verdicts of nineteenth-century judges are positively uncanny – or rather, they are not uncanny but point instead to the slippery quality of race and racial difference. If the true realm of race is not the biological, but the social, if a walnut can serve not as a biological category of classification but only as a metaphor for a perceptual difference which proves impossible to pin down, then it is no wonder that the judiciary and the fictional meet in metaphor. And it is no wonder, conversely, that Updike's novel, in its struggle to define the enigmatic nature of whiteness, should echo the nineteenth-century judges' cry for help. Updike, too, may be said to admit his own helplessness in defining the perpetually shifting nature of race, thus also admitting, implicitly at least, the doom of his entire narrative; and he, too, may be admitting this failure through a shift in register. Where the judges slipped into metaphor in a court case which exceeded the very language of the judiciary, Updike can in fact be said to slip into the judiciary. In their inability to define the precise nature of whiteness, the judges turned to metaphor and implicitly admitted, with this slippage in tone, the ultimately fictional quality of race. In the same inability to pin down true whiteness, to separate which shade of whiteness is suspect and which is not, Updike does the reverse: he slips from metaphor, the true realm of the writer, into an altogether different register: that of racial classification.

and from telling into an even more obvious register, as his cover illustrates: from telling to mere deictic gestures. My concern, moreover, is not so much with the artistic or inartistic than with a shift in register, a withholding of cultural exclusion through the solace of metaphor, of what Booth calls "showing".

To return to Ahmad's dress code, his white shirt, too, spells out Booth's line between showing and telling. For the shirt, as Updike all too bluntly reminds us, is that of the martyr, the white shroud which Ahmad wears, as if prophetically, well before he sets out to commit a suicide attack. What interests me here is not to pass judgment on a narrative which I believe is racially, not aesthetically flawed. Rather, I am interested in the juncture at which Updike, the literary master, lapses from metaphor. I believe that the junctures, at which showing lapses into telling are racially, are politically motivated; they are markers, ultimately, of a profound cultural incomprehension. For metaphor presupposes a familiarity, a being attuned to, that what it describes. Updike's lapse from metaphor, then, spells out a profound cultural helplessness – as Updike's judiciary equivalent, the nineteenth-century judge would have it, “[it is greatly hoped] that an amendment ... will make quite clear the meaning of the word ‘white’” (223). It is this epistemological crisis, I believe, which returns in Updike's novel; it is this crisis which may account for his obsession, in his text, with distinguishing one shade of whiteness from another, to separate the “Irish white” of Ahmad's mother from the “waxy white” of Ahmad's Yemeni imam (101). Where the nineteenth-century judge resorts to metaphor, lapsing from the judicial into the poetic, Updike, the literary master, lapses from metaphor into deictic bluntness. What Updike's portrayal of Ahmad, the Arab American suspect and potential terrorist is lacking, then, is nuance. If, on the other hand, nuance is the prerequisite for metaphor, it is this evasion, this dismissal of shading, of nuances, that reserves for Ahmad, in the aesthetic universe of John Updike's novel, the lesser craft of telling, not showing.

As these considerations imply, Updike has thus excluded Arab Americans, on account of both a lesser, potentially suspect whiteness and an outlandish cultural practice, from his national imaginary. Metaphorically speaking, his novel can thus in fact be seen to revoke the citizenship of Arab Americans in the twenty-first century. If we stay with the judicial analogy, moreover, with the linkage between the racial prerequisite cases of the nineteenth and the racial profiling of the twenty-first centuries, then today's Arab Americans may in fact be worse off than the nineteenth-century claimants for whiteness: for precisely because legally, they are citizens to begin with, there is no court to which today's Arab Americans, unlike nineteenth-century Syrians, can appeal. Paradoxically, this is a moment in which they might actually want to apply for *denaturalization* – a precedent which their fellow Americans of South Asian descent have already set. For in the early 1980s, Indian Americans who were classified in the US racial pyramid as white, applied for a change of their legal status:⁸ because, they argued, they were subject to many discriminatory practices despite the legal fact of their citizenship, they sought to be re-classified as non-white because this would render them eligible for affirmative action programs, programs which, given the fact of everyday discrimination, they were indeed in need of. Barring this legal reform of their own citizenship, then, to which court might Arab Americans appeal given the

⁸ See Susan Koshy, “Category Crisis: South Asian Americans and Questions of Race and Ethnicity.”

nature of today's racial profiling? Updike's most recent novel implies that it is not the court of fiction that they might be heard in. Rather, in this, one of the most trying periods of American history, fiction itself seems to have lost its standing, the belief that literature itself, not law, may actually be the most supreme of narratives: because it can imagine what everyday reality as yet seems to have no words for; because, given its aesthetic potential, it can indeed devise alternative worlds. It is this prerogative of fiction, this solace of metaphor, that John Updike, in this, his most recent novel, has chosen to withhold from us.

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