The Longest Memory

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRED D'AGUIAR

Fred D'Aguiar was born in London in 1960 to recent Guyanese immigrants, but around the age of two, he was sent back to live with his grandmother and his extended family. He then moved back to London at the age of twelve. As a teenager, D'Aguiar published poetry in local newspapers and became strongly influenced by the atmosphere of racial tension in London during the 1970s. This led him to become politically engaged in his writing, which often focuses on racism and the legacy of slavery. After training to be a psychiatric nurse, he graduated in African and Caribbean studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury, in southern England. He published his first book of poetry, *Mama Dot* (named after his grandmother), in 1985, the same year as his graduation. The success of this first book established D'Aguiar's reputation as an influential young poet capable of expanding the scope of British literature in the 1980s and 1990s. During the next few years, he wrote successful poetry and plays, focusing on multiculturalism, Afro-Caribbean traditions, and the legacy of slavery. D'Aguiar published his first novel, *The Longest Memory*, in 1994, which depicts slavery in the United States, and won two prestigious prizes. A prolific writer, D'Aguiar wrote a play, four more novels, two narrative poems, and two collections of poetry in the two decades that followed. D'Aguiar has taught at various universities, including the University of Cambridge, Amherst College, and the University of Miami. He is currently a Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at the University of California, Los Angeles.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Longest Memory is set from 1790 to 1810, during a period in which Northern states gradually abolished slavery (from 1777 to 1804). This period saw an economic and ideological gap grow between the increasingly industrialized North and the South, whose economy was based on agriculture (such as the production of cotton, sugar cane, or tobacco), which largely depended on slave labor. In the North, the antislavery and abolitionist movements sought to eliminate slavery in the entire country. While the abolitionists (a minority group) sought to abolish slavery and racism right away, antislavery advocates (who included famous figures such as President Abraham Lincoln) argued for the gradual ending of slavery and did not necessarily eschew racist ideas entirely. Meanwhile, a Protestant movement called the Second Great Awakening renewed the public's interest in morality and sin, strengthening the Abolitionist Movement's claims that slavery was immoral, in contrast with those who believed that Christianity and slavery were not incompatible. The deep economic and political tensions between the North and the South led, decades later, to the American Civil War (1861-1865).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although *The Longest Memory* is a fictional account of slavery in Virginia, written two hundred years after the events it relates, it builds on a tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century autobiographical slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave* (1855). The slave narrative genre influenced the entire tradition of African-American autobiographical writing, often concerned with the legacy of racism and discrimination, whose major twentieth-century figures include Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Maya Angelou. *The Longest Memory* also builds on the literary legacy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Despite *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s tendency to reinforce certain racial stereotypes, the novel played an important role in bolstering the abolitionist movement, as it explored themes of racism, Christianity, and empathy, and made slaves' plights vivid to readers across the country.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Longest Memory
- **When Written:** 1994
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1994
- **Literary Period:** Post-Modernism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Mr. Whitechapel's plantation in Virginia
- **Climax:** Chapel's death
- **Antagonist:** Although authority figures such as Mr. Whitechapel, Sanders Senior, and Sanders Junior can be cruel and prove more interested in defending their own interests than protecting the slaves, the entire system of slavery proves to be the true antagonist in the story, as it is capable of leading even seemingly well-intentioned characters to acts of oppression and violence.
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Tragedy and Progress. Despite his frequent focus on tragic occurrences (such as, in *The Longest Memory*, the brutal death of a hopeful young boy), D'Aguiar believes that even the most

terrifying historical events carry positive lessons, capable of making society a better place. In an interview, he explains how disaster can be the catalyst for spiritual transformation: "there are these formative moments of history tied around tragedy and disaster and sacrifice, that led people to survive and take stock and move on with some kind of notion of betterment. […] And then there's a moment to remember those who died or sacrificed for us to carry on."

PLOT SUMMARY

Set in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Virginia, where slavery is an ordinary aspect of life, Fred D'Aguiar's 1994 novel, *The Longest Memory*, revolves around one tragic event: the death of the slave Whitechapel's son Chapel, who is whipped to death for running away. As various characters reflect on their life on Mr. Whitechapel's plantation, the economic, social, and political ramifications of slavery come to light, providing the context to understand the motives behind the young boy's death.

Whitechapel, the oldest slave on the plantation, is widely admired by authority figures for his knowledge, hard work, and obedience. He believes in the existence of two types of slaves: rebellious slaves who cannot accept their lack of freedom and thus get into trouble, and obedient slaves who rightly behave according to their status in society. While Whitechapel belongs to the second category, which he believes brings long-term peace and stability and establishes a relationship of mutual trust between slave and master, Chapel belongs to the more volatile, first category, which Whitechapel is convinced will only bring trouble for his son.

Whitechapel is committed to protecting his family at all costs. Most of the slaves on the plantation are his own family members, as he had twelve children with his first wife and is now surrounded by his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. After the death of his first wife, Whitechapel falls in love with a new slave on the plantation: a young woman whom the overseer, Sanders Senior, calls "Cook" and uses as his cook and the caretaker of his son, Sanders Junior. With Mr. Whitechapel's consent, Whitechapel makes plans to marry her. However, in the meantime, Sanders Senior rapes Cook twice, causing her to lose her virginity and to become pregnant.

When Cook tells her new husband, Whitechapel, about what has happened, Whitechapel in turn relates the news to his master. Furious about his overseer's actions, Mr. Whitechapel decides to fine (rather than fire) Sanders Senior and forces him to apologize to both Cook and Whitechapel for his actions. Whitechapel initially has doubts about whether or not he wants to stay with Cook now that he knows she has been raped, but he ultimately decides to commit to his wife, whom he loves, and put the past behind them. He accepts her son as his own and calls him Whitechapel, which his mother shortens to "Chapel." Overall, he impresses his wife with his devotion to his family and his capacity to make figures of authority treat him with fairness and respect.

Over the years, Chapel grows up with a strong desire to learn and develop his talents. At the master's house, he becomes fascinated with Mr. Whitechapel's daughter's main activity: reading. Moved by the young boy's curiosity, Lydia teaches him to read and, later, to write, even though such activities are strictly forbidden to slaves. Over the course of two years, in the small, intimate environment of the master's reading room, the two of them fall in love and develop a relationship nourished by mutual learning. One day, though, Mr. Whitechapel catches them together and, after ordering Lydia out of the room, beats Chapel with his belt. He orders the young boy never to read or see his daughter again.

Cook has also discovered her son's secret activity. Even though she knows reading is forbidden, she feels proud of her son's achievements, admiring the fact that his reading voice resembles that of his master's. She respects her husband's views about obedience and the importance of preserving trust between slave and master, but prefers to let protect her son's happiness and decides to keep what she has discovered to herself. However, she mediates between Lydia and Chapel so that they can meet outside at night. During these clandestine meetings, the two young people share literary knowledge: Chapel composes poems in his mind and recites them to Lydia and, in turn, Lydia recites entire books she has memorized for Chapel. The two of them also dream of a future together. When Lydia learns about the North from her brother, Thomas, and discovers that interracial relationships are possible there, she encourages Chapel to think about running away together. Despite the numerous obstacles and dangers involved in such a trip, Chapel feels inspired to think about escaping.

Cook falls ill and dies a slow, painful death over the course of a few weeks, during which her devoted husband and son take care of her. When Cook finally dies, Chapel, feeling that he has nothing left to lose, decides to run away. Upon discovering his son's escape, Whitechapel is faced with a dilemma: while telling his master about his son's whereabouts might be seen as a betrayal, Whitechapel believes that running away is likely to lead to his son's death, as search parties usually kill runaway slaves. By contrast, on the plantation, Whitechapel trusts that he can negotiate a fair punishment for his son, which would spare his life. To protect his son's life and instruct in him the importance of obedience, which maintains peace and stability on the plantation, Whitechapel ultimately decides to tell his master where his son is hiding.

After hearing his slave's pleas, Mr. Whitechapel agrees to order Chapel to be locked up, once he is caught, until his return from a day-long family trip. He plans to spare the boy's life but give him an exemplary punishment that would keep him—and the other slaves on the plantation—from ever trying to run away

again. However, once the search party brings the young boy back to the plantation, Sanders Junior, who is now the overseer, decides to ignore the master's orders. Instead, he announces his decision to give Chapel two hundred lashes, which shocks all the slaves on the plantation. Although Whitechapel begs to take the place of his son, and the other slaves plead for the boy's life, the overseer remains unmoved. Halfway through the whipping, it becomes clear that Chapel is mentally gone and, a few moments after the punishment is over, the young boy dies of his wounds.

This event leaves Whitechapel completely crushed. As the rest of the community stays away from him, blaming him for his son's death, Whitechapel becomes completely passive and apathetic, taking on the same emotionless stare that his son adopted in death. He realizes that his belief in the fairness of the system, which he thought would respect his and his family's lives, was illusory. Instead, he is forced to accept that he was incapable of protecting his own child's life, which overwhelms him with guilt and grief. Convinced that he has lost all right to possess an individual identity, he decides to abandon his name and to reject his entire memory. He accepts to become nothing more than a body deprived of all emotion and pain, a mere tool at his master's service, and something that other people can treat as they will.

Whitechapel reflects on his life and admits that he knew his son was born to be free. His judgment does not rely on a belief in universal freedom, but on his son's biracial nature, as he believes that the mix of races in Chapel's blood made him unsuited to life as a mere slave. Whitechapel realizes that he has been wrong all his life to believe that obedience would ensure survival for himself and his family. Instead, he is forced to accept that his philosophy of self-sacrifice has failed him and the people he loved the most. The system of slavery, which relies on principles of racial inferiority and the dehumanizing treatment of slaves, proved more powerful than even Whitechapel's well-intentioned actions. Overcome by the knowledge of his own mistakes and the injustice of life, Whitechapel dies of pain and sadness.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Whitechapel – Whitechapel, the protagonist of the novel, is the oldest and most trusted slave on Mr. Whitechapel's plantation. He is married to a young slave named Cook and has an illegitimate, half-black son named Chapel (the then-overseer, Sanders Senior, raped Cook, resulting in her pregnancy). Whitechapel earns respect from authority figures through his obedience, hard work, and willingness to accept his inferior status as a slave. Whitechapel is known for his moral rigidity, which leads him to impose his views about obedience on everybody around him, including his son, who pines for freedom and a better life. However, Cook and Chapel also admire and love Whitechapel, and they are impressed by his righteousness and devotion to his family. Whitechapel's acceptance of slavery does not reduce him to complete passivity, since on various occasions, Whitechapel demonstrates his bustling intelligence, as well as his capacity to defend his own rights and his moral beliefs. Despite his initial rejection of freedom, Whitechapel also proves capable of deep honesty and self-examination, which ultimately lead him to conclude that his views about justice and obedience on the plantation have been wrong all his life. His greatest failing is when he accidentally brings about his son's brutal death (at the hands of Sanders Junior) while trying to teach Chapel a lesson about running away and knowing his place in life.

Chapel – Chapel, the son that Whitechapel raises as his own, is in fact the result of Sanders Senior's rape of the young slave Cook. However, this parentage plays no role in the young boy's life, since he ignores that Whitechapel is not his biological father. Chapel belongs to the category of slaves that Whitechapel identifies as rebellious and troublesome, as he distinguishes himself through his literary creativity, his moral principles, and his powerful desire to learn and grow. Moved by ideals of freedom and justice, he interrogates the world around him and dreams of escaping slavery for "paradise" in the North, which his love for Mr. Whitechapel's daughter, Lydia, only strengthens. Despite his opposition to Whitechapel's views about obedience, Chapel respects his father and takes pride in being his son, even if he is illegitimate. After an unsuccessful attempt to run away, Chapel dies as a result of Sanders Junior's brutal two-hundred-lash whipping—a punishment Whitechapel accidentally brought about by revealing his son's whereabouts to the plantation's white authority figures.

Mr. Whitechapel – The master on the plantation, Mr. Whitechapel believes that he treats his slave with fairness and respect. Despite his conviction that blacks are inherently inferior to whites, Mr. Whitechapel trusts that his Christian beliefs, which advocate kindness, are compatible with slavery. Because of this, he thinks that he is a better plantation owner than most of his brutal "friends," which are owners of neighboring plantations. However, Mr. Whitechapel's views are marked by contradictions, as he realizes that his punishment is not always fair—For example, Chapel died when Mr. Whitechapel was unable to supervise a whipping on his plantation. His desire to protect slaves from unnecessary suffering also proves blind to the greater cruelty he inflicts on them: denying their freedom and equality, and making them vulnerable to the constant threat of physical violence. Like most slave owners, he also denies his slaves the opportunity to learn to read and write—which is why he is furious when he finds out that his daughter, Lydia, taught Chapel to do so. Although he sometimes seems conflicted about his own

behavior, he ultimately prefers to believe that he is a righteous slave owner.

Lydia – Unlike her father, Mr. Whitechapel, Lydia is firmly committed to racial justice and equality. Her desire to teach Chapel to read and write demonstrates her capacity to translate her ideals into action, as she considers that the young slave *can* and *should* develop his natural talents. Her letters to *The Virginian*, written under the pseudonym of "Miss L.," also reveal her desire to provoke her contemporary, conservative society to reflect on the dangers and injustice that slavery inflicts on people. She is also progressive for her acceptance of interracial relationships, as she falls in love with Chapel and consequently rejects all of her white, wealthy suitors. Idealistic and hopeful, Lydia hopes that Chapel and she will be able to elope to the North and live a free life as a couple. However, it is during Chapel's attempted escape to the North that he is caught, brutally whipped, and ultimately killed.

Cook – Cook is Whitechapel's wife and Chapel's biological mother. She is a loving, caring family member who takes pleasure in making her family happy. Despite her respect for her husband's opinions, she is not as committed to blind obedience as he is. Rather, she reveals her independence and freedom of thought when she decides to keep Chapel's ability to read secret from her husband, trusting that her son should be able to grow intellectually and to invest in his own happiness. She also demonstrates courage in telling Whitechapel about the times that Sanders Senior raped her (leading her to become pregnant with Chapel) and thus risking both punishment for speaking out and ostracization from no longer being a virgin.

Editor of The Virginian – Despite his pretense of promoting a balanced view on a variety of topics concern slavery, the editor of the local newspaper, *The Virginian*, is racist and clearly believes that blacks (especially slaves, but also free blacks in the North) are inferior to whites. He advocates protecting the economic interests of a plantation before slaves' well-being and suggests that slaves should be seen exclusively as economic assets. On occasion, these views paradoxically exhibit a relatively progressive attitude toward slaves, as he is not opposed on principle to slaves' literacy and prohibits any sexual act that masters might want to engage in with their slaves. These views, however, always rely on economic considerations, not on an empathetic regard for the slaves' situations.

Sanders Junior – Although Sanders Junior shows promise as a young boy seemingly interested in interrogating the moral roots racism and slavery, as an adult overseer, he ultimately replicates Sanders Senior's propensity for violence. However, he proves conflicted about the whipping of the young slave Chapel, whom he did not know was his half-brother until after the young boy's death. Although Sanders Junior believes that his most important duty on the plantation is to remind slaves that they are inferior to him and therefore must obey him, he also feels guilty about hitting Whitechapel and killing his son, because he recognizes their bravery and intelligence. By the end of the novel, despite his attachment to rigid racial hierarchies, he seems open to feeling compassion and respect for the two slaves, as he feels sorry for their suffering.

Sanders Senior – Sanders Senior was the overseer at Mr. Whitechapel's plantation before Sanders Junior, his son, took over. After the death of his wife, Caroline, Sanders Senior feels lonely and generally depressed about his position and his life. These feelings of emptiness—coupled with his tendency for brutality—lead him to repeatedly rape a young, pretty slave named Cook, who works in the Sanders household. Cook then gives birth to Chapel, who is Sanders Senior's biological child, but whom Whitechapel claims as his own son. Despite admiring Whitechapel's skills—which he refuses to consider evidence of intelligence—Sanders Senior is a deeply racist character who rejects slaves' humanity and advocates violent punishment, taking pleasure in whipping slaves. He shuns all demonstrations of kindness or empathy and mocks people's efforts at moral or spiritual elevation, including his own son's interrogations about race and desire to be a scientist or a philosopher.

Plantation Owners – Mr. Whitechapel's acquaintances, a group of unnamed men, mock his beliefs in treating slaves humanely. Instead, they advocate stern discipline on the plantation, seem to take pleasure in violent punishments, and feel strong hatred toward abolitionists, who want to eradicate slavery. Although their point of view is unapologetically racist and brutal, these men successfully highlight the hypocrisy of Mr. Whitechapel's behavior, as he claims that Christian compassion is compatible with slavery.

Whitechapel's Great-Granddaughter – Whitechapel's great-granddaughter feels pity and compassion for her grandfather, whom she knows has been suffering terribly since the death of his son, Chapel. Her recollections of the times Whitechapel used to wash her force her to understand that her conception of freedom is opposed to his, but also highlight her love for him, as she appreciates how he takes care of her.

Whitechapel's Grandson – One of Whitechapel's grandsons inadvertently runs into him, knocking him to the ground, when trying to escape an authority figure who is about to beat him. Although the boy's motives remain unclear, Whitechapel becomes convinced that the boy was implicitly punishing him for Chapel's death, demonstrating that Whitechapel should suffer for his participation in that death.

Thomas – Thomas is Lydia's brother and Mr. Whitechapel's son, who travels to the North for business. Upon his return, he tells his sister about the difference in social behavior there, where some blacks are free and can even be seen publicly with white women. Unlike his sister, Thomas is viciously intolerant, finds interracial relationships hateful, and does not understand her interest in life in the North. Unknowingly, he only furthers Lydia's interest in running away to the North so that she and

Chapel can be together.

The deputy The second-in-command on Mr. Whitechapel's plantation. He is Mr. Whitechapel's trusted lieutenant. However, on the night when Chapel is captured after running away from the plantation, the deputy is not on the plantation because he has snuck off to spend time with his wife (something he does regularly). As a result, there is no one at the plantation to ensure that Mr. Whitechapel's orders are followed, and Sanders Junior decides to punish Chapel much more harshly than Mr. Whitechapel intended, causing Chapel's death. Mr. Whitechapel later reprimands the deputy for "behaving foolishly" in leaving the plantation when he should have been on duty.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Caroline – Sanders Senior's late wife, Caroline, is only recalled through her husband memory, which presents her as a beloved, gentle wife.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FREEDOM VS. OBEDIENCE

The Longest Memory explores the horror of slavery through its dissection of life on a Virginia plantation in the early nineteenth century. Whitechapel, the oldest and most respected slave on the plantation, does not believe in his freedom, trusting instead that he should show subservience toward his master, Mr. Whitechapel, to protect his life. By contrast, Whitechapel's son, Chapel, wants to fight for liberation. When Chapel escapes from the plantation, Whitechapel is forced to decide whether he wants to let his son attempt a risky journey to the North, which is likely to get him killed, or whether he should negotiate with Mr. Whitechapel a fair punishment that would spare Chapel's life. Whitechapel's subsequent decision to betray his son's whereabouts leads to Chapel's brutal **whipping** and ultimate death, shattering Whitechapel's views about obedience. D'Aguiar uses Chapel's death to underscore the fact that, no matter how well they behave, slaves inherently lack the freedom to protect their own bodies and lives. In this way, he ultimately suggests that the only way for slaves to maintain a sense of agency and humanity is to retain their own moral freedom. Otherwise, they become nothing more than mere tools blindly serving the master's purposes.

A core conflict of the novel arises from the contradiction between Whitechapel and his son's differing conceptions of a meaningful life. Whitechapel advocates a philosophy of survival, deeming it necessary for slaves to obey their masters in order to protect themselves and their families. Chapel, on the other hand, believes that life is only worth living if he can achieve freedom. Whitechapel's firmly held belief in the protective nature of obedience is why, when Chapel runs away, Whitechapel disapproves of this action and fears for his son's life. His misguided decision to tell the master about his son's whereabouts follows a personal logic based on physical preservation. Indeed, Whitechapel believes that his son is more likely to die if he runs away than if he stays on the plantation, because trackers will kill him outright if they find him. Whitechapel trusts that his ability to negotiate a fair punishment with his master will spare his son's life, as well as discourage other slaves on the plantation from trying to escape (and, it follows, keep them from endangering themselves). In this way, Whitechapel is willing to sacrifice slaves' moral and spiritual freedom in order to protect their physical lives.

However, Whitechapel does take part in small acts of resistance that reveal an underlying belief in his own moral agency. These acts show that he is willing, within certain boundaries, to defend his freedom. After Chapel's escape, he temporarily conceals information from his master, in the goal of trying to negotiate his son's fair treatment. Mr. Whitechapel, he notes, "was furious and appeared to judge my knowledge of my son's whereabouts as some form of power over him, my master." Later, Whitechapel audaciously argues with Sanders Junior, the plantation's overseer, who wants to give Chapel two hundred lashes instead of following the master's orders. In both cases, Whitechapel oversteps his own role and shows defiance toward his superiors for the sake of protecting his family. He seems convinced that, in these particular cases, he has the right to speak his mind and defend his point of view, even if this involves small acts of disobedience.

This defiance shows that Whitechapel does trust in his power to determine right from wrong and to exercise moral agency. It also demonstrates a largely illusory trust in the system, as Whitechapel believes that his master and the overseer will actually be able and willing to protect his son's life. After Chapel's death, Whitechapel realizes that he does not actually have the power to protect his own son's life, and that his views about obedience are therefore erroneous. Obedience does not protect one's life, but rather encourages dehumanizing passivity and subjugation. He realizes that slaves' survival is arbitrary and subject to the whims of authority figures. The only hope for slaves to maintain their humanity, then, is for them to believe in their own internal freedom, separate from the rules of slavery.

This leads Whitechapel to conclude that survival without freedom is meaningless. Without the capacity to transform one's internal knowledge of right and wrong into concrete

action, the life of an obedient slave loses all purpose. "[I] decided that from this day I had no name," he notes, speaking about the day of Chapel's death. "I was just boy, mule, nigger, slave or whatever else anyone chose to call me." As a passive, resigned slave, he becomes a mere piece of property, like a "mule," that must serve the plantation staff's orders even if they threaten his life or those of the people he loves.

Retaining one's humanity within the confines of slavery thus involves trusting in one's own freedom, however frail this freedom might be. Regardless of the riskiness of Chapel's escape attempt, it allowed him to take control over his life and assert his human agency. Similarly, Whitechapel's discussions with his master and the overseer protected his humanity, demonstrating that he retained his freedom of thought. Therefore, without such protection of one's moral independence, being a slave merely equates to being a piece of the master's property.

Furthermore, the possibility for a slave to retain a sense of freedom has the potential to impact an entire community. For example, Whitechapel's desire to punish his son for running away makes him complicit of the entire system of slavery, as his rigid principles turn him into an oppressor whose actions perpetuate discrimination and injustice, by reducing *everyone*'s incentives to run away or rebel. Similarly, even if Chapel's desire to run away is personal, his decision is also a political one, affirming symbolically that no human being should have to live in such degrading conditions. More than a mere conflict between father and son, then, Whitechapel and Chapel's views about freedom have potential repercussions on everyone's lives. They are capable of inspiring slaves to rebel or, on the other hand, to accept their harrowing existence.

RACISM AND INEQUALITY

While some characters in *The Longest Memory*, such as Lydia and Chapel, argue that blacks should be granted the same rights as whites, most of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Virginian society proves hostile to the concept of equality, preferring instead to believe that blacks are inherently inferior. Racism determines the nature of economic and social relations between whites and blacks. Such entrenched inequality sets a fragile foundation for the nation's present and future, as it remains uncertain how society might handle the long-lasting effects of discrimination and oppression. The novel's prophetic interrogations of the future foreshadow the difficulties that American society will face in reconciling Northern and Southern mindsets and, more generally, in allowing blacks and whites to prosper side by side.

Despite being learned behavior, racism corrupts everyone—including members of the oppressed, black minority. Racism is not innate, but rather comes from observing and abiding by societal dynamics. As a young boy, the overseer Sanders Junior asks his father, Sanders Senior, about racial inequality: "he asked me why they were dark and we were bright. His word 'bright.'" The child realizes that the division between people's skin colors is arbitrary, following no logic that he can perceive. In this way, it becomes apparent that he has to *learn* to consider blacks not only inherently different from him, but also inferior. His later adherence to a strict code separating whites and blacks in terms of superiority and inferiority—evident in his punishment of the runaway slave, Chapel—shows that societal dynamics can shape even a previously skeptic young boy's behavior for the rest of his life.

Racism is so prevalent that even slaves can find themselves participating in this ideology. "There are two types of slave: the slave who must experience everything for himself before coming to an understanding of anything and he who learns through observation," Whitechapel explains, concluding that the first slave (the rebellious one) is wrong and bound to experience trouble, whereas the quieter, more obedient slave can live a peaceful life. Whitechapel does not necessarily believe in the inferiority of blacks, but he does believe that slaves must *learn* to accept their position in society. In this way, he effectively accepts the inferior social and economic position that is given to blacks, seemingly without questioning it on a moral level.

This understanding informs Whitechapel's entire vision of life. Instead of considering that his son should be independent as a human being, Whitechapel believes that it is only because of Chapel's biracial nature—the result of Sanders Senior's rape of Cook—that he can claim the right to rebellion. "You were born half a slave, half the master of your own destiny," he says in an imaginary dialogue with his son. "Shall I tell you about your blood? That two races are distributed evenly in it?" Whitechapel abides by the narrow division of humans into two races, which he believes determines an individual's right to freedom. Whitechapel's understanding of his son's rebellious nature does not depend on universal freedom, but on an acceptance of race as a determining factor in people's minds and attitudes.

While some people attempt to overcome such divisions between blacks and whites, their efforts often seem bound to fail. For slaves, running away and escaping slavery is likely to get them killed. Among her fellow white Southerners, Lydia's efforts to open a dialogue about slavery with the local newspaper, *The Virginian*, fails from the moment she mentions the possibility of interracial relations, which the editor considers heinous and unacceptable. It becomes obvious that the only possibility for Lydia and Chapel to live happily is to escape to the North.

These various experiences underline the idea that racism is a deeply-rooted problem, affecting the social and economic fabric of society. Such entrenched divisions lay unequal foundations for society's future. In the novel, characters reflect on the difficulty of handling the social and economic legacy of

slavery, prophesizing the harmful, long-term effects of violence and discrimination against the country's black population. Whitechapel, for example, foresees a depressing future in which society simply reproduces the same dynamics of oppression and inequality over time: "The future is just more of the past waiting to happen." His very name—Whitechapel, the same as his master's—suggests that oppression is inherited, generation after generation, and that little can be done to change it.

Other people believe that change will only happen through tension and conflict. Responding to a letter that Lydia sent to the newspaper, the editor worries about the legacy of interracial relationships: "what will become of the offspring from these heinous alliances? Where is their place in these States when they see themselves as our equal and feel it too because the blood courses through their veins?" The racist editor proves prophetic in his anticipation of racial tensions, as he imagines that the fight for African-Americans' equality and socio-economic "place" in society will involve grappling with centuries of violent discrimination.

However, other characters are more optimistic. Despite benefiting directly from slavery, Mr. Whitechapel believes that the expansion of slaves' rights, perhaps to the point of freedom, "might be possible in the future." Even the intolerant, racist editor in *The Virginian* admits that racial dynamics might change. Commenting on Lydia's views, he writes: "Whatever we may think of this young lady's opinions we must grant that she demonstrates intelligence and certain advantages that go with being young, namely an unmitigated idealism. This is as it should be. It is the young, after all, who hold dominion over the future."

As bleak as the present or the future might seem, the novel concludes, society *is* capable of changing, however slowly or violently these changes might occur. As history proves, through the later Civil War and the ongoing struggle to achieve equality between blacks and whites, no change is ever perfect or complete. Rather, each generation—the idealistic "young"—must fight to solve the problems of their time and defend their dream of a better future.

PUNISHMENT AND CRUELTY

Plantation owners' management of their estate is based on an analysis of costs and benefits, meant to protect their self-interest over the well-being of their slaves. In order to govern over large groups of slaves, many masters resort to various kinds of punishment, aimed at discouraging rebellion or escape. Seemingly alone in believing in slaves' humanity, Mr. Whitechapel argues for demonstrating kindness and respect to slaves in order to establish relationships of trust. However, Mr. Whitechapel's views prove deeply hypocritical, as the novel underscores that slavery is the antithesis of kindness or humaneness. Focusing on a master's occasionally respectful actions ignores the fact that slavery takes away slaves' right to be seen as full human beings. Even without the use of outwardly violent punishment, the institution of slavery remains inherently cruel, aimed at oppressing and dominating a vulnerable minority.

Mr. Whitechapel's philosophy is to show respect to slaves and, unlike other plantation owners' brutal methods, avoid violent punishment on the plantation. However, this attitude is hypocritical, as it disregards the dehumanizing effect of slavery itself. Initially, Mr. Whitechapel seems committed to treating his slaves fairly. When the overseer, Sanders Senior, rapes Cook, who is the future wife of a well-respected slave named Whitechapel, Mr. Whitechapel fines the overseer and threatens to fire him if he does not find himself a wife. Later, Mr. Whitechapel also agrees to negotiate the young Chapel's punishment with his father so that the boy's life might be spared, at least temporarily. His ability to interact and negotiate with a trusted slave such as Whitechapel shows that he does respect slaves' well-being to a certain extent.

However, even as Mr. Whitechapel insists that he believes in slaves' humanity, he is also convinced that their so-called inherent inferiority justifies their economic and social subjection. "Africans may be our inferiors," he says, "but they exhibit the same qualities we possess, even if they are merely imitating us. Their management is best exemplified by an approach that treats them first and foremost as subjects of God, though blessed with lesser faculties, and therefore suited to the trade of slavery." Mr. Whitechapel thus accepts Africans only insofar as they represent a subhuman class that must be ruled by whites. This denies slaves even the most basic right of self-determination. Therefore, even without direct physical punishment, slavery constitutes a form of violence: the removal of what makes people fully human.

Mr. Whitechapel prefers to ignore his own participation in such a violent system. When he rebukes Sanders Junior for killing Chapel, he argues that "the lot of the slave is miserable enough without being compounded by unnecessary hardships and cruelties." While he criticizes instilling terror on the plantation ("unnecessary hardships"), he also recognizes the inherently "miserable" nature of slaves' lives—a misery in which *he* participates directly as a plantation owner, but for which he does not seem to consider himself responsible. Whatever actions Mr. Whitechapel might take to maintain peace and cooperation on the plantation, his support of the system of slavery makes him just as oppressive and cruel as his more outwardly violent counterparts. His occasional acts of kindness or respect are unable to compensate for the cruelty of a system of oppression.

Like other slave owners, Mr. Whitechapel ultimately proves less committed to his slaves' well-being than to his economic self-interest. An article in the local newspaper, *The Virginian*, summarizes slave owners' general attitude toward slaves. The

editor argues that it is fine to separate slave families, since slaves should be seen as economic assets rather than full human beings. "It is wise not to confuse [their] displays of attachment and habit with love," the editor writes. "At the auction block, get the best price for your investment even if it means breaking up the capital into smaller holdings and selling each holding separately." Slave owners, the article argues, should learn to prioritize financial considerations only, not their slaves' emotional health.

Although Mr. Whitechapel does not necessarily treat slaves as inanimate possessions, he does give preference to his own interests over his slaves' well-being. In doing so, he reveals that fairness is impossible in a system where one section of the population is considered inferior. When Whitechapel's wife, Cook, is dying, for example, Mr. Whitechapel refuses to pay for a physician for her, arguing instead—without any medical evidence to support his views—that this is her time to die. His refusal to pay for a physician reveals that he does not want to spend money on a slave's life. On other occasions, his harsh words of rebuke toward Whitechapel—when the slave is trying to negotiate for Chapel's life, or after Chapel's death—reveal that Mr. Whitechapel only respects his slave so long as he remains subservient. Mr. Whitechapel's relationship with his slaves is always colored by his awareness of his status and of slaves' inferiority. As such, his pretensions to respect and fairness can only exist within the limits of economic gain. More than anything, he wants to maintain his position as all-powerful master on the plantation.

By the end of the novel, the very concept of fairness and fair punishment on the plantation prove illusory, as punishment against slaves always involves a form of brutality. "Your policy of a judicious **whip** failed to save him. There is only one whip, it eats flesh," Mr. Whitechapel tells himself after Chapel's death. This serves as a reminder—to the reader, but also to the master himself—that Mr. Whitechapel is not handling inanimate economic assets, but *real lives*. Even though he defends the practical purpose of public punishment (which keeps slaves from running way and thus ensures the stability of the plantation's economic system), he realizes that social utility does not necessarily make an action morally valid. Instead, calling a violent form of punishment "judicious" only imbues an inherently cruel—and, therefore, condemnable—act with moral worth.

Even though Mr. Whitechapel might occasionally strive to be kind, his participation in an inherently violent system thus makes him just as guilty as his uncaring colleagues. It is only in rejecting slavery altogether that Mr. Whitechapel might show himself to be truly fair and to protect the dignity of the people he claims to respect.

LOVE, SEX, AND FAMILY

While love can blossom on Southern plantations, relationships formed in the midst of slavery are inherently fragile, threatened by the external dangers of a racist society. The taboo nature of interracial relationships keeps lovers (such as Lydia and Chapel) from being together, and the lack of consideration for black people's lives risks tearing apart the family that Whitechapel and Cook have created. Despite these obstacles, it is precisely the possibility—however frail—of developing meaningful relationships that allows slaves to feel human and to want to fight for their happiness. Love and family, the novel thus suggests, are invaluable means for survival and joy within an oppressive environment.

The novel highlights that stable relationships are possible in the midst of violent oppression. Despite Whitechapel's status as a slave, he impresses his wife, Cook, with his love and ability to deliver on his promises. Cook notes, "Only death could divide us, he said. This I took to be idle talk; the sweetness of a man's tongue when he hungers for a woman. Not Whitechapel. How can a slave promise such things, I challenged. He said I should trust him." Cook is most surprised by Whitechapel's decision to stay with her even after she reveals that the overseer, Sanders Senior, has repeatedly raped her, and that she is now pregnant his child. Despite some initial hesitation, Whitechapel's ultimate dedication to Cook not only rejects common social behavior of the time (which deemed it acceptable for a man to abandon his wife after she had been raped), but also his very status as a slave, since he promises her the same things that a free man would promise his wife.

Although illicit and fraught with peril, even the relationship between Chapel and Lydia, Mr. Whitechapel's daughter, thrives, at least temporarily. Despite Mr. Whitechapel's orders for Lydia and Chapel never to see each other again, the two young people are able to secretly meet at night and to dream about their future, thus flouting the master's supposed dominance on the plantation. Lydia, who has heard about interracial marriages in the North, convinces Chapel that they might be able to escape and build a new life in such a place. Combined with his desire for freedom, Chapel's love for Lydia encourages him to try to fight for his happiness by running away.

Of course, as in other aspects of slaves' lives, romantic and family relationships are marked by the oppressive nature of discrimination and social conformity. Relationships on the plantations reflect—and, sometimes, perpetuate—inequalities that affect society as a whole. In early nineteenth-century Virginian society, women were not expected to marry for love, nor were they considered men's equals. Despite Whitechapel and Cook's shared status as slaves, Cook is more vulnerable to sexual abuse on the plantation and is sometimes referred to as her husband's property. She is also subject to misogynistic

double standards. After she is raped by Sanders Senior, her supposed purity is tarnished. "Whitechapel lost his second wife to your father. […] She was pure and unsullied, until he laid hands on her," Mr. Whitechapel tells Sanders Junior. At first, Whitechapel himself doubts whether he wants to accept Cook after the rape. "Whitechapel it seems wants to give her up but was persuaded by Mr. Whitechapel to wait." The idea that Cook is "lost" and that Whitechapel might "give her up" reduces her value as a woman to her virginity. It also implies that Cook's rape is somehow her fault, and that she must pay the price for it. In the end, though, Whitechapel changes his mind and determines to keep his wife from being defined by this rape. He commits to giving her a new future, as free from harm as possible.

Even white women have to abide by society's gendered expectations. Lydia's family, for example, pressures her to find a husband, regardless of what her actual feelings toward her suitors might be. A woman, it seems, should be docile and limit her role the domestic sphere. However, Lydia fights against such norms, deciding that she prefers to build a relationship with Chapel based on mutual learning and growth. In both relationships, then, love overcomes the social inequality between men and women. These characters' commitment to caring, reciprocal relationships in an environment rife with injustice suggests that they try, as best they can, to keep their private lives separate from harmful public standards. Even though external social pressures might make these relationships seem fragile, true love thus proves capable of compensating for the burden of inequality.

At the same time, relationships are not immune to all kinds of external attacks. The inherently violent nature of racism and slavery proves particularly dangerous, as slavery's direct threat to individuals' lives proves to be the greatest danger to relationships. As Sanders Senior's rape of Cook is concealed—in part because of the brutal power dynamics at play, but especially because of the interracial nature of this relationship—the overseer Sanders Junior only discovers that Chapel was his half-brother *after* he has **whipped** him to death. Sanders Junior ultimately concludes that knowing that Chapel was his half-brother would have changed nothing, since Chapel was a rebellious slave who deserved to be punished. The overseer considers blood ties irrelevant in a society where the rules are simple: slaves have to obey their superiors. He also trusts that Chapel's black skin makes him inherently inferior to him, proving sufficient to negate his white parentage.

Despite the fragility of relationships in the novel, the bonds that exist between vulnerable characters reveal the human capacity to receive comfort and to give love to others even in the direst of circumstances. However tragic, the image that arises from these stories is one of resilience in the midst of oppression, as love and family becomes more important than basic self-preservation. The difficulty of maintaining a caring relationship in the midst of a dehumanizing environment only emphasizes the nobility and power of such relationships, as individuals try to invent their own, private rules to counter the oppressive reality of everyday life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PARADISE

In *The Longest Memory*, the notion of paradise represents the deep divisions that exist between the old slave Whitechapel's views about death and other slaves' hope in freedom. While many slaves—including Whitechapel's son, Chapel—yearn to be free and believe that they might reach paradise on earth by running away, Whitechapel crushes their hopes by claiming that the only paradise that exists is the one that people go to after death (heaven). In this way, Whitechapel suggests that freedom is merely an illusion, an attractive dream that will never come to fruition. His pessimism leads him to reject rebellion and to embrace obedience until it is too late—that is, until his very own son dies, reaching the "premature paradise" Whitechapel wanted to save Chapel from. Paradoxically, through trying to keep his son from believing in fantasies of liberty, Whitechapel discovers that his own trust in obedience is also a fantasy, as it fails to protect his family. The concept of paradise thus highlights Whitechapel's shift from his focus on physical preservation to his understanding that idealism and optimism are also important in life, as they are potentially capable of maintaining slaves' humanity, sense of agency, and hope in the future.

WHIP

On the plantation, the whip symbolizes the insurmountable divide between a master and his slaves. Although Whitechapel initially believes in Mr. Whitechapel's fair treatment, the very existence of the whip underlines slavery's inherent brutality. Indeed, even if Mr. Whitechapel tries to use the whip as little as possible, the very fact that he *can* use it at any time symbolizes the total control he has over his slaves' bodies and lives, which are his literal property. After Chapel's death, Mr. Whitechapel realizes that the whip has nothing to do with justice. It cannot, therefore, be seen as fair punishment—a "judicious whip"—since all it does is destroy bodies and bring an end to slaves' humanity. The whip also underscores the ubiquity of oppression. When Whitechapel puts balm on his son's back after being brutally whipped by Sanders Junior, Whitechapel sees his son cringe and has to tell him that his hand is not the whip. This scene

serves as a symbolic representation of Whitechapel's guilt, as he attempts to exonerate himself for his participation in his son's death and comes to terms with the fact that he, too, like the overseer, can be an oppressor. Ultimately, the whip serves as a concrete reminder that, beneath the veneer of civility and fairness that some masters adopt, slavery's main object is the physical subjection of vulnerable black bodies.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Longest Memory* published in 2017.

Remembering Quotes

"The future is just more of the past waiting to happen. You do not want to know my past nor do you want to know my name for the simple reason that I have none and would have to make it up to please you. What my eyes say has never been true. All these years of my life are in my hands, not in these eyes or even in this head. I woke up one day [...] and decided that from this day I had no name. I was just boy, mule, nigger, slave or whatever else anyone chose to call me.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The Longest Memory opens with these lines, in which the slave Whitechapel decides to abandon his individual identity after the death of his son, Chapel. Convinced that the circumstances surrounding his son's death prove that life on the plantation is unfair, immoral, and meaningless, Whitechapel is forced to reexamine his entire life in terms of this meaninglessness.

Even though he used to believe that the master and the overseer treated him with respect, he now realizes that, throughout his life as a slave, the only thing that has mattered to the plantation staff has been his manual work (his "hands"), not his intellectual freedom (his "eyes" and his "head"). This thought makes Whitechapel lose all hope and vitality. Instead of rebelling against the system, he decides to accept it in the most extreme of ways: by rejecting his very own humanity. He stops considering himself a human being, accepting instead to become nothing but an unthinking slave and a body—the very stereotype that defines how blacks are treated in society. Therefore, from now on, he accepts to be considered an animal (a "mule") or treated in a derogatory way ("boy," "nigger").

Paradoxically, this decision is both a passive acceptance of oppression and an active effort to denounce injustice. Whitechapel's address to the reader (an undefined "you") reveals his trust that his story might be useful to others—perhaps to encourage other slaves to defend their freedom, or to remind readers of the future of the injustice that so many people suffered through slavery.

Chapter 1: Whitechapel Quotes

"My hand is not the whip son," I said or imagined saying to him. He nodded to everything, then nothing. I had to have no name to match this look and the remainder of this life.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

After Chapel receives two hundred lashes from Sanders Junior for trying to run away, his back is raw and his flesh exposed, which makes him recoil at any touch. Therefore, Whitechapel, who is gently applying balm on his son's back, needs to reassure the young boy that he does not mean to hurt him, but that he is simply trying to help him heal.

This moment gains symbolic significance, since it is Whitechapel's decision to reveal his son's whereabouts that led Chapel to be caught and, later, whipped to the verge of death. To convince his son that he never meant to hurt him, Whitechapel separates his hand from the whip, thus reflecting his effort to separate himself from the brutal force that ultimately killed his son. Whitechapel—who is crying uncontrollably while tending his son's back—insists that he never meant for his actions to have such violent consequences.

This situation leads both father and son to suffer incomparably. While Chapel soon dies of his wounds, Whitechapel lets himself die spiritually, accepting that his son's death has brought about his own death—the destruction of his own "name," his trust in justice, and his capacity to protect his family.

> Worry cut those paths in my face. I let it happen because I didn't feel it happening and only knew it was there when someone called me Sour-face one day and I looked in the mirror for evidence and found plenty staring back at me.
>
> What was I before this? I forget. Did I smile? Laugh out loud? Don't recall. To laugh. What is that? I think of a donkey braying. That is like a big laugh, involuntary, involving the whole body, noisy and long and toothy.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Whitechapel recalls discovering that he looks like a depressed, bitter old man when someone called him "Sour-face." Putting aside Chapel's sudden death, which has obviously caused Whitechapel to suffer, he wonders if his life has always been miserable, and he's just now realizing it. Although there is no doubt that his son's death has made him particularly unhappy, Whitechapel also realizes that he might never have been happy to begin with.

Whitechapel's reflection highlights the harmful psychological effects of slavery and oppression—negative, long-term effects of which Whitechapel seems to have been unaware, believing that all that mattered was mere survival. Instead of laughter and joy, Whitechapel has experienced perpetual worry throughout his life, as he has had to constantly think of ways to protect himself and his family, since he is unable to rely on external justice or protection to take some of this burden from him.

The worrying that Whitechapel has suffered from contradicts his view that working hard and being obedient to the master brings peace and comfort. Instead, obedience seems to bring only dissatisfaction and insecurity—a situation no better than that of other slaves who choose to rebel. Regardless of Whitechapel's attitude toward his master, he is bound to suffer from the harmful effects of slavery. This suggests that Whitechapel's belief in self-protection on the plantation is largely illusory, as he proves unable to protect his own well-being, let alone his son's life.

> There are two types of slave: the slave who must experience everything for himself before coming to an understanding of anything and he who learns through observation. The slave in the first category behaves as if he is the only slave in the world and is visited by the worst luck on earth. That type of slave is agitated, brings much trouble on his head and he makes the lot of every slave ten times worse. It is generally accepted that the slave in the second category is brighter, lives longer, causes everyone around him a minimum of worries and earns the small kindness of the overseer and the master.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Whitechapel's entire philosophy of life revolves around the acceptance of being treated as a slave. His philosophy requires accepting a collective state of subjugation ("the lot of every slave") instead of focusing on one's individuality (thinking as "the only slave in the world"). The process of "learning," then, for Whitechapel, is the same as the process of submission: one must learn to stay within the confines of social status, instead of believing in progress or upward mobility.

Whitechapel's philosophy derives from experience, as he has seen that authority figures on the plantation treat obedient slaves better than rebellious ones. However, in the absence of institutions that protect slaves and give them the right to justice and freedom, these past experiences are insufficient to protect slaves' future. Whitechapel discovers, through Chapel's whipping, that the overseer and the master's kindness has clear limits, and that even the most respected slave can do nothing to influence their actions when they decide to assert their authority.

In this way, the very assumptions of fairness and respect that underlie his philosophy prove fallible. As a result, Whitechapel's rigid ideas about whether a slave should rebel or obey are also fraught with illusions and error.

> I killed my son because I wanted him next to me when I died. Just as he had held his heavy mother weighted by death for me to listen to her last breath, he would hold my head to help my last words out.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Cook, Chapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

After Chapel's death, Whitechapel realizes that his motives for betraying his son's whereabouts were partially selfish: he wanted Chapel to stay by his side until Whitechapel's death. By negotiating Chapel's punishment with the master, Whitechapel claimed to be protecting his son's life, but he was doing so partially out of self-interest, not necessarily with the objective of enhancing his son's happiness.

Whitechapel's focus on family ties—here, on the act of accompanying a loved family member through their last moments—reveals that he considers family something sacred and precious that must be fought for at all costs. More than individual happiness, Whitechapel emphasizes collective responsibility, believing that humans—and, perhaps, slaves in particular—have a duty to care for each other.

In this sense, Whitechapel's decision to fight for Chapel's survival over Chapel's freedom is not wholly selfish. Rather, it reflects his knowledge that, in a slave's life, the only stable bonds are one's own family, because the outside world cannot be trusted to supply comfort and peace. Only family is capable of making slaves feel that they have left something valuable behind: a family member who is ready to look after them, and who will then have family members of their own to maintain these bonds of love and care. Whitechapel finds this idea of inter-generational care reassuring, as it gives even slaves' brutal and chaotic lives a sense of stability and continuity.

❝ Protector of the worst fate of your people or any people. Is that what I have become? The master of my fate. No longer in need of control or supervision. One so accustomed to his existence that he impinges on his own freedom and can be left to his own devices. A master of his own slavery. Slave and enslaver. Model slave. Self-governing slave. Thinks freedom is death. Thinks paradise is the afterlife.

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When Whitechapel realizes that, despite his best intentions, he is indirectly responsible for his son's death, he realizes that he has behaved as an oppressor. In preventing his son from running away, he has deprived Chapel of freedom and, ultimately, led the young boy to the very death he wanted to avoid.

Whitechapel's deeply critical moment of introspection makes him realize that being an overly obedient slave is the same as being complicit in the oppressive system of slavery. He mocks his own views about freedom, noting that he has been close-minded in rejecting the possibility of running away and achieving freedom (or "paradise") in this life, when in fact the very lack of freedom is a form of death, since it causes one to lose all control over one's life.

For slaves, Whitechapel suggests that the only solution is one that he was never able to embrace himself: to deny one's inferiority and, instead, fight boldly for freedom in the hope that it might one day become reality.

Chapter 2: Mr. Whitechapel Quotes

❝ "This inhuman display parading as discipline is a regular occurrence on these so-called 'tightly run' operations. I tell you all the evidence supports my belief that as a long-term measure it is a disaster. Contrary to their arguments, such rough handling provides rougher responses. The human spirit is passive in some but nature shows us that it is rebellious in most."

Related Characters: Mr. Whitechapel (speaker), Plantation Owners, Chapel, Sanders Junior

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

After Chapel's death, Mr. Whitechapel reproaches Sanders Junior for brutally (and disobediently) whipping Chapel to death. Mr. Whitechapel argues that, unlike many other plantation owners he knows, he does not want to use excessive brutality on his plantation. By contrast, other slave owners sometimes disguise violence through such names as "discipline" or "tightly run operations," which are

nothing more than the implementation of a state of terror on the plantation.

Mr. Whitechapel does not oppose violence on the basis of respecting slaves' dignity. Rather, his concern is exclusively for the long-term sustainability of the plantation's economic project. His view is that a plantation can only be viable if slaves are kept contented and not inclined to rebel, which violence might encourage them to do.

Therefore, even though Mr. Whitechapel criticizes others' "inhuman" approach to slaves, he is not particularly more committed to slaves' humanity. Rather, he shares the same goal (economic profitability) as other slave owners but merely believes that the method through which to achieve this goal should be peaceful, not violent—not for the slaves' sake, but for the stability of his economic investment.

❝ "Africans may be our inferiors, but they exhibit the same qualities we possess, even if they are merely imitating us. Their management is best exemplified by an approach that treats them first and foremost as subjects of God, though blessed with lesser faculties, and therefore suited to the trade of slavery."

Related Characters: Mr. Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel, Sanders Junior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In the speech in which Mr. Whitechapel berates Sanders Junior for whipping the young slave Chapel, the master also outlines his racial beliefs, to make sure that his employee understands and respects his guidelines in the future.

Mr. Whitechapel's views on race and slavery undermine all pretense of respect that he claims to have for his slaves. Indeed, he mixes ideas of equality ("the same qualities," "subjects of God") with a clear embrace of inequality ("our inferiors," "imitating us," "lesser faculties"). This reveals that Mr. Whitechapel believes that Africans and their descendants only *appear* to be equal to whites, when in fact, he claims, their intellectual faculties are inferior, and they should therefore be treated as social inferiors. This denies the very possibility for Mr. Whitechapel to treat slaves with respect, since there can be no sincere respect if slaves are considered inherently subordinate.

Mr. Whitechapel's conclusion that blacks are meant to be slaves is illogical and hypocritical, since even a baseline assumption of inequality does not justify oppressing people. Rather, the assumption of inequality serves as an excuse for Mr. Whitechapel to ignore the harm that he is inflicting on others and to believe that, in embracing slavery, he is behaving according to natural hierarchies of superiority and domination.

Chapter 3: Sanders Senior Quotes

❝ I told my son that we are different from slaves in intelligence and human standing before God. He asked why Whitechapel could do a knot that I couldn't do. His first joke. Not a bad one. I said doing things like that was not a proper measure of intelligence. Then he asked why they were dark and we were bright. His word "bright."

Related Characters: Sanders Senior (speaker), Whitechapel, Sanders Junior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

When Sanders Junior asks his father about the reason for the differences between whites and blacks, he demonstrates an ability to think beyond rigid social boundaries of race and class. The young boy's curiosity at people's different skin colors suggests that he has not yet absorbed racist ideology and learned to associate people's appearance with stereotypes about their intelligence. Instead, his initial reaction to racism is to recognize its inherent arbitrariness.

The contrast between Sanders Junior's attitude as a young boy and his later willingness, as an adult, to whip Chapel to death simply because of his status as a slave suggests that racism can become so ingrained in people's thinking that they lose the capacity to re-examine their beliefs. Sanders Senior, for example, finds himself unable to admit that Whitechapel might indeed be more skilled than he is, simply because this possibility lies beyond his acceptance that the world is divided into two races of unequal intelligence.

These contradictions will affect Sanders Junior throughout his life. Even though he will remain impressed by Whitechapel's knowledge and skill, he will find himself unable to accept that these characteristics indicate equality between whites and blacks. Instead, he will choose to abide by rigid hierarchies separating people according to race, function, and class.

Chapter 4: Cook Quotes

Whitechapel saved me. The second time I had to tell someone or surely die. There was no one to tell but my husband. Whitechapel saved my life. A child not his. A pure wife no longer pure. Any other man would have thrown me away. He is no ordinary man. His master respects him.

Related Characters: Cook (speaker), Sanders Senior, Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

After recalling the horrible experience of being raped by Seniors Sander, Cook explains that her husband saved her from shame and the desire to die. She invokes Whitechapel's love as proof and also highlights his special ability to protect her from the external dangers of racism and slavery.

In particular, she is impressed by Whitechapel's capacity to subvert society's traditional norms of behavior. His willingness to let love prevail over issues of female "purity" shows that he values interpersonal respect and trust more than his social reputation (for example, the shame of knowing that his son is not biologically his). Similarly, despite Whitechapel's seemingly subservient attitude, he is able to make his superiors respect him and treat him fairly. Whitechapel might not be rebellious, but he has succeeded in achieving a degree of dignity and freedom from social constraints that Cook finds extraordinary in the repressive world of slavery.

Cook's perspective defends the validity of Whitechapel's views about obedience, which do seem to bring a certain number of advantages over time. However, as Chapel's death soon demonstrates, these advantages are much frailer than both Cook and Whitechapel would have thought.

Chapter 6: Plantation Owners Quotes

"Whitechapel, you even got a mention in *The Virginian*."

"The death of one slave does not make me one of you."

"True, Whitechapel, true, it does not; it makes you a fool."

"And, after all you've said, a hypocrite too. 'The slaves have rights as humans; they are not just tools.'"

"What about this? 'Show them respect and they'll work hard.'"

"'They may be inferior but they're people like us.' Lost your tongue, Whitechapel?"

Related Characters: Mr. Whitechapel, Plantation Owners (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

After Chapel's death, which is reported in the local newspaper, *The Virginian*, Mr. Whitechapel's fellow plantation owners mock him for not abiding by his professed principles, according to which slave owners should not use extreme violence against their slaves.

Mr. Whitechapel tries to defend himself by arguing that this was an accidental death and that one mistake does not make him as brutal or prone to violence as his peers. However, this defense is naïve. While the plantation owners might indeed be wrong in believing that Mr. Whitechapel *wanted* to kill Chapel (let alone enjoyed it), they are correct in recognizing that, on a practical level, Mr. Whitechapel's belief that he respects slaves' humanity is difficult to defend.

Indeed, regardless of what Mr. Whitechapel might claim, slavery does not allow for slaves to be treated as humans with "rights" worthy of "respect." Chapel's death proves that Mr. Whitechapel's principles were unable to protect the young slave, and that the pervasive racism and violence at the heart of slavery (embodied in the person of Sanders Junior) is responsible for Chapel's death.

In other words, without fighting against the system of slavery itself, Mr. Whitechapel cannot claim to defend slaves' rights or humanity, since he is an active participant in a system that benefits from degrading them.

Your policy of a judicious whip failed to save him. There is only one whip, it eats flesh.

Related Characters: Mr. Whitechapel (speaker), Plantation Owners, Chapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In the middle of his heated discussion about race and slavery with fellow plantation owners, Mr. Whitechapel takes a moment to reflect on Chapel's death. When he takes the time to confront his guilt and his feelings of responsibility, he reaches the conclusion that his views about punishment are hypocritical.

Mr. Whitechapel realizes that his views are paradoxical. On the one hand, he advocates public punishment, which detracts slaves from running away. On the other hand, he wants to limit violence on the plantation in order to keep slaves from rebelling. While he used to believe that both concepts were compatible, he now realizes that using the whip as a form of punishment can never be "judicious" because it uses precisely the kind of extreme violence that he dislikes. Mr. Whitechapel recognizes that, in accepting to punish slaves by whipping them, he has proven just as tyrannical as his colleagues.

While this thinking reveals Mr. Whitechapel's capacity for remorse, it remains disappointingly short-lived. Instead of criticizing slavery's inherent violence, Mr. Whitechapel prefers to try to fit in with his peers and take pride in being a powerful slave owner.

"Our line of work is slaves, we can't change the fact. We do it the way we think best serves our investment."

"It's not a charity."

"We are Christians but Christianity does not equal weakness."

"We treat our slaves with a firm hand, we're severe in the hope that other slaves will behave well out of fear."

Related Characters: Plantation Owners (speaker), Mr. Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation among plantation owners discusses the potential compatibility of Christianity with slavery. At the same time, the slave owners' conversation reveals that any discussion about the economic profitability of slavery cannot be distinguished from a discussion of slavery's inherent violence.

While the men argue that protecting one's investments involves taking any measure—however violent—to keep slaves from rebelling, they also reveal that slaves' well-being should never be taken into account. Rather, what matters is the amount of fear they are able to instill in their slaves. It seems that the concept of Christianity is nothing but a nominal marker of identity for these plantation owners. It does not influence their conception of morality, nor does it encourage them to make use of compassion.

The men's focus on economic interests only reveals their lack of concern for slaves' humanity. Their description of slaves as their "line of work" suggests that slaves should be managed like any other economic asset: something that the master can control at will, regardless of the slaves' emotions or pain.

"How could your Whitechapel watch and not intervene?"

"He lost a son in deference to authority."

"Name your price. That slave of yours is a slaver's dream."

"He's still not for sale."

"He deserves your family name."

"Well said indeed."

"If he were white he'd still be rare."

"Let's drink a toast. To Whitechapel and to his slave."

Related Characters: Mr. Whitechapel, Plantation Owners (speaker), Sanders Junior, Chapel, Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Whitechapel reveals the parentage between Chapel and Sanders Junior, the plantation owners are surprised that Whitechapel did not intervene to protect his son. The men's amazement at Whitechapel's inaction reveals that, despite their claims that slaves are not fully

human and should be treated as impersonal economic assets, they know that slaves *do* have strong ties to their families, as well as feelings of loyalty and pain that can be strong enough to make them rebel against authority. In other words, despite plantation owners' claims of racial inferiority, they *do* expect slaves to behave as normal human beings and defend their family against external threats of violence. Whitechapel's reluctance to do so reveals that he has been so oppressed and indoctrinated that he has behaved not as an ordinary human being, but as an ideal slave: completely passive before authority.

The men's surprise at Whitechapel's behavior reveals a paradoxical mix of admiration and derision: admiration for the slave's noble principles of obedience (which makes him unique, even for supposedly superior "whites") and derision for his lack of independence, which justifies his objectification as something that can be traded and bought, like any economic asset.

In addition, the association of Whitechapel with his master through their shared last name proves that, in betraying his son, Whitechapel has betrayed his very social group, taking sides with his master and the "whites," the oppressors.

Chapter 8: Cook Quotes

❝ You would hold up your glorious life as an example of the slave who has done all the proper things to survive and earn the respect of the master and overseer.

I can hear you, my husband. Your voice is strong and clear but without the strength and clarity of the voice of my son as he lifts word after word from the pages of a book.

Related Characters: Cook (speaker), Lydia, Chapel, Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

After Cook discovers that Chapel is taking part in an illicit activity (reading) with the master's daughter, Lydia, she wonders whether or not she should reveal this information to her husband. However, Cook concludes that both her husband and her son's differing conceptions of life are valid, and that she does not want to force her son to abandon his noble pursuits.

While Whitechapel has worked all his life to receive respect from authority and has succeeded in living a long life, this has forced him to remain inferior to them and to *accept* this inferiority as a tool for survival, since it keeps him from being seen as a threat to his master. By contrast, Chapel has striven for a greater goal: equality between him and his master. Instead of abiding by the racist status quo, Chapel has worked to demonstrate that racial inequality is meaningless, since he is capable of projecting the very same competence, self-confidence, and intelligence as his master, a white man who is much older and more powerful than him.

If Whitechapel's power derives from his cooperation with oppressive authorities, Chapel's power derives from his capacity to see beyond oppression and to hope for a world where one's intelligence and skill might matter more than one's skin color. It is Cook's love for her son and her understanding of the nobility of such a hope that leads her to protect Chapel from her husband's rigid ideas—which, after her death, she will no longer be able to do.

Chapter 9: Lydia Quotes

❝ "By teaching little Whitechapel to read and write when he can never use it you have done him the gravest injustice." I want to reply that a law which says a slave should not read and write is unjust. But I look at my feet and nod when he enquires whether I have heard every word. He said it might be possible in the future. I look up at him and, as if to dash my hopes of a future when Chapel and I could sit and read together, he adds, in the next century, perhaps.

Related Characters: Lydia, Mr. Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Whitechapel discovers that Lydia was teaching Chapel to read, he scolds his daughter sharply for her actions, arguing that they are harmful to Chapel's well-being.

Mr. Whitechapel's conception of justice relies on pragmatic considerations, such as the senselessness of slave literacy in an economic system where slaves' sole purpose is to perform manual labor. Mr. Whitechapel's understanding of morality thus exists only *within* the system of slavery itself. By contrast, Lydia is able to conceive of morality *outside* of slavery, which leads her to question the very morality of slavery itself. She does not see slaves as inferior beings meant for physical labor but, rather, as people just like her who are capable of learning and should be able to exercise

their talents instead of being constrained to mindless physical work.

The difference between the two characters' views is in part informed by self-interest. Mr. Whitechapel's inability to consider a world without slavery during his lifetime hinges on his perceived necessity of slavery in the present, since his livelihood depends on it. By contrast, despite living a comfortable life thanks to her father's business, Lydia is capable of imagining other ways of maintaining economic revenue without slavery. Lydia's emphasis on universal human dignity over economic considerations distinguishes her from her father and, in general, from the rest of her close-minded Southern society.

Chapter 11: The Virginian Quotes

❝ Young, nubile female slaves are a temptation to us all, but one that should be religiously avoided. […] If these female slaves are used in this way they engender bitterness in a house between the overseer and his wife or the master and his wife. The slave may even become aware of this influence and exploit it to her own advantage. I therefore argue for restraint.

Related Characters: Editor of The Virginian (speaker), Sanders Senior, Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

The editor of *The Virginian* addresses the issue of sexual relations between plantation authorities and slaves. However, his opinion is concerned neither with questions of morality, nor with slaves' dignity and respect. Rather, the editor assumes that female slaves are mere objects ("a temptation," and something that can be "used") whose perception about what happens to them is irrelevant. The only consequences worth examining, in the editor's mind, are the effects that rape may have on the authority figure's life—that is, on the life of the perpetrator himself.

The editor's seemingly moderate, reasonable approach (which encourages "restraint") thus exposes the normalized objectification of slaves, as well as slaves' total vulnerability to authorities' violence, since they cannot even hope to be recognized as legitimate victims. It also highlights women's twofold oppression as slaves and, simply, as women.

Indeed, as Cook's example highlights, Cook feared not only Sanders Senior's violence (an overseer-to-slave relationship of violence that all slaves might experience) but also rejection from slaves themselves (the fear that Whitechapel might reject her for having been raped and thus no longer a virgin). In this context, Whitechapel's decision to stay with his wife can be seen as a progressive understanding that rape is just another form of violence, and that it should never be seen as the victim's fault. This mode of thinking challenges their society's basic conceptions of female sexuality, focused on concepts of "purity," whether among free persons or among slaves.

Chapter 12: Great Granddaughter Quotes

❝ He never talked about Africa. It was his view, I found out later, that such talk promoted day dreams and insolence on the plantation. He said Africa was his past and not ours. If anyone had the right to dream about it, he did and he chose not to, so why should anyone else.

Related Characters: Whitechapel's Great-Granddaughter (speaker), Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

After Whitechapel's great granddaughter tells him about a dream she had about Africa, Whitechapel reacts in an irritated way and scolds her for talking about something she knows nothing about.

Whitechapel's perspective on Africa echoes his views about freedom and "paradise." He considers that dreaming about something that slaves have never experienced will only lead them to want to escape their present condition. Averse to the possibility of rebellion, Whitechapel prefers to remain focused on the present and to think of pragmatic ways to make life more bearable, through cooperation with the authorities on the plantation.

Whitechapel's views reveal his distrust of abstract notions of progress and a better life, but also, on a more personal level, his fear of leaving an environment he has grown accustomed to. While his advice about working hard in the present can be considered reasonable (as it protects slaves' lives to a certain extent), it also stifles a universal human instinct: the desire to be free and to dream of a better future. Whitechapel thus extends his own repression of freedom (here, evident in his desire not to talk about Africa) to everyone else, thus policing slaves' minds and behaviors,

and keeping them from wishing for a better life.

It is only when Whitechapel begins to examine his own actions, after Chapel's death, that he realizes his personal suppression of freedom—itself the result of slavery's oppression—has led him to oppress his fellow slaves, thus perpetuating cycles of abuse.

Chapter 13: Sanders Junior Quotes

"I couldn't strike you. You showed me how to run things. My father spoke highly of you. You were a better overseer than I. There I was, thinking I was the first one to rise in the morning, setting an example for everyone, and you were out here even before me. Always first and last in everything. I am sorry about your son. Not my brother. I knew him only as the son of a slave. He was trouble from the day he talked. He not only asked questions but when you gave him an answer he was never satisfied. He always asked why: Why this? Why that?"

Related Characters: Sanders Junior (speaker), Chapel, Whitechapel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

After Whitechapel's death, Sanders Junior begins an imaginary dialogue with the slave Whitechapel, in which the overseer seeks to explain two of his violent actions: slapping Whitechapel and whipping Chapel.

In a confused way, the overseer realizes that there is a difference between professional codes of conduct, according to which he should punish rebellious slaves on the plantation, and moral validity ("I couldn't strike you"), according to which he should not have hit Whitechapel, who has played such a positive role in his life.

This moment of moral reflection, though, is fleeting and disappears as soon as the overseer considers Chapel's behavior. The overseer sees the young boy's interrogation of racial divisions—a questioning in which Sanders Junior himself had taken part as a child, when he interrogated his father about race—as troublesome and unacceptable. He does not comment on whether or not Chapel's questions are legitimate, but focuses instead on the boy's insubordination, implying that the very act of asking questions was inadmissible.

Sanders Junior thus displays conflicting thoughts about his role as an enforcer of slavery and his understanding that slaves can prove worthy of respect. Even though this could lead him to interrogate the validity of racial divisions in society, he ultimately proves unable to do so, preferring instead to trust in the preexisting, arbitrary separation between free people and slaves, without wondering about its moral validity.

Forgetting Quotes

"Shall I tell you about your blood? That two races are distributed evenly in it? Shall I help you prepare for a life elsewhere? Where? This is the only place I know. Maybe I am wrong, I wonder to myself as I see myself doing it, wrong to tell the master that my son is gone and say I want him back under my guidance and protection. Then I ask myself, after I see the entire scene, what guidance? What protection?"

Related Characters: Whitechapel (speaker), Chapel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

In an imaginary dialogue with Chapel, Whitechapel describes his son's personality in racial terms. He argues that it is the "white" part of Chapel's blood that led him to seek freedom (and become "the master of your own destiny"), whereas Chapel's "black" blood condemned him to be a slave.

Whitechapel's deterministic association of blackness with slavery keeps him from questioning whether this association is even *fair*. Instead, he simply accepts society's status quo, according to which people's role and value is determined by their skin color. This shows the extent to which Whitechapel has internalized society's racism, as he has become both the victim and the enforcer of racism.

At the same time, after Chapel's death, Whitechapel realizes that part of his perspective about obedience is moved by fear: his lack of knowledge about what lies beyond the plantation. He also realizes that what he thought he knew (namely, how things work on the plantation) was wrong, since he has now discovered that he actually didn't know how to protect his son. At the end of his life, Whitechapel thus comes to terms with his own biases and fears, as well as an inability to think beyond his immediate circumstances. His repeated, open-ended questions reveal his vulnerability, as he launches in a difficult process of introspection, capable of revolutionizing

his very way of thinking—and, perhaps, of challenging society's precepts.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

REMEMBERING

In a mournful voice, Whitechapel, the oldest and most respected slave on Mr. Whitechapel's plantation in Virginia, begins to speak. He explains that the future is a repetition of the past, and that he has now decided to erase his own past, so he no longer has any identity. His entire life, he concludes, now lies in his hands—not inside his consciousness or through what he sees—because he has decided to give up on thought itself, choosing to surrender his name and be nothing more than "boy, mule, nigger, slave," whatever people might want him to be.

Whitechapel's choice to erase his identity creates mystery and suspense. Rejecting his name and individual essence, Whitechapel now centers his entire sense of self around his status as a slave. He equates being a slave with being an animal, arguing that slaves must have no identity or humanity. His decision is thus a political act in itself, as it highlights the dehumanizing nature of slavery.

Whitechapel also rejects emotion, admitting that he is no longer able to cry because the last time he cried was after the death of a boy he considered his own (later introduced as Chapel). Ever since that last, harrowing shedding of tears, he has refused to feel such pain again. He hopes to forget the unjust **whipping** of this boy—a punishment that was far too severe. To this end, he works hard to forget what has happened, in order to avoid spiritual and physical pain.

In addition to carrying social criticism, Whitechapel's pain is deeply personal, based on the experience of losing a family member. It seems that experiencing this pain for himself strengthened his understanding that slavery is a deeply unjust, destructive system.

CHAPTER 1: WHITECHAPEL

Whitechapel describes the morning after he decided to abandon his identity. Instead of staying up all night as he is used to, listening to others sleep—hearing their nightmares, their unconscious expressions of pain and fear, their physical reactions to the memory of violence, and, sometimes, listening to the very moment of their death—he can now accept that he is nothing more than a body and go back to bed. Before, he used to suffer from agonizing, worry-filled nights that caused him to get up before everyone else instead of sleeping peacefully.

Whitechapel's description of slaves' sleep emphasizes the emotional and physical pain they are in, as their sleep is constantly interrupted by fear and anguish. This description also shows that Whitechapel is highly aware of the pain slavery inflicts on himself and on others, but it seems that he now wants to stuff those feelings down for the sake of being nothing more than a body. As his worrying shows, his obedience toward his master did not keep him from reflecting on how best to protect himself and, perhaps, the community around him.

Whitechapel recalls hearing other people die in their sleep and, in particular, the moment of their last breath. Even though slaves often talk of death as their salvation, people's last breath is not a moment of relief but of panic—the body's automatic and surprised reaction to death's arrival. Whitechapel reflects on these reactions and concludes that *he* should die, because he has seen too much to continue living. Sometimes, he does not remember whether what he has seen was reality or a dream.

Slaves' association of death with salvation—a liberation that is both physical and spiritual—highlights the utter lack *of freedom that they have in life, as they have lost all hope in obtaining freedom while alive. Their painful deaths also show that death does not actually bring justice. Rather, death* highlights *a deep injustice: the lack of care and respect with which slaves' bodies are treated.*

Whitechapel recalls his son's **whipping**, noting that despite the intense agony he felt from seeing his son beaten so brutally, he would have been punished for looking away. In that moment, his eyes became void, watching the scene blindly, trying to avoid confronting the horror of what was happening.

Chapel's whipping is doubly cruel. It is meant not only to harm the young boy physically, but also to destroy all the observers emotionally, as they are forced to witness the torture inflicted on another human being. Whitechapel's effort to stop seeing and feeling is all he can to do keep from going crazy.

After half of the allotted two hundred lashes, Whitechapel's son is already gone. After each lash, his body immediately tenses to prepare for the next one, but sometimes he doesn't succeed in doing so fast enough and can't protect himself from the violence of the next lash. Whitechapel, watching this scene, learns to become numb to all pain, giving up on his powers of perception in the same way that his son's body gradually abandons itself to the unrelenting **whip**.

Whitechapel's aligns himself with his son physically, as he essentially takes on the pain that his son is feeling—a pain that later transforms into the numbness of death. Later, Whitechapel will also align himself with his son mentally and emotionally, realizing that his son's rebellion might have been warranted, despite what the Whitechapel has believed all his life about the value of being loyal and obedient to one's master.

In a dangerous act of protest that could get them punished, Whitechapel and the other slaves beg the overseer (later revealed as Sanders Junior) to spare Whitechapel's son from more lashes. However, the boy is always able to answer to his name (Chapel) when it is called, which the authority figures interpret as a sign of vitality, sufficient to pursue the punishment. Therefore, the **whip** continues to dig into the boy's flesh and blood. By the end of the two hundred lashes, the boy's eyes are empty. Ever since he stopped calling out "father" during the beating, realizing that Whitechapel is held down and thus cannot help him, the boy has been gone, his mind seemingly separated from his wounded body.

Throughout this chapter, Chapel is never referred to by his own name but, rather, is simply called "the boy" or "my son." This emphasizes the dehumanizing nature of slavery, as it turns slaves into anonymous bodies, forced to surrender their lives to cruel authorities. This, coupled with Chapel's desperate calls to his father, also highlights the vital family bonds that exist between slaves, as they must depend on each other for love, care, and survival itself.

Before closing his son's lifeless eyes and realizing that, from that moment onward, he would adopt the exact same empty look, Whitechapel applies balm to his son's back. As he does so, Whitechapel cries frantically and apologizes to his son for what has happened. When he sees his son recoil in pain at his touch, Whitechapel explains that his hand is not the **whip**. His son nods to these words but becomes increasingly quiet and eventually ceases to nod or answer to his own name. That marks the moment in which Whitechapel decides to abandon his name, in order to match the empty look on his son's face.

Chapel's confusion between Whitechapel's hand and the whip is symbolic. On a physical level, it is completely understandable, since Chapel's back is raw and extremely sensitive to any kind of touch. However, it also represents Whitechapel's participation in the system of slavery that has wounded his son. As will be explained later on, Whitechapel's opposition to his son's rebellion made him an oppressor. By affirming that his hand is not the whip, Whitechapel reveals his new effort to distinguish himself from authority and obedience, now knowing that collaborating with the master does not necessarily bring justice and protection.

At the plantation, people call Whitechapel "Sour face" because of the deep worry lines on his face. He was unaware that the difficulty of living was being etched onto his face until he looked at himself in the mirror one day and realized that people were right in giving him that nickname. Now, he doesn't even remember what it feels like to smile or laugh. Instead, he thinks laughing is like a donkey braying, and that he will never be capable of such an action ever again. He concludes that he has made his life overly difficult and long by worrying constantly.

Whitechapel's somber reflection on his life highlights the lack of joy and emotional freedom that he has felt throughout his life. His regrets about worrying too much reflect the fact that he cannot rely on anyone besides himself for protection, and that he must constantly be on his guard (and "worry") to survive on the plantation. Even though he's recently committed himself to being nothing but a slave, it's clear that his trust in the system is frail, and he does not *fully believe his master or other authorities have his personal interests at heart.*

After witnessing the death of two wives and most of his children, Whitechapel is now surrounded by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They mostly leave him alone, merely checking whether he is still alive every morning. Once, Whitechapel's grandson ran into him when turning a corner, accidentally knocking him to the ground in the process of running away from a man with a stick. The man who was following the child also beat Whitechapel for delaying him. Since then, Whitechapel has learned to walk far from corners.

Whitechapel's experience with loss and suffering does not begin with Chapel—a fact that emphasizes the uniqueness of Chapel's death which, unlike the previous ones, is so blatantly unfair that it forces Whitechapel to reexamine his entire life. Before this event, Whitechapel's ordinary reaction to injustice (for example, here, submissively accepting a beating even though he didn't do anything wrong) is not rebellion but, rather, a pragmatic attitude to avoid future harm.

Sometimes, Whitechapel feels suddenly dizzy and has to sit down. This has led his great grandchildren to call him "Sit-down Grandfather," which he prefers to "Sour-face." In such moments, his grandchildren run toward him in alarm, but he waves them off, and they laugh like donkeys. Whitechapel, who cannot laugh, wonders at how easily they give in to pleasure. While he might have laughed with his first wife and their children, there is absolutely no trace of laughter in his face anymore. His eyes and mouth warn people about the suffering he has gone through, urging them to stay away from him, since his depressed attitude could be contagious.

Whitechapel feels alienated from his grandchildren, but they are all still committed to protecting and caring for each other, emphasizing that family bonds are crucial. Whitechapel's solitude and sadness suggests that his focus on obedience throughout his life has perhaps kept him from empathizing with the community around him. In his concern for mere physical survival, he has isolated himself from their sorrows, hopes, and pleasures—the ordinary elements of a full life.

Because of the misery of his life, Whitechapel now looks forward to his death. He recalls the death of his second wife (later revealed as Cook), which dragged on for weeks. Chapel held her, hiding his tears. Cook's final words were for Whitechapel, telling him to join her soon. The next morning, after Cook's death, Chapel ran away but was caught in the evening. Now, Whitechapel does not want to die because he imagines his wife's anger at seeing their son arrive before him, which Whitechapel considers his fault. Believing that he should be punished for his actions, Whitechapel thinks that his grandson who ran into him did so to escape from the stick, but also to take revenge for Chapel's death.

Whitechapel's guilt over betraying his son and thus participating in his death reveals itself through family ties: his anticipation of his wife's anger and his interpretation of his grandchild's behavior as spite. Whitechapel's conception of justice is entirely tied to the family—specifically, to the need to protect one's family members from the outside world. Despite his apparent trust in his master, the only people whose opinions Whitechapel actually trusts and cares about are his own family members, whom he feels accountable to.

Whitechapel attempts to justify his participation in Chapel's death. He explains that his son needed to be reminded that he was only a slave and, therefore, needed to be punished to deter him from running away again. Whitechapel criticizes slaves' belief that successful runaways go to **paradise**, arguing instead that the only paradise they go to exists in death, since the likelihood of being killed for running away is so high. He knows that his son considered such views cowardly, believing instead that paradise could be found on earth, and that his son would need to learn a lesson to be discouraged from trying to escape.

Whitechapel's life philosophy revolves around the body—specifically, the need to protect oneself from death. This explains why Whitechapel does not see paradise as freedom, like Chapel does. Instead, Whitechapel sees paradise as death, since running away—the principal way to try to achieve freedom during one's lifetime—is likely to just result in death anyway. Later, Whitechapel will realize that his refusal to value intellectual and spiritual freedom is oppressive.

Unlike his son, Whitechapel trusts that a slave can live a long life and receive respect and fairness from his master if he works hard and does not rebel. Whitechapel uses the example of the many dynamic, admirable young people he has seen run away and die over the years to conclude that running away is suicidal and foolish.

Whitechapel's rigid categorization of people as slaves suggests that he accepts the racist ideology that blacks are somehow meant to be slaves. His philosophy, then, is based on racist ideas of blacks' inferiority as much as on the necessity for self-protection.

In the days leading up to Chapel's escape, Whitechapel is distracted from his son's desire to run away by Cook's slow death. When the master (Mr. Whitechapel) allows Whitechapel to tend to his wife instead of working, he concludes that his hard work at the plantation has paid off, as his master is showing consideration for him. The master, though, does not want to pay for a physician to come, convincing Whitechapel instead that this is his wife's time to die. Whitechapel thus takes care of his wife, which is exhausting. When she finally dies, the couple's son runs away. To keep his son from joining his mother in **paradise**—more specifically, to keep the search party from killing him—Whitechapel knows he has to do something.

Whitechapel's decision to interpret his master's words as fair overlooks the master's apparent lack of concern for Cook's health. The master's reluctance to call a physician only highlights his self-interested attitude, as he cares less about his slaves' well-being than about saving money. The master lacks any medical expertise to assert that Whitechapel's wife cannot be saved, but passively accepts her death as though it were an ordinary occurrence. Meanwhile, Whitechapel's desire to act reflects the importance he attributes to family bonds and to his son's life.

Whitechapel explains that there are two types of slaves. The first kind only learns from experience. Such slaves believe that they are born free and should not be slaves, which causes them to rebel and get into trouble. The second kind learns through observation, realizing that behaving well and working hard brings relative fairness from authority, is better for the community, and leads to a longer life. Whitechapel knew that Chapel belonged to the first category, and that Whitechapel would have to work on his son's behalf to keep him from dying at the trackers' hands.

Whitechapel's belief that obedience is the only behavior a slave should exhibit is not motivated by a desire to oppress others but, rather, by illusory trust in the system of slavery, which he considers capable of fairness and of rewarding hard-working slaves. When this assumption proves wrong, after Chapel's death, Whitechapel's entire belief system breaks down. Like the "first category" slaves he criticizes, Whitechapel ultimately learns through experience that slavery will never protect him or his family, and that obedience can be just as dangerous as rebellion.

To save Chapel, Whitechapel decides to talk to his master, Mr. Whitechapel, and negotiate his son's fair treatment in exchange for information about his son's whereabouts. Whitechapel walks up to the master's house, which surprises and annoys Mr. Whitechapel. Whitechapel apologizes for showing up at his house and begins to talk about his son, but Mr. Whitechapel interrupts him, asking what he should possibly do with a rebellious runaway who would only corrupt his other slaves. Whitechapel argues that his proposed solution would discipline his son *and* ensure future peace and submissiveness.

Mr. Whitechapel's irritation at Whitechapel's presence is a bad omen, suggesting that Whitechapel's trust in his master is unmerited, since Mr. Whitechapel does not treat his slave with respect. Mr. Whitechapel's reaction to Chapel's escape shows that he is self-interested—he doesn't care about Whitechapel's feelings or Chapel's life. This interaction only highlights the gap in rights, power, and interests between the slave and his master.

Whitechapel then looks up to Mr. Whitechapel for the first time in their conversation and begs him to keep the search party from killing Chapel. The master merely says that Chapel is now in God's hands, and that Whitechapel should accept God's fair judgment. When Whitechapel attempts to continue speaking, Mr. Whitechapel interrupts him twice, increasingly angry at the slave's defiance of his judgment.

The fact that Whitechapel has kept his head bowed for this entire time serves as a tangible reminder of the power dynamics at play, as it reaffirms Mr. Whitechapel's dominance over the slave. It highlights Whitechapel's willingness to obey codes of subservience, but also suggests that he knows how to adopt an external display of submissiveness in order to keep his master from dismissing his potentially rebellious ideas.

Whitechapel then reveals that he knows where Chapel is hiding. Surprised and furious at seeing his slave hold such power over him, Mr. Whitechapel interrogates him angrily, but Whitechapel only says a few vague words about his son's search for a place called **paradise** on earth. Exasperated, Mr. Whitechapel reprimands his slave by calling him directly by his name, "Whitechapel," which is the worst possible disapproval. Whitechapel reveals that his son has taken the river path, opposite the search party's direction. Mr. Whitechapel assures Whitechapel that Chapel will not be harmed, because he wants to give him an exemplary punishment.

Mr. Whitechapel's exasperation demonstrates that he has no desire to treat Whitechapel fairly but, rather, simply wants to affirm his dominance over his slaves, and that their relationship of respect can breakdown any time Whitechapel oversteps his boundaries. Whitechapel's revelation of his son's whereabouts before *Mr. Whitechapel promises to protect his son's life shows the slave's weakness before his master's authority. Despite Whitechapel's efforts to negotiate shrewdly, he ultimately gives in to fear and the need to obey.*

While Whitechapel feels relieved, realizing that this was the most he could hope for, the slaves in the house look at him angrily, as though he were sacrificing his son's life. Whitechapel leaves Mr. Whitechapel's house with relief, believing that the domestic slaves, who are affected by the master's every mood, are as angry at him for upsetting their master as they are for Whitechapel betraying his son.

Whitechapel's satisfaction at his master's promise shows how little power he has over Chapel's life. Even though Mr. Whitechapel has said nothing about what specific punishment he will inflict on the young boy, Whitechapel chooses to believe that it will be fair.

Whitechapel spends the rest of the day waiting eagerly for any sign of his son. Mr. Whitechapel, who initially delayed his trip to the North, ultimately decides that he cannot wait anymore and tells the deputy that once Chapel is captured he should be locked up until Mr. Whitechapel returns. At hearing this order, Whitechapel feels a surge of fear, which he does not understand since this is not the first time his master has left the plantation and had his orders obeyed. After night has fallen, Whitechapel finally hears the sound of the search party's dogs entering the plantation, carrying his son. The boy refuses to look at his father, knowing that Whitechapel has betrayed him.

Whitechapel's betrayal of his son does not reflect his indifference toward his son's fate but, rather, an extremely rigid belief in the necessity to punish rebellion. Whitechapel's eagerness to see his son reveals that he does care deeply about Chapel, but that this love expresses itself through discipline. By contrast, Chapel's visible anger suggests that, for the young boy, love should allow family members to make their own decisions, not force them to obey strict rules.

Seeing his son dragged into the plantation, Whitechapel trusts that he is the only person capable of saving Chapel from what he considers to be Chapel's absurd ideals, such as believing that his children will be born free. Whitechapel believes that he has already saved his son by going to see the master, who dominates over every living thing on the plantation and therefore ensures that his orders are obeyed. However, when Whitechapel subsequently doesn't see the deputy anywhere on the plantation, he begins to panic. The overseer, Sanders Junior, tells Whitechapel that the deputy is never at the plantation at night. Whitechapel realizes that the deputy must regularly sneak off the plantation at night to join his wife, in defiance of his function and of Mr. Whitechapel's orders.

Whitechapel's belief in his own power proves mistaken. It transposes a relationship of direct power between father and son within the family realm into real life, where Whitechapel's family ties matter little in light of the relationship of subordination that all slaves must demonstrate toward plantation authorities, who are capable of determining whether they live or die. Whitechapel's panic creates suspense and a sense of impending doom, as his trust in order and justice begins to fall apart.

Despite the danger of contradicting Sanders Junior's desire, Whitechapel tells him that he and four other witnesses can attest to hearing the master's orders to lock Chapel up until Mr. Whitechapel's return. Sanders Junior threatens to **whip** him if he keeps on speaking, but, intent on protecting his son, Whitechapel ignores him and keeps on relating the master's orders. Sanders Junior then hits him in the face. Remembering that Sanders Junior's father, Sanders Senior, who was the overseer thirty years ago, had hit him in a similar way and had then been punished for it, Whitechapel believes that he can receive such justice again.

Despite Whitechapel's usual display of obedience, his awareness that this is a life-and-death situation makes him resist authority, proving that his love for his son will always lead him to try to protect his life at all costs. This shows that Whitechapel never intended to put his son's life in danger, but was simply moved by past experience, which has caused him to trust in his master's fairness. Sanders Junior's behavior toward Whitechapel reveals his disdain for slaves and his belief that violence is necessary to enforce authority.

Angry at Sanders Junior's action, Whitechapel's son tries to attack the overseer but is restrained by the men in the search party and is too weak to fight back. Ashamed at what he has done, Sanders Junior apologizes meekly but tells Whitechapel he deserved it. However, he becomes enraged at hearing the master's orders, which Whitechapel relates again. Sanders Junior believes that the boy should be punished so that he can set an example for slaves' future behavior. Sanders adds that he will accept no orders from a slave and a "nigger."

Chapel's anger at the violence against his father shows that his sense of betrayal is not as strong as the deep-rooted loyalty and love he feels for Whitechapel. Sanders Junior's apology reveals that he does have at least minimal respect for Whitechapel—but that this respect is marred by a belief in slaves' inferiority. The overseer's ultimate decision shows that slavery can arouse feelings of dominance, encouraging even a simple overseer to defy his superior's orders in an attempt to assert his white supremacy.

Panicked, Whitechapel sends a slave to look for the deputy, despite the fatal danger for slaves to be found off the plantation at night. Chapel calls out for Cook (who died the previous day), and Whitechapel begs the Sanders Junior to **whip** him in Chapel's place, saying that his son is all he has. Sanders Junior just laughs and orders two hundred lashes. The announcement of this punishment arouses incredulity and indignation in the crowd, and Sanders's colleagues have to hold Whitechapel back forcefully and put him on his knees to keep him from intervening. When the whipping begins, Whitechapel cries out for his son. The other slaves also cry for him, begging for the punishment to stop.

Sanders Junior's decision shows that justice follows no set rules, but remains bound to the whim of cruel authorities on the plantation. Whitechapel's physical restraint mirrors his intellectual subordination to slavery, as his own freedom of thought has been constrained by his acceptance of his inferior status as a slave. By the time he becomes aware of his mistake, it is too late, and all he can do is express pain at his own powerlessness. Chapel's call for his mother highlights that he is too young and innocent to be put to death.

Now, Whitechapel realizes that he was given neither mercy nor respect. He realizes that he wanted Chapel to be by his side when he eventually died, just as he and Chapel were by Cook's side when she died. This desire is what ultimately killed Chapel. Now, as a form of self-punishment, Whitechapel accepts to be nothing more than an ordinary slave. He works hard to forget all his memories. Whitechapel wonders if, throughout his life, he has been an oppressor to his fellow slaves—a slave who has become so used to slavery that he has enforced slavery on himself and his family, trusting that there can be no freedom in life and that **paradise** only exists in death. Realizing he has outlived all his loved ones and cannot even respect himself anymore, he only hopes to die.

Without the possibility of justice, Whitechapel's obedient life loses all meaning. Instead of being rewarded for his hard work and submission, he is punished just as cruelly as any other slave. While Whitechapel believed he was sacrificing his freedom in the name of a worthy goal (namely, the protection of his family members and himself), he has in fact given up his independence to a system that now proves to be senseless and unfair. His acceptance of slavery isolates him, allowing him neither to join the ranks of his white superiors nor to belong to the community of slaves who feel that he has betrayed his son. Whitechapel thus has nothing—and no one—left to live for.

CHAPTER 2: MR. WHITECHAPEL

Back on the plantation the next day, Mr. Whitechapel launches in a long monologue to Sanders Junior, the deputy, and Whitechapel, accusing all of them of behaving foolishly and causing Chapel's brutal death. The master claims the boy's escape was Whitechapel's own fault, since he was not able to protect his son from ludicrous ideas about liberty. Mr. Whitechapel accuses Whitechapel of betraying his trust. He adds that he is glad his wife and daughter (later revealed as Lydia) were not present to witness such a chaotic situation.

Mr. Whitechapel's blame of Whitechapel for what has happened is hypocritical and offensive. Not only does he claim that liberty is not a valid aspiration for slaves, who are born to be subjugated, but he also concludes that this episode—over which Whitechapel had barely any control—is sufficient to undermine an entire lifetime of trust between Whitechapel and his master. Mr. Whitechapel's concern for his own family's feelings, instead of for Chapel's life or Whitechapel's feelings, shows how selfish and uncaring he is.

Angry at what has happened, Mr. Whitechapel wonders if he should sell all the slaves on his plantation, because he doesn't know how to manage such a high level of discontent among his slaves. He recalls how the other plantation owners mocked his ideas about managing slaves through mutual respect, and wonders if they might be right in mocking him. Ultimately, he decides that Chapel's punishment was right even though it happened in a disorderly fashion.

Mr. Whitechapel's anger shows how seemingly fragile his beliefs in slaves' dignity are, since he shifts so easily from a philosophy of mutual respect to the belief that he should punish all his slaves for expressing dissatisfaction with their situation in life. As his confessions to Sanders Junior later reveal, these words do not necessarily reflect his intimate thoughts, but are simply meant to arouse fear and shame in Whitechapel. In this way, Mr. Whitechapel hopes to regain control over the situation and reassert his dominance.

Mr. Whitechapel tells Whitechapel to leave, orders him to calm his fellow slaves down, and tells him that it is only his seniority that has kept him from being punished for his behavior toward Sanders Junior. He tells Whitechapel to apologize to him, which Whitechapel seemingly does.

Whitechapel, who initially believed that Sanders Junior would have to apologize to him, *is forced to apologize to the overseer who hit him and then killed his son. This scene is meant to humiliate and subdue Whitechapel, so that he remembers to obey his superiors at all times.*

Once Whitechapel is gone, Mr. Whitechapel tells his two employees he is not actually worried about Whitechapel but, instead, about *them*. He scolds the deputy for leaving the plantation and angrily demands an explanation. Mr. Whitechapel also tells Sanders Junior that, because of the overseer's behavior, he could have very well returned from his trip to find his entire estate burned down, given the amount of discontent among the slaves. Mr. Whitechapel decides to fine Sanders Junior for his disobedience instead of firing him, because both of their fathers used to work together. However, he reprimands him severely for daring to overlook his orders and defy authority.

Mr. Whitechapel's words seem to negate what he has just told Whitechapel, as he actually places the blame for what has happened on his two white employees. This suggests that Mr. Whitechapel's threats might not have been sincere, but merely meant to scare his slave and display authority. However, it also shows Mr. Whitechapel's lack of integrity, as he does not mind berating and lying to his slave as long as it serves his self-interest. Clearly, sincerity matters less to Mr. Whitechapel than defending his economic interests and his authority over everyone on the plantation.

Mr. Whitechapel also scolds Sanders Junior for hitting Whitechapel and **whipping** Chapel to death in front of him, invoking Whitechapel's honorable behavior and long, serious work for both them and their fathers. Mr. Whitechapel is furious at such a display of brutality, arguing that slaves' already difficult conditions should not be worsened by unnecessary violence. Contradicting what he said to Whitechapel earlier, Mr. Whitechapel notes that he does not call his previously mentioned acquaintances "friends" but, rather, criticizes these other plantation owners for being too brutal and thus breeding rebellion on their plantations, which only generates more violence. He believes that, despite Africans' inferiority, which predisposes them to slavery, they should be treated as "subjects of God" so that they do not rebel against their master.

It remains ambiguous whether Mr. Whitechapel's distaste for violence derives from his respect for slaves' dignity, his Christian faith, or from mere calculation (based on the potential for violence to encourage slave revolts). Either way, his belief in slaves' inferiority means that he can never be trusted to protect true justice on the plantation, since he does not believe slaves deserving of full respect, independence, and self-determination. Instead, he believes that justice and fairness involve protecting slaves only insofar as they accept to remain subservient to his authority.

Mr. Whitechapel trusts that they will all have to work hard to make their slaves obedient again, invoking a mysterious episode between Whitechapel and Sanders Senior as proof that Whitechapel's patience and obedience have been well tested and tried in the past. Mr. Whitechapel ultimately reveals that Sanders Senior raped Whitechapel's virgin wife (Cook), and she became pregnant, but that Whitechapel accepted the illegitimate child (Chapel) as his own. Seeing Sanders Junior's shock, Mr. Whitechapel realizes with surprise that the man did not know this.

Throughout this chapter, neither Chapel nor Cook are ever directly named. Rather, Mr. Whitechapel refers to them as "his son" and "his wife," which suggests that he is less interested in their individual identities than in their relation to Whitechapel—in other words, in their position in the plantation hierarchy. The mention of Cook's rape suggests that life on the plantation is potentially more brutal than Mr. Whitechapel intends, as all slaves are subject to the violent whims of the people who have authority over them.

Mr. Whitechapel adds that Whitechapel could have used this fact to keep Sanders Junior from **whipping** his own half-brother (Chapel) to death, but that Whitechapel probably assumed Sanders did not care. The master explains that the only reason he gave orders to spare Chapel was because of his special status as Sanders Senior's son. Otherwise, he would have let his overseer handle the situation as he saw fit. Finishing his speech, Mr. Whitechapel ultimately invites everyone to pray, concluding that they must not let slavery turn them into "savages," and decides to ask God for advice.

Given Mr. Whitechapel's previously twofaced interaction with Whitechapel, it remains uncertain whether his words are to be trusted when he speaks publicly. However, his admission that he only cared about Chapel because the boy was Sanders Senior's biological son reveals Mr. Whitechapel's lack of concern for his slaves' lives, whom he respects only if they demonstrate absolute deference to him. His final only prayer highlights his hypocrisy, as the master believes that he is a kind and fair Christian man, when in reality he treats slaves as less-than-human, disposable commodities.

CHAPTER 3: SANDERS SENIOR

The novel jumps back in time. In a series of diary entries, starting in January 1796, Sanders Senior relates his life on the plantation. Ever since the death of his wife, Caroline, five years ago, he has felt bored, lonely, and convinced that no one will ever be able to replace her. He refuses to tell his son, Sanders Junior, how his mother died, although Sanders Senior does tell his son that she is in heaven. Sanders Senior admires the slave Whitechapel's skill, knowledge, and hardworking attitude, but this does not keep him from treating his slaves severely, which Mr. Whitechapel often criticizes.

Sanders Senior's longing for his wife and general feelings of dissatisfaction set the foundation for his frustration, which later translates into aggressive behavior, such as his sexual violence against Cook. The overseer's brutal attitude can also be understood as a reflection of his disdain for slaves, whom he does not consider worthy of fair treatment. Mr. Whitechapel, by contrast, seems at least minimally committed to ensuring that his slaves are treated with respect.

Sanders Senior believes that slaves are cattle and should not be given more food, despite Mr. Whitechapel's new orders. After a few female slaves die on the plantation, he needs to find new slaves and decides to look for a fifteen-year-old girl at the market. He ultimately chooses a woman (later called Cook) who looks about twenty-two, despite her claim to be fifteen, and is satisfied with her work on the plantation. He notes that Whitechapel also likes her very much.

The mention of the slave market highlights the extent to which slaves are considered economic commodities, capable of being sold and bought against their will, instead of being respected as dignified human beings. Cook's name also highlights that Sanders Senior only sees her as a person meant to exercise a given function, not as an individual whose identity is separate from her tasks on the plantation.

Sanders Senior tells Sanders Junior that slaves are intellectually inferior. When his son replies that Whitechapel can tie a knot that his father cannot replicate, Sanders Senior considers this a joke but concludes that Whitechapel's knot-tying ability is not a sign of intelligence. His son then wonders about the reasons for the difference in people's skin colors: specifically, why slaves are "dark" while his father and he are "bright"—a word choice that amuses Sanders Senior.

Sanders Senior's failure to recognize his son's observation as a valid argument shows how his convictions about slaves' inferiority blinds him to any logic that might demonstrate the contrary. His son, by contrast, proves capable of questioning arbitrary societal divisions.

When Sanders Senior's normal cook gets sick, he decides to use the new girl (Cook) in the kitchen, who turns out to be a wonderful cook. He decides to give her a permanent position as cook and caretaker of his child, and she seems relieved to escape the hard work in the fields. Despite Sanders's frequent dreams about his dead wife, Caroline, he realizes that he feels attracted to Cook but that, at the same time, Whitechapel has become a good friend of hers, which seems to indicate romantic interest. He jokes to himself about Whitechapel's twelve daughters, which he believes are the cause of his wife's death, and concludes that the slave should contain his sexual ardor.

Cook's relief at changing tasks reveals the harrowing conditions that slaves endure in the fields, where most of them spend their lives doing draining work. At the same time, this change places Cook under a new (and possibly more direct) threat: her vulnerability to Sanders Senior's actions. The possibly violent danger of Sanders Senior's attraction to Cook derives from the evident power dynamics at play in this relationship, as well as the potentially volatile situation between Whitechapel and him, which seems to involve romantic rivalry.

When Sanders Senior is caught beating a slave, Mr. Whitechapel reprimands him, which irritates the overseer. On Sanders Junior's birthday, which is also the anniversary of Caroline's death, Sanders Senior can smell what Cook has baked in the kitchen and realizes that it reminds him of his wife. Later, when Whitechapel asks Mr. Whitechapel if he can marry Cook, Sanders feels resentful, as he believes she will soon be pregnant and thus less useful to him. He says that Whitechapel should simply use one of his daughters for sexual comfort instead.

The fact that Sanders Junior's birthday is on the same day as his mother's death anticipates Sanders Senior's later revelation that Caroline died giving birth to the boy. Sanders Senior's anger at Whitechapel and Cook's marriage possibly hides sexual jealousy more than a mere concern with the running of his house. The overseer's mention of incest as a potentially acceptable practice only highlights his lack of morals and empathy.

A few days later, Sanders Senior scolds Cook for answering one of Sanders Junior's questions about death, while Whitechapel teaches him to click his heels, which annoys his father greatly. Meanwhile, Sanders Senior continues to dream about Caroline and, at the same time, feels increasingly attracted to Cook. He decides to postpone Whitechapel's marriage because he still has not found a replacement cook—a decision to which Whitechapel reacts with his usual smile, which impresses Sanders in its capacity to disguise any potential feeling of impatience or anger.

Sanders Senior's irritation at Cook and Whitechapel's actions reveals that he believes slaves should never overstep the basic functions they are meant to perform, even if their actions bring joy and amusement to the overseer's very son. Sanders Senior's postponement of Whitechapel's marriage highlights the rivalry between the two men. It foreshadows danger, as it remains ambiguous whether the overseer's attraction for the young slave influenced his decision.

When Sanders Senior and Mr. Whitechapel go to the market to look for a new slave, they discuss Abolitionists' increasing protests. Sanders makes a joke about the fact that they do not need Abolitionists on Mr. Whitechapel's plantation, since slaves are treated well there. This makes Mr. Whitechapel laugh so hard that Sanders thinks he is overreacting, as the joke was not *that* funny.

The mention of Abolitionists sets this story in its greater political and geographic context. It shows that, beyond the microcosm of Mr. Whitechapel's plantation, political activists are fighting against racism and trying to put an end to slavery. Even though Mr. Whitechapel benefits from slavery, his laughter implies that he might be willing to accept that Abolitionism is not an unreasonable, terrifying threat.

After the visit to the market fails to bring a new slave on the plantation, Sanders Senior finds excuses to invite Cook to his room. On one occasion, he scolds her for once again talking to Sanders Junior about issues unrelated to her position and, as a punishment, slaps her, which makes her cry. To apologize, he holds her against him, thinking she might actually be fifteen after all. However, he soon begins to feel sexual desire and tells her to leave. The thought of her keeps him awake at night. Whitechapel later asks Sanders if he has succeeded in finding a new cook, and the overseer sarcastically replies by asking him if he thinks he might be better at finding a slave himself, to which Whitechapel replies with his usual smile, once again impressing Sanders with his impassivity.

Sanders Senior's violent action toward Cook is as irrational and disproportionate as his subsequent reaction (hugging her forcefully) is sexually inappropriate. Both actions show how Cook is vulnerable to the overseer's whims, which makes her a constant, potential victim of abuse. By contrast, Whitechapel's smile reveals his emotional complexity and capacity to resist authority, as he is capable of using an external symbol of obedience (smiling respectfully) as a form of resistance, showing that the overseer's decisions will not be able to provoke him.

On Christmas Eve, a time that reminds Sanders Senior of Caroline, the overseer grabs Cook, draws her to his bed, and rapes her, seeking to get out of his system what he feels as an uncontrollable sexual urge. To keep her from telling anyone about what has happened, he agrees to let her marry Whitechapel immediately. Despite his fear that Whitechapel might find out about the rape and kill him, Sanders Senior feels reassured by Christmas dinner at Mr. Whitechapel's house, where he laughs with the master's family about finding a wife and feels protected.

Sanders Senior's disdain for his slaves here reaches its peak, as he uses Cook to assuage his sexual urges, thus using his power to dispose of her body as he will. His subsequent fear that his authority on the plantation might not protect him from violent retribution does not show any sincere remorse or any fear of superior justice. Rather, he is purely moved by practical considerations about his own safety, not by guilt or shame about what he has done.

On the first of January, Whitechapel and Cook get married. Sanders Senior reflects that most slaves on the plantation belong to Whitechapel's family, and worries about the possibility of mass rebellion. When Cook asks to return to the fields, Sanders refuses but learns that she still has told no one about being raped, which makes him feel relieved. A few days later, though, despite Cook's fierce efforts to fight him back, Sanders Senior rapes her once again, noting that he only feels relief, not pleasure. He promises her it will not happen again.

Sanders Senior's fears of mass rebellion do not come true in this story. However, as history later showed, slaves' desperation to be free did *lead to violent revolts. At the same time, the overseer's fears reveal that he knows that slavery is cruel and unsustainable. In other words, Sanders Seniors knows that his violent actions are unacceptable, as slaves, too, feel the need to be treated in a respectful, dignified way.*

The next day, Sanders Senior is summoned to a meeting with Mr. Whitechapel, Whitechapel, and Cook. He knows the meeting will be about the rape and does not attempt to lie, despite his trust that, as a white man, his word would be infinitely more powerful than that of a slave. As retribution for the rape, Mr. Whitechapel forces Sanders to apologize to both Whitechapel and Cook, fines him, and urges him to find a male cook. Sanders wants to hit Cook out of anger but is forced to remain calm.

This episode shows Mr. Whitechapel defending his slaves against the overseer's violence—a display of justice that appears to reinforce the vision of Mr. Whitechapel as a fair protector of his slaves. This contrasts starkly with the master's shameful order, after Chapel's death, to make Whitechapel apologize to Sanders Junior, who hit the old slave. In other words, Mr. Whitechapel is a highly imperfect guarantor of justice.

One day, Sanders Senior is once again convened to Mr. Whitechapel's house, as Cook has revealed that she lost her virginity to him when he raped her the first time. Whitechapel is furious and no longer smiling. Whitechapel, it seems, now wants to abandon Cook, but Mr. Whitechapel has convinced him to stay with her. A month later, Cook discovers that she is pregnant. While Sanders hopes that it might be Whitechapel's child, Whitechapel believes it probably belongs to Sanders. Whitechapel ultimately decides to stay with Cook because he loves her and does not want to leave her.

Whitechapel's hesitation about leaving Cook undermines his moral dignity, as it shows him willing to blame the victim for her rape and to consider her less worthy of his love and care. In this situation, he proves just as oppressive as Sanders Senior himself, as he evaluates Cook not in terms of the young woman's innocence and dignity, but only in terms of his self-interest. Whitechapel's capacity to change his mind, though, reveals his intelligence and his capacity—at least in this situation—to overcome rigid societal expectations.

Over the next few months, Sanders Senior keeps on refusing to tell Sanders Junior about Caroline's death, and Sanders Senior also makes fun of his son's aspirations to become a scientist or a philosopher. In the meantime, Whitechapel seems genuinely happy about Cook's pregnancy.

Whitechapel's joy at his wife's pregnancy shows that he has put the past behind them and is willing to invest all his energy in building a new family. At the same time, Sanders Senior's derogatory attitude toward Sanders Junior foreshadows Whitechapel's own disregard for Chapel's desire for intellectual elevation and freedom.

Disaster strikes when a slave runs away, and Mr. Whitechapel removes some of the slaves' privileges. Famished and desperate, the runaway finally returns to the plantation after hiding for days. He receives two hundred lashes, faints twice during the punishment, and Mr. Whitechapel uses this occasion to make his slaves promise their loyalty to him. In the evening, the master and his family celebrate the slave's return, although the slave dies a few days later of a fever. Mr. Whitechapel seems worried that the slave's wounds might have caused his death, but Sanders Senior finds this idea ridiculous.

Despite Mr. Whitechapel's professed dislike for violence on the plantation, he celebrates whipping a slave for running away. This shows that his rejection of certain forms of punishment is only based on his consideration of practical matters, such as how effective the punishment will be at dissuading rebellion. At the same time, his concern about the slave's death shows that he did not intend to kill him—and, therefore, that his use of the whip was a form of the extreme violence he despises.

Sanders Senior finally tells Sanders Junior that his mother, Caroline, died in childbirth, which upsets the boy terribly. In September, Cook gives birth to a son (Chapel) whose skin is dark but whom Sanders finds looks exactly like his own son. Sanders tells Whitechapel to give his son the same name, since Whitechapel will raise him as his own son. Whitechapel is overjoyed, which makes Sanders reflect that his emotions are very similar to white people's.

Sanders Senior's surprise at Whitechapel's emotion shows that he truly had not previously entertained the idea that black slaves are just as fully human as white people. This reveals the prevalence of racist ideas in society, which men like Sanders Senior take for granted, even though they do not provide an accurate description of reality.

Meanwhile, after rumors begin to spread about Sanders Senior's role in Cook's pregnancy, Mr. Whitechapel furiously orders the overseer to find a wife to quell the rumors. Sanders obeys the master and gets married. When Whitechapel slyly asks him about his new wife, Sanders finds himself unable to imitate the slave's typical smile and wonders if Whitechapel is secretly laughing at him.

Sanders Senior's forced marriage shows that he, too, is vulnerable to the master's orders and that he must obey certain forms of justice and punishment. Whitechapel's questions about the overseer's new wife shows his capacity to resist authority in sly and subtle ways, within the confines of his role as a slave.

CHAPTER 4: COOK

Cook relates her experience with the overseer, Sanders Senior. Although she wanted to die after he raped her, she soon found love and peace through her relationship with Whitechapel, whom she feels has saved her life. She believes that he is truly extraordinary, for other men would have abandoned her after learning what happened to her. She is also impressed by the respect that Mr. Whitechapel demonstrates toward Whitechapel, and the fact that her husband succeeded in punishing Sanders for his rape, forcing him to apologize and to pay a fine.

Part of Cook's admiration for her husband derives from the sense of relative power and protection that Whitechapel gives her, as he is able to defend his rights and obtain some form of justice. She has also discovered that she does not need to be seen as a passive victim (for example, accepting that a man would leave her after she has been raped) but, rather, that she can expect fairness and devotion even in the midst of slavery.

Initially, Cook thought Whitechapel was too old for her, but now she feels deeply loved and is grateful that Whitechapel has put the rape behind them, making her feel that she is fully his wife and not merely a rape victim. At first, she did not believe in his promises of love until death, since only a free man could make such a promise, but she has learned to trust him fully and believe that he will always stay by her side.

Cook's surprise at Whitechapel's actions shows how unique and precious their relationship is, as it defies the very oppression of slavery, allowing them to build an intimate, relatively safe environment in a greater context of instability and violence. However, Chapel's death will later show that even a family member's unlimited love has limited power over an inherently cruel system.

CHAPTER 5: CHAPEL

Whitechapel and Cook's son, nicknamed Chapel, reflects on his family and his life on the plantation. He notes that his mother is pure and admirable, despite her black skin, but that she could be Whitechapel's granddaughter because of her age. This age gap is so large that Whitechapel washes Chapel with his great grandchildren.

Unlike the other characters in the novel, Chapel's chapter is written entirely in verse. This demonstrates his literary creativity and his desire to cultivate his intellect. His opposition between the concept of purity and his mother's black skin, though, can be seen as an unconscious embrace of racial prejudice, according to which blackness is something shameful or degrading.

On the plantation, Chapel explains that he has always tried to behave well to avoid the **whip**—a punishment that he can see has taken away all joy and life from so many children around him, forcing them to conform to life as slaves. He notes that his father, Whitechapel, has chosen reason and pliancy over moral imperatives such as freedom. Chapel explains that his father has even threatened to whip him to make him behave more like a slave. Whitechapel wants his son to learn from him and not from the overseer's inevitably harsher punishment.

While Whitechapel disagrees with the degree *of violence that authority figures use, he agrees with the* principle *that violence can redress rebellious young men and keep them from trouble. This attitude only supports the system of oppression that the slaves must abide by.*

Chapel describes life in the master's house, recalling in particular his time with Mr. Whitechapel's daughter, Lydia, who has taught him to read from the bible, after making him swear to God to keep it a secret. Over the course of two years, she ultimately teaches him to write but insists that it is forbidden for slaves to read and write—a rule that Chapel feels is a waste of his intelligence. However, Lydia does not want the young boy to feel shame. She is diligent in her teaching and always keeps his place in the book so that they can start reading from where he stopped the last time.

While Lydia is aware of the strict rules concerning slaves' education, she does not assume that they actually reflect slaves' capacity (or incapacity) to learn. Rather, her belief that Chapel can and should become literate reflects her defiance of a racist ideology that considers black people as intellectually inferior to white people. Her refusal to obey the rules does, however, place greater peril on Chapel than on her, since she is unlikely to be punished in a violent way for her actions.

One day, while Chapel is reading and watching Lydia listen to him with closed eyes, he is suddenly startled to see Mr. Whitechapel enter the room. Lydia's father orders her out of the room and **whips** Chapel with his belt, forbidding him from reading again and threatening to send him to another plantation where he will die of hunger and mistreatment. After the punishment, the master warns Chapel to tell no one about what has happened.

Mr. Whitechapel's anger at seeing Chapel read reveals that, for all his claims of equality, he does not consider slaves worthy of becoming literate. At the same time, his desire to keep what has happened secret remains ambiguous. Perhaps he is afraid that people might learn that his daughter has been socializing with a slave, or maybe he is ashamed of his own anger, which goes against his supposedly non-violent principles.

Reacting to Mr. Whitechapel's beating, Chapel says he deserves to be a slave and claims obedience to his master. Chapel describes composing poems in his mind and meeting Lydia secretly at night. In the darkness, they talk, and she recites poems she has memorized for him.

When Chapel accepts his status as a slave, the poem's lines break down temporarily, becoming shorter and more condensed. This shows both the artificiality of Chapel's obedient attitude, which does not reflect his perspective on slavery, but also the extent to which the master can control the young boy's actions through fear.

Chapel then recalls animated discussions about freedom he's had with Whitechapel. Chapel regrets some of his words, as he believes that some of his criticism regarding his father's obedient behavior was too harsh. He explains his father's categorization of slaves in two types: the rebellious ones who are bound to suffer brutal punishment and the savvy, observant ones, who will lead a more peaceful life. Whitechapel is worried about his son, whom he knows is in the first category. Chapel, though, considers his father a kind of "jailer" himself. Therefore, after Cook falls sick and dies, Chapel trusts that he no longer has a reason to stay on the plantation. He decides to run away, suddenly feeling free and happy instead of fearful.

Despite disagreeing strongly with his father's principles, Chapel still loves him. The boy believes that he should treat his father with respect, since he knows that Whitechapel is not behaving out of malice, but out of a sincere concern for his son's life. However, Whitechapel's inability to understand the value that his son places on happiness and freedom over physical survival ultimately proves more dangerous than Chapel's own rebellion, as this mode of thinking leads to the young boy's death, even if Whitechapel's intentions were not violent.

CHAPTER 6: PLANTATION OWNERS

Mr. Whitechapel prepares to meet his fellow plantation owners, whom he knows will ridicule him. He feels conflicted, torn in half by contradictory thoughts. He remembers that his father helped to build the plantation owners' club but feels that he does not personally belong there. On the way, he wonders if he should drive back home. These acquaintances, he notes, believe that he's deserving of their insults. Mr. Whitechapel wonders if they truly are all the company he has.

Initially, it remains ambiguous why Mr. Whitechapel feels that he is going to be ridiculed, although it is likely that it has something to do with Chapel's death. Mr. Whitechapel's feelings of isolation show that he, too, is vulnerable in some ways, despite his all-powerful attitude on the plantation. In this sense, his domination over his slaves does not reflect the actual power he holds in society at large.

When Mr. Whitechapel's carriage approaches the building, the plantation owners are amused and wonder why Mr. Whitechapel would choose to drive it himself in the rain when he owns hundreds of slaves. However, they decide to tone their mockery down, reminding themselves that he is still one of them. Mr. Whitechapel, though, does not understand why he decided to attend the gathering, and wonders if he is seeking answers that he needs others to say out loud.

Once again, Mr. Whitechapel's worries remain unspecified, building mystery and suspense. The men's mockery of Mr. Whitechapel's desire to drive his own carriage highlights the master's hypocritical attitude toward slavery, which combines oppression of hundreds of slaves with an attitude of moral uprightness and independence.

When Mr. Whitechapel enters the building, trying to convince himself that this is his home because his father has helped build the club, the plantation owners take turns mockingly congratulating him for **whipping** Chapel to death. A long, heated debate ensues about the men's differing visions of slavery. Mr. Whitechapel tries to defend himself by saying that it was an involuntary consequence of fair punishment. Despite feeling physically uncomfortable in the room, he tries to remain calm and engage with his peers.

Surprisingly, Mr. Whitechapel's fears of mockery were unrelated to the possibility of being condemned for whipping a slave to death. Instead, he feared the opposite attitude: the men's excitement at seeing that Mr. Whitechapel has finally behaved in a brutal way. Instead of fearing higher justice, Mr. Whitechapel was thus fearing nothing less than base social pressures, which turn traditional notions justice on their head.

Meanwhile, the other plantation owners mock Mr. Whitechapel for being a hypocrite, emphasizing that Chapel's death proves that Mr. Whitechapel's beliefs about slaves' humanity and right to respect are illusory. Mr. Whitechapel counters that he still trusts in his principles, and that one slave's accidental death does not make him as brutal as them. His friends nevertheless keep on deriding him, nothing ironically that he treats his slaves well only until he decides to kill them. They complain about his attitude of superiority toward them and try to make him admit that **whipping** that slave finally made him feel alive.

Although it is true that Mr. Whitechapel did not intend to kill Chapel, the plantation owners are also correct in recognizing Mr. Whitechapel's hypocrisy. Indeed, Mr. Whitechapel refuses to accept that treating slaves with respect, as he claims to do, does not actually protect them from violence, such as the punishment Chapel suffered at the hands of the overseer.

Mr. Whitechapel feels that half of him joins in the plantation owners' collective merriment, while another half feels deeply troubled by what is being said. Someone calls him an Abolitionist, and Mr. Whitechapel worries momentarily about what he considers to be the men's intellectual inferiority and, therefore, potential danger. When Mr. Whitechapel defends his Christian beliefs, the men accuse him of protecting Africans instead of showing solidarity to his fellow white Christians. Mr. Whitechapel argues that he does not consider his involvement in slavery and his Christian beliefs incompatible. The men argue, though, that Mr. Whitechapel's overly generous treatment of his slaves will only breed rebellion and an erroneous belief in racial equality. The atmosphere becomes darker, tense, and deprived of laughter, as the discussion becomes more intense.

Mr. Whitechapel's desire to fit in proves just as powerful as his desire to defend his principles. His conflicted attitude symbolizes the way in which racism and cruelty can become predominant in society. If standing up to racist injustice is dangerous, people will be inclined to conform to racist standards of behavior. The very threat of being an outsider in society can be sufficient to make people abide by the status quo. The men's heated, potentially violent arguments only emphasize what is at stake in this conversation: their sense of moral worth but, more importantly, their very livelihood, which depends entirely on slave labor.

When Mr. Whitechapel takes a moment to think of Chapel to himself, he realizes guiltily that, after this young boy's death—whom he once beat with a belt as if Chapel were his own son—there can be no "judicious **whip**" on the plantation. Rather, punishment is always brutal.

In private, Mr. Whitechapel re-examines the very concept of physical punishment and concludes that whipping is always violent and morally unacceptable, even if it is accepted by society. However, this moment of introspection is only temporary, and Mr. Whitechapel would never dare to express such non-violent views in public.

Mr. Whitechapel then resolves to tell the plantation owners about Chapel's true identity in a mysterious way, starting a new discussion by claiming that **whipping** slaves leads to "brother killing brother." Asking for their complete secrecy, and feeling dizzy with fear and confusion, he argues that God does not tell men to treat other men like animals. However, he finds his own words ridiculous, and almost laughs along with the other men at this argument. He even discusses the possibility of ending slavery, arguing that they could pay slaves to stay and work for them, but finds his own ideas worthy of mockery.

Mr. Whitechapel is unable to reconcile his moral instincts (the idea that men should not be treated like animals) with his own actions, in which he does *sometimes treat slaves like animals on the plantation. His progressive ideas disagree so strongly with his self-interest that the only possible solution is for him to dismiss these ideas entirely.*

When the plantation owners mention the slave Whitechapel, Mr. Whitechapel resolves to finally tell these men the truth about Chapel more directly. However, they keep him from expressing his ideas fully, and they mockingly wonder whether a member of his family might have had sexual relations with a slave. At the same time, they are curious about what Mr. Whitechapel has to say. When Mr. Whitechapel finally reveals that Sanders Senior raped Whitechapel's wife, Cook, who bore the very boy who was **whipped** to death, the men are incredulous at hearing this story. Mostly, they do not understand how Whitechapel could have let Sanders Junior whip his own half-brother to death. Mr. Whitechapel explains that Whitechapel simply refused to stand up to authority. The men conclude that this slave is truly extraordinary, saying that he deserves Mr. Whitechapel's name, and that they wish they could buy him.

The men's jokes about the possibility of interracial relationships highlight the very impossibility of such an event in their minds, which they consider absurd and laughable—an attitude that emphasizes their belief in separate, unequal races that should never interact. The men's surprise and approval of Whitechapel's passive behavior only highlights how extreme Whitechapel's views about obedience are, for it is highly ironic that Whitechapel's actions would be celebrated by the very men who advocate slavery, oppression, and cruelty. In this context, Whitechapel's actions cannot be seen as an expression of freedom of thought but, rather, as proof of his utter submissiveness to a system of oppression.

Mr. Whitechapel finally feels at peace and ceases to be conflicted, as he feels included in the same group as his fellow plantation owners and accepted by all. Despite Chapel's death, he feels comfort in knowing that his loyal slave Whitechapel is still alive. After revealing the truth to his fellow plantation owners, he ceases to feel shame and trusts that he has owned up to his family name.

Mr. Whitechapel's qualms about Chapel's fate prove insufficient to make him reject the company of his brutal peers. Rather, he prefers to stop thinking about his moral responsibility and, instead, to take joy in feeling part of a strong social group. This reinforces the idea that Mr. Whitechapel is only superficially interested in treating slaves with respect, for his greatest concern is simply to maintain his status as a powerful slave owner.

CHAPTER 7: LYDIA

Lydia describes the evolution of her relationship with Chapel. She initially treats him like a young brother, taking his hand to lead him into the reading room after seeing him watch her curiously from behind the door. For days, she waits for him to appear, smiling when she sees him spying into the room, and finally reads to him, marking his page when he has to run back to his mother, Cook.

Lydia's detailed description of Chapel's behavior, as well as of her own attentiveness, reveals her emerging romantic feelings for him, as she has clearly been paying attention to the young boy in a curious, affectionate way. Unlike so many others on the plantation, she does not see any reason to keep from interacting with a person who neither shares her skin color nor her social status.

When Lydia sees that Chapel is eager to understand what she is reading from, she teaches him to read, enjoying watching the movements of his mouth as he pronounces words. She sits close to him and takes his finger to make it move along with the words. When Cook calls Chapel from the kitchen, Lydia tells him to keep this activity their secret.

Lydia's attentiveness to Chapel's movements and her desire to stay physically close to him outlines the beginning of romantic attraction between the two of them. At the same time, the necessary secrecy of their activity serves as a reminder of the deep social inequality that divides them and the danger for Chapel to be overstepping his rights as a slave.

Over the course of several weeks, Chapel begins to say a few words aloud as Lydia reads, and she leaves spaces for him to say the words he knows. Both of them are excited and smile, but Lydia's smile makes him turn away shyly so she hides it from him. They become so absorbed in their secret activity that Cook has to call her son twice before he answers.

The young people's excitement is as much related to the experience of reading as to the feelings they share for each other, which makes them feel shy and self-conscious. However, the fact that Cook has to call Chapel twice foreshadows danger, as the two young people are clearly paying less attention to their surroundings, which might lead them to get caught.

After a while, Chapel becomes capable of reading to Lydia, pausing for her as she used to pause for him. Lydia leans back and listens to the boy, feeling his voice move over her body. She closes her eyes so as not to make him lose his concentration when he reads and looks at her. One day, she suddenly realizes that she has been selfish in forgetting to teach him to write his own name. When she opens her eyes, she catches him watching her, and he looks around, worried that someone might have seen them. Lydia wants to tell him that he is the one who surprises her but keeps quiet.

Lydia realizes that their reading activity is both an intensely sensorial moment, filled with love and attraction, and a learning experience capable of giving Chapel an intellectual and spiritual freedom that he so sorely lacks. Lydia also understands that writing is not a trivial pastime but, rather, can help Chapel build his identity and, through that, gain personal power, as the idea of writing his own name suggests.

Before teaching Chapel to write, Lydia makes him swear to keep this activity secret, which he does because he is so eager to learn. She teaches him to spell his last name: "Whitechapel." Curious about Chapel's nickname, she asks Cook why she calls her son "Chapel." Cook says that, otherwise, both her son and husband would answer when she calls.

The possible confusion between husband and son is humorous, given Whitechapel and Chapel's strikingly different personalities, but also suggests a deeper link between the two men: an essential family bond that ties the father to his son, however much they might disagree on certain issues.

CHAPTER 8: COOK

Cook describes preparing two pots every day. One of the pots is for her master, and it is full of the best things she has prepared. The other one, while less rich, is sweeter to her because it is meant for her beloved family.

Cook places greater value on personal riches, such as her family's love, than material differences, such as receiving a higher-quality meal. In this way, she shows that family is capable of offsetting the unjust effects of even a deeply unequal system.

One day, Cook calls Chapel while cooking but does not hear him answer. After walking around and listening carefully, she hears a voice that sounds like Chapel's but is not fully his. When she walks toward the sound and listens through the door where Mr. Whitechapel keeps his books—a room Cook has never dared enter—she hears Chapel reading loud and strong, like the master's prayers at Christmas, and has to stifle a cry of surprise.

Chapel's metaphorical transformation, through his voice, from slave to master constitutes a subversive reversal of roles. It suggests not only that Chapel is just as intellectually capable as Mr. Whitechapel, but also that he is potentially capable of rebelling against his status as slave and, through reading, develop his intellectual freedom.

Cook runs back to the kitchen and yells Chapel's name again, this time hearing his answer in a voice she recognizes. Chapel runs toward her and hugs her, and she notices how happy he looks. When claims that he was simply daydreaming, Cook warns him against walking around the house and distracting Lydia. She does not, however, say anything about hearing him read, nor does she tell him to keep away from books. Instead, she feels a swelling of pride at knowing that her son can sound like the master. At the same time, she worries about having to talk about this with Whitechapel.

Unlike Whitechapel, who sees Chapel's happiness as a threat to the young boy's life, Cook understands that her son's happiness is an important aspect of his life that must be safeguarded and nourished. She sees Chapel's intellectual growth as a process of personal and collective transformation, as it not only influences the boy's individual well-being but also subverts an entire system of inequality. Her decision to keep quiet about what she has discovered makes her complicit of Chapel's rebellion, showing that she supports his endeavor.

Cook tries to convince herself that what she heard is unimportant, but she cannot avoid admitting that Chapel's action is a bold, subversive act. Ultimately, she concludes that she wants neither herself nor Whitechapel to tell their son that he cannot read. Despite loving her husband and respecting his beliefs, she resolves to keep this secret for him, because she trusts that her son's voice when he reads is just as powerful and righteous as her husband's voice when he tells her that slaves should obey their masters and not learn to read. She continues to cook, looking forward to her husband and son's reactions when they will smell the delicious things she has prepared for them.

Cook's decision to support her child demonstrates her devotion to Chapel's growth, beyond any boundaries that slavery might erect to crush the young boy's happiness. Unlike her husband, she understands that dignity does not only derive from protecting one's life, but also from protecting one's internal life, made of dreams and hopes, however unattainable they might be. Cook concludes that obedience and rebellion are two valid modes of behavior, but that everyone should be free to choose which one they want to adopt.

CHAPTER 9: LYDIA

Lydia recounts the day her father, Mr. Whitechapel, caught her reading with Chapel. She describes the feeling of falling in love with Chapel, as she no longer listens to the words he says but focuses only on his voice. When her father enters the room, the children jump up in surprise. Mr. Whitechapel orders Lydia out of the room, and Lydia feels scared for herself but more so for Chapel. She knows that she is in love with a slave who is three years younger than her, and that it is her fault if Chapel is in trouble.

Lydia and Whitechapel are finally punished for disobeying not only the master, but the entire system of racism and slavery, according to which whites and blacks should not socialize, nor should slaves be given the freedom to educate themselves. Lydia realizes that her personal life, in which she has fallen in love with Chapel, has led her to go against the grain of society's precepts.

Mr. Whitechapel reprimands Lydia for teaching Chapel to read, telling her that she has committed an injustice since Chapel will never be able to use these skills. Lydia wants to reply that the true injustice is the prohibition for slaves to be literate, but she stays quiet. After forbidding her to see Chapel again, Mr. Whitechapel surprisingly notes that slave literacy might be possible some time in the future. Excited by this prospect, Lydia imagines herself freely reading with Chapel, but her father then adds that it would not happen before the next century, thus crushing Lydia's hopes for the present. She concludes that she needs to learn to live in this present, unfair world instead of dreaming of an improbable future.

Mr. Whitechapel's blindness to injustice is striking, as he does not realize that he *is responsible for sustaining slavery and thus creating the kind of context in which Chapel cannot put his literacy skills to use—a situation he himself defines as unjust. Similarly, his suggestion that slave literacy might be possible in the future suggests that he is not opposed to it on principle—and, therefore, that slave literacy might be* fair. *However, once again, he fails to realize that he is responsible for perpetuating injustice.*

One day, when Lydia is dreaming of Chapel, Cook enters the reading room and gives the young girl a cryptic message about someone waiting for her at night, in the dark, under stars that flicker when she looks at them. Lydia understands that Cook is telling her that she can meet Chapel secretly at night. After her parents go to bed, the young girl walks out and reaches an old shed, where she believes she is alone. However, she leans back and touches a body that asks her if she truly believes that stars flicker. She recognizes Chapel's shaky voice.

The two young people's efforts to see each other, with Cook's help, shows that their love is greater than their fear of punishment. Their story follows a similar pattern as that of other classical, tragic tales of love in the midst of oppression or violence. In this way, it shows that neither racism nor slavery is capable of destroying the human instinct to love and connect across boundaries of race or class.

Lydia asks Chapel what he would wish for if he saw a shooting star, but he refuses to reveal his thought, explaining that Whitechapel has told him that a wish will not come true if it is revealed to someone who is a part of it. Lydia notes that Whitechapel is right, and Chapel proudly says that his father is always right, which makes Lydia feel that he is prouder of his father than she is of hers.

Lydia's feeling that Chapel is prouder of his father than she is of hers suggests that a family's happiness and fulfillment has nothing to do with social class. It also shows that Chapel's disapproval of his father's ideas about freedom diminishes neither his love nor their father-son bond.

The two of them agree to meet on clear nights and, to avoid disobeying Mr. Whitechapel, Chapel says that he will compose lines in his mind, which Lydia can write down later, while she should memorize lines for him. Lydia has tears in her eyes as she thinks of everything she wants to memorize for Chapel.

Chapel and Lydia's relationship, based on mutual sharing and growth, shows that people are able to create loving, equal relationships even in the most oppressive societies, thus engaging in private acts of rebellion that challenge the status quo.


Finally, the two of them part after telling each other they love each other. Chapel tells Lydia not to turn around, so that he will not disobey Mr. Whitechapel, who has told him never to see her again. For the next months, the two of them meet on clear nights. Sometimes, when Lydia leaves the house when it is pitch dark and Chapel has not come out, she still imagines that she can smell Chapel and thinks to herself that he must have been there a few minutes earlier.

Despite his belief that he should not be forced to be a slave and obey a master, Chapel surprisingly decides to respect Mr. Whitechapel's order about not seeing Lydia. He does so not because he accepts to defer to authority, but because he has given Mr. Whitechapel his word, and wants to respect it out of a sense of honor.


CHAPTER 10: LYDIA

As time passes, Lydia's family tells her that she is becoming a woman and that she should adjust her posture and manners accordingly. Her mother tells her to walk with a book on her head, and Lydia amuses her brothers and Mr. Whitechapel by piling more books, until the Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare fall from her head. Outside, at night, she and Chapel touch each other's bodies while reciting lines from memorized books, and Lydia notices that she never feels uncomfortable with him.

Lydia's secret relationship with Chapel allows her to realize she does not want an ordinary relationship like the kind that society sanctions. Her intellectual curiosity and her disregard for racial boundaries set her apart from more mundane concerns, such as adopting an appropriate posture, which Lydia considers absurd. Instead, she seeks intellectual and physical connection, beyond external factors such as wealth or social status.

Meanwhile, Lydia receives the visit of young men whom she is supposed to consider for marriage. However, she always compares them to Chapel and, as a result, finds their attitudes ridiculous and their intelligence despicable. When she discusses slavery with them, she is shocked to hear some men tell her not to worry about men's affairs or argue that Africans are actually saved from barbarism when they are brought to America.

Even though she belongs to the white upper class and is never affected by racial prejudice, Lydia is confronted with discrimination in her own way, as her womanhood constricts her to a narrow role, far from the social and intellectual pursuits that mean so much to her. The inequality she must fight, she realizes, is based on gender as well as race.

When Mr. Whitechapel sees Lydia's lack of interest in her suitors, he calls her into his study and tries to encourage her, in an indirect but forceful way, to begin thinking of her life outside the household. Lydia gives him a vague answer about promising to think of what is best for her, which irritates her father. Her mother begins to pressure her more explicitly, highlighting the social skills and financial means of the various men she has met. Under such pressure, Lydia goes to her room and cries, wishing desperately that Chapel could be white, or that she could be black.

In a similar way that Whitechapel tries to convince his son of behaving according to his social class, Mr. Whitechapel attempts to force Lydia to follow the conventions related to her gender and social status. Despite her economic well-being, Lydia lacks the family love and care that might make her feel valued and understood for who she is. Her frustration at society's constraints leads her to feel hopeless about ever achieving the freedom she desires.

When her brother, Thomas, returns from the North, Lydia feels enthusiastic about his descriptions of interracial relationships, though he finds them disgusting. She is impressed to hear that many educated people are fighting against slavery and arguing that slaves should be paid for their labor. She imagines herself walking freely with Chapel in public in the North and later tells him about this dream. However, Chapel seems annoyed by the fact that Lydia has forgotten to memorize a Shakespeare sonnet, and makes sarcastic comments about all the suitors at her house taking up her time. Lydia defends herself by listing all the works she has memorized for him. Chapel then suddenly spins her around and kisses her, telling her he can no longer live like this.

Lydia's surprise at hearing about politics in the North reveals how isolated her plantation—and, perhaps, the South in general—is from progressive ideas. The atmosphere in the North suggests that an end to slavery is possible, since even contemporary activists are fighting for it. Chapel's jealousy about Lydia's suitors reveals his frustration at being unable to change his life. Even though he knows Lydia loves him and is committed to him, he cannot help but feel hopeless at the impossibility of making their relationship official and secure.

Lydia proceeds to give Chapel more details about the North, encouraging him to try escaping there with her, but Chapel asks her many logistical questions to which she has to admit that she doesn't know the answer. The two of them are excited, and Chapel reveals that he had always hoped he might one day escape like this, and that his love for her is stronger than anything, capable of moving him to brave any danger. That night, Lydia stays awake thinking of all the obstacles that such a journey would involve, but still tries to feel hopeful.

It remains uncertain whether the young people's desire for freedom will ever come true, or whether the danger of rebelling against society will force them to abandon their dreams. However, the two of them conclude that no danger can dampen their love or their deep yearning for freedom—goals for which Chapel will prove willing to risk his very life.

The next day, Lydia asks Thomas if she might accompany him on his trip to the North, which he refuses. Thomas mentions her request to their father and Mr. Whitechapel interrogates Lydia about it, who answers by saying that she is hoping she might find a suitable husband in the North, now that she has been presented to everyone in the South. This seems to convince her father, who nevertheless believes that the greatest obstacle will be her mother. Lydia's mother does indeed object forcefully to the idea of a trip North, and Lydia realizes that the only way to convince her to agree to this trip is to have her come with her.

In a system characterized by pervasive racism and social rigidity, even one's own family constitutes an obstacle to freedom, mirroring the very dynamics and constraints that public life imposes on people. The family's reputation is of crucial importance, as Lydia's family proves deeply opposed to the idea of letting her take part in such an unconventional trip, which challenges norms about what a young, unmarried woman should do.

The logistics of the trip thus leaves Chapel and Lydia incapable of escaping together. Chapel initially feels resigned to his fate but then accepts to remain hopeful, as Lydia reminds him of all the obstacles they have overcome so far in their relationship. In the meantime, Lydia tries to interrogate Thomas discreetly about how slaves travel across the country. However, she soon annoys him with her questions about seemingly insignificant details and has to stop.

The possibility of freedom seems unreachable again, despite the young people's hopes and efforts to design a creative solution to their plight. The seeming hopelessness of this situation sets the foundation for Chapel's later decision to run away—a desperate action with little hope of success.

When Lydia tells Chapel about what she has learned from Thomas, the two of them dream of the various aspects of their future life together, even imagining the children they would have. Chapel concludes that he will write verses for a living, adding that he could never contain within a single poem the depth of what he feels for her.

Lydia and Chapel's dreams about a shared future emphasize the tragedy of their relationship's outcome. Chapel's death highlights the injustice of keeping hopeful young people from realizing their dreams.

CHAPTER 11: THE VIRGINIAN

In a series of editorials, beginning in December 1809, the editor of the local newspaper, *The Virginian*, discusses issues concerning slavery. Regarding the use of slaves' physical punishment, the editor considers that violence in the name of a greater good—in this case, the maintenance of economic prosperity—is justifiable. Brutality, though, he notes, must never be the objective in itself. Rather, a man who remains an honest human being, capable of love and compassion, can remain perfectly dignified while choosing to **whip** a slave.

Although they appear reasonable, the editor's conclusions about the use of violence against slaves remain vague, since knowing when brutality is too extreme is subjective, depending on the slave owner's general tolerance of violence. The writer's distinction between the private and public spheres is also arbitrary, as it suggests that a man should be judged morally only by his private actions (characterized by love), not by his public relationships with his slaves (marked by violence).

The next month, the editor discusses how much a seller should ask for a slave who is later discovered to be pregnant. He concludes that since it cannot be known whether the investment will be profitable—in this case, whether both mother and child will live—it would not be wise for the seller to increase the price. Rather, the slave owner should enquire whether he might receive a refund if mother and/or child die in childbirth.

The editor's discussion of childbirth transfers the focus from the main protagonists—the mother and her child—to the slave owners. This perspective highlights the editor's belief that slaves should not be seen as independent beings in control of their own lives. Rather, their very value is determined by external owners who see them as interchangeable assets.

In another editorial, the editor concludes that slaves can rightfully be separated from their family because Africans do not have the same capacity for love and affection as whites. Therefore, the family bonds that exist between them do not need to be respected, and each member of the family can be treated as a separate economic asset.

The editor believes that, on an emotional level, slaves should not be seen as fully human. The editor's perspective on a crucial issue such as separating a family forever is particularly heartless, as it is concerned only with economic arguments, rather than any conception of the slaves' well-being.

Discussing the punishment of runaway slaves, the editor considers two hundred lashes and restrictions on food to be fair, since this can also serve to dissuade potential runaways. He argues that, upon calculating the economic cost of a slave's escape, it seems logical to punish the slave, even to the point of death, although excessive violence (such as the use of bloodhounds or showing the body as it rots) should be avoided. Punishment should provoke obedience and instruction, not anger and rebellion.

The editor's conception of justice does not rely on fair and respectful treatment but, rather, on the effects of punishment. In this way, justice is divorced from morals and adopts a purely utilitarian definition: how well it will succeed in keeping slaves from running away. The editor's seemingly humane view about excessive violence only masks his lack of moral discernment.

Concerning the use of old slaves who have worked all their lives but are too old to do so anymore, the editor argues against abandoning them off the plantation. He reasons that an old slave can instruct younger ones in obedience, even if he is no longer working. The example this slave sets is invaluable and should be considered an asset.

Once again, the editor's seemingly moralistic attitude, which advocates respecting old slaves, is divorced from any understanding of slaves' dignity or well-being. Instead, it focuses exclusively on the economic purpose that slaves play on the plantation.

Despite considering that young female slaves are "a temptation to us all," the editor concludes that sexual relationships with slaves should be avoided at all costs. It might be right, he explains, to experience lust, but to *act* on that lust must be forbidden, as relationships between a master and a slave can threaten the relationship between a master and his wife, or encourage the slave to demand greater rights. Therefore, a master should make sure to marry female slaves and keep them occupied with raising their children. As an example of the dangers of relationships between masters and slaves, the editor recounts a story he recently heard of an overseer **whipping** a young slave to death, whom he later learned was none other than his half-brother.

Once again, the editor's warning against sexual relationships with slaves cares little for the actual slaves' perspective, but focuses only on the consequences of rape on life on the plantation and the master's family. The editor does not see rape or the objectification of female slaves (in which they are described not as human beings but as "a temptation") as problems, since he seems to assume that women slaves have no say in what happens in their sexual life. The example he mentions is the one involving Cook and Sanders Senior and, once again, he focuses only on the perspective of the plantation staff, not on the injustice done to slaves.

The editor discusses the compatibility of Christianity with slavery. He concludes that, while Christianity answers a spiritual need, slavery provides material well-being. Therefore, the two are perfectly compatible, as can be seen from the fact that over a century of slavery has not destroyed the Christian faith. He explains that the confusion between the two notions derives form the wrong view that slaves should take part in all aspects of the Christian faith. Instead, converting slaves to Christianity should always involve reminding them of the separation between masters and slaves, as well as their inherent inferiority due to their primitive, previous life in Africa.

The editor's argument that Christianity would have disappeared if the faith were incompatible with slavery is deeply flawed. The writer seems incapable of conceiving that, in addition to a spiritual function, religion plays a social role in society and can therefore not be seen as a separate entity from the interests and power dynamics pervading society. His vision of the Christian faith is selective. Instead of focusing on religion's precepts to love and respect all human beings, the writer's opinion is primarily defined by his conviction that slaves are not full human beings deserving of equal treatment.

The editor discusses whether slave management should be firm or kind. He describes each perspective: the kind approach considers brutality inhumane and unproductive, breeding discontent among slaves, whereas the firm approach defends the use of punishment for misbehavior. The editor concludes that a balanced approach should be used, in which fairness is defined as the defense of the plantation's interests. Because of this, slaves do not necessarily have to live miserably for the plantation to profit.

Once again, the editor defines justice and fairness not as moral codes of conduct, but as utilitarian notions serving the slave owner's economic interests. His seemingly humane conclusion about not needing to treat slaves with extreme violence only suggests that some level of violence and oppression is always necessary and acceptable.

When asked whether slavery will end, the editor understands the two sides of the answer. On the one hand, he believes that slavery will always be needed because work in the fields will always be necessary for the economic system. On the other hand, technological advances might make slaves' work obsolete, as cheaper modes of producing goods might make slavery too expensive. The editor concludes that this will not take place in the next couple of generations, but also worries about the increasing number of freed slaves in society.

The editor's narrow focus on economic interests makes him blind to larger societal dynamics taking place at the time that he is writing, such as the birth of the abolitionist movement. He seems unable to realize that the central issues that characterize slavery are economic as well as social and political. In particular, the oppression and violence that slavery involves makes it unsustainable in a society where people begin to fight for equality.

When the editor receives a letter from a mysterious Miss L. (Lydia) who asks whether it might be more profitable to pay black people for their labor, he takes her question seriously, considering questions of supply and demand. However, he ultimately concludes that the profitability would depend on factors such as the number of slaves on the plantation, and that, since profitability might not be guaranteed in all cases, the idea of paying blacks should be rejected as too impractical.

Once again, the editor considers such a crucial existential question as slaves' freedom from a purely economic perspective. Paradoxically, this makes him appear open to such a large social and economic change, as he is willing to consider it on a theoretical basis. His conclusion, though, reveals the deep opposition to slaves' freedom that anyone who has an economic interest in slavery will demonstrate.

Miss L. (Lydia) replies to the previous editorial, arguing that slavery is full of fluctuations, and that she has recently noticed that an increase in costs at her father's plantations has not been accompanied by increasing profits, which suggests that slavery might bring diminishing returns. The editor argues that the rising costs might be related to other factors than the inevitable decline of slavery, such as inefficiency on the plantation. In an authoritative voice, he admonishes her to avoid thinking that slavery should be considered an open market system or a system that is dying.

Miss L.—Lydia's pseudonym to maintain anonymity and protect herself from social backlash—tries to argue with the editor in economic terms. However, the editor's harsh response, which is still economically reasonable, also serves as a warning that predicting (let alone wishing for) the end of slavery is socially and politically dangerous and unacceptable, as it threatens the ideology of the entire American South.

The editor relates an extraordinary event: he has received an extremely articulate letter from a literate slave who argues that *The Virginian* should include stories written by slaves themselves. Despite being surprised at discovering that blacks also read this newspaper, which he did not think was possible, the editor is open to this idea and asks his readers to write to him with their opinion. He concludes that he is not opposed to slaves' literacy as long as it does not hamper the economic development of the plantation.

Despite his surprise, the editor does not admit that this slave's elaborate response—which likely comes from Chapel—should cause him to revisit his views on the intellectual and emotional inferiority of slaves, even though this letter serves as clear evidence that slaves are just as capable of brilliance as any free person. The editor's perspective on slave literacy, though, is surprisingly open for the time.

After the previous editorial, the editor receives an overwhelming "no" from his readers. He notes that he received two divisive letters within the same family. The father argued slaves' literacy would only increase their discontent and is therefore unethical, whereas the daughter argues that literacy makes slaves—and, in general, everyone—better people. Without necessarily agreeing with her, the editor lauds the young girl's idealism, concluding that the young will be the ones to design the future.

Readers' rejection of the idea of reading slaves' accounts of life suggests that people know that this might be potentially dangerous—for example, showing how miserable slaves' lives are and, therefore, how immoral slavery is. The danger of confronting this truth, which might uproot people's trust in slavery, as well as the public's utter disinterest for slaves' feelings, prompts their rejection. The editor, though, seems to imply that progressive views about slave literacy might prevail in the future, if not in the present.

The editor receives a letter from the deputy of an overseer complaining about the conditions of poor whites, who are sometimes barely above the condition of slave and who feel that some free blacks enjoy a better life than some whites. He turns his sentiment of injustice into a direct (if imaginary) threat when he imagines that poor whites might kill all the blacks, as well as the rich whites who did nothing to secure their future.

While the deputy's indignation at poverty might be justified, his conclusion that this is somehow blacks' fault is absurd, given that black slaves have absolutely no control over their own lives—and much less over inequality in society as a whole. The deputy is also blind to the distinction between poverty (which whites and blacks might experience) and the extra burdens that affect blacks exclusively, regardless of their economic status: severe lack of freedom and racial discrimination.

In the next editorial, many readers share the angry white man's sentiment, feeling that society has all but forgotten poor whites. While the editor does not believe in resolving this problem in a violent way and trusts that people's "Christian restraint" will keep them from doing harm, he does agree that whites should be treated better than blacks because of their inherent superiority.

The editor's belief in a vague notion of "Christian restraint" reveals his naïveté about the use of violence in society. The readers' indignation at the life of poor whites only highlights their incapacity to feel empathy for the oppressed life of blacks, even though slaves suffer infinitely more from violence, discrimination, and lack of freedom.

The editor writes a vehement article criticizing interracial relationships, which he considers shocking and inacceptable. This leads him to worry about the future. He wonders what the product of such relationships will be, wondering if biracial children will claim equality with whites and what their place in the country might be. He compares this situation to relationships between masters and slaves, although he does note that there is a difference between free blacks and slaves.

Even though the editor's views about interracial relationships are explicitly racist and, unfounded, his fear of the future actually brings to light a much deeper problem. Beyond his narrow fear of racial equality, his interrogation *about the integration into society of a population that has been systematically discriminated against will remain a matter of political debate for the following decades and centuries.*

In the next editorial, the editor criticizes Miss L.'s (Lydia's) response to his views about interracial relationships, as she accuses the editor's views of being unconstitutional. The writer defends himself by arguing implicitly that free speech and the expression of his worries is not unconstitutional. He insults her intelligence and her excessive "love for blacks," which he believes keeps her from thinking about these issues rationally. He imagines that she might find herself in an interracial relationship, which would be her own fault.

When the editor focuses exclusively on social issues that are not directly related to the economic system of slavery, his racism and intolerance—which might have been disguised under seemingly open-minded economic considerations—are brought to light. His bigotry keeps him from realizing that Miss L.'s lack of racism does not indicate lack of intelligence but, rather, the courage to challenge the dominant ideology.

CHAPTER 12: GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER

Whitechapel's great granddaughter recalls the memory of Whitechapel washing her and complaining about New England lice being more aggressive than African lice. When she asks him about Africa, Whitechapel describes being taken from a field where he was playing and then sent on a long journey on a boat, during which many people died.

Whitechapel's memories of Africa highlight the inherently violent nature of slavery, which forcefully uproots innocent people from their home to turn them into slaves—even though they were living innocent, free lives in their own land.

The great granddaughter enjoys Whitechapel's washing sessions, because she thinks of him as "African Great Grandfather." She tells him that she dreamed of Africa, which Whitechapel finds silly. However, the girl still recounts her dream, in which she reaches Africa, kneels, and kisses the soil, feeling that she belongs there. She then joins friends and family at a hut where food is cooking and everyone cheers when she eats, as they recognize that she is left-handed like her great grandfather.

The girl's dream of Africa symbolizes her deep yearning for freedom and for a feeling of home, which life on the plantation deprives her of. Her dream also highlights the difficult position of black slaves, who have lost their homeland (except, perhaps, in dreams) but are also not accepted in the very land they were born in, leading to a sense of severed identity.

When the great granddaughter is done telling Whitechapel her dream, he tells her that she should not think of Africa. He tells her to dream about her life here and seems irritated by her story. He prefers to avoid thinking and talking about Africa to not breed disobedience on the plantation. He also insists that Africa is his own past, and that the other slaves, who have never experienced it, should not talk about it.

Whitechapel's irritation at the mention of Africa mirrors his irritation at slaves' yearning for freedom or "paradise." Instead of projecting his hopes into the future, Whitechapel prefers to make his life in the present more livable—which, in his view, involves eliminating any desire for freedom and progress.

The great granddaughter recalls Whitechapel's second marriage and the sadness that marked his face after his wife, Cook, died. Since Chapel's death, he has empty eyes and everyone avoids him because the old man was responsible for his son's death. They know this because when Chapel escaped, the slaves got together to decide what to do. Whitechapel said he wanted to talk to Mr. Whitechapel, and people thought he had gone crazy. However, he argued that he knew what to do, and that they should just trust him. During the **whipping**, everyone noted Whitechapel's own surprise, as though he hadn't planned for this to happen. His great granddaughter saw the old man's body react to the whipping in the same way as his son's and knew there was nothing she could do for him.

Whitechapel's visible surprise at seeing his son whipped reveals the extent to which he actually trusted in the overseer and the master's fairness, and the fact that he never meant to cause his son any harm—even though the other slaves on the plantation distrusted the master and knew that betraying Chapel might lead to his death. While Chapel underwent physical suffering, Whitechapel underwent the spiritual disillusionment, which caused him to lose all hope in life. Whitechapel's suffering also reveals how strong his bond with Chapel was, since his physical pain mirrored his son's.

Instead of dreams about Africa, the great granddaughter now has nightmares of beatings. She wonders if there is a way anyone could have convinced Whitechapel that Chapel would be safe but decides not to interrogate him about it. Finally, one day, she finds Whitechapel's curled-up, dead body and begins to wash him, like he used to wash her. Overcome by sadness, she then finds herself unable to continue washing Whitechapel and must be replaced.

Despite the girl's awareness of Whitechapel's mistakes, her love for him remains strong and her inability to continue washing him reveals her pain at seeing him dead. Her decision to keep from interrogating Whitechapel also reveals her respect for him, as she was curious about what happened but realized her question would only cause the old man more pain.

CHAPTER 13: SANDERS JUNIOR

Sanders Junior engages in an imaginary dialogue with Whitechapel, who is now dead. He is surprised to realize that Whitechapel is actually dead and notes that he now looks peaceful, as though he were taking a nap. Sanders admits that he liked Whitechapel, and that he should not have hit him, but he argues that he was merely defending his position as overseer and his authority over the slaves.

Sanders Junior's imaginary dialogue with Whitechapel reveals a desire to explain himself to the old man and, perhaps, receive his pardon. While the overseer knows that he misbehaved in hitting Whitechapel, he is still incapable of articulating an unconditional apology, as he again tries to defend himself by invoking his professional duty.

Sanders Junior explains that he could never have hit Whitechapel hard, because he learned his entire trade from the knowledgeable slave, whom he considers a better overseer than him. Although he feels sorry for Whitechapel's son, Sanders adamantly rejects the idea that he and Chapel are brothers, since Sanders only knew him as the son of a slave. He complains about Chapel's constant questioning and insubordination and realizes now that Chapel's attitude can be understood by the fact that he wasn't actually Whitechapel's son.

Sanders Junior's confession that Whitechapel was a better overseer than him suggests that Whitechapel cannot be considered inferior to him in any way, despite their nominal inequality on the plantation. It also highlights how Whitechapel believed deeply in obedience and tried to impose his views on his fellow slaves to keep them in line (and thus keep them safe). However, this knowledge of slaves' intellectual capacities does not lead the overseer to understand that slaves might desire freedom, and his condemnation of Chapel's behavior reveals his ready acceptance of racist conceptions of personality.

Sanders Junior wonders why Whitechapel was not capable of keeping Chapel from running away and places the blame for what has happened on him. He also notes that Mr. Whitechapel himself had previously agreed that two hundred lashes would be an adequate punishment for a runaway. The overseer concludes that even if he had known that Chapel was his half-brother, he would have felt compelled to execute the punishment. He also argues that Mr. Whitechapel would likely have returned from his trip to order a similar punishment, though perhaps with fewer lashes.

Once again, the overseer's inability to see slaves as fully human blinds him to their desire for freedom, which is equal to that of whites—but which he sees as unnatural behavior in a slave. His narrow focus on standard modes of punishment keeps him from reexamining the very concept of punishment itself in terms of violence and brutality. This prevents him from reflecting on the moral weight of his own actions.

Sanders Junior insists that slavery is a business, and that all the slaves' lives belong to Mr. Whitechapel, which means that slaves should not rebel. He adds that he liked Whitechapel because he "knew his place." Sanders recalls finding Whitechapel napping one day and being about to strike him with his stick to wake him up when Whitechapel suddenly blinked at him and walked away, fully awake. Now, though, despite his tricks, Whitechapel has finally been taken by death. Sanders reflects that, despite Whitechapel's long life, he would never want to live as a slave, with no one by his side and no possessions of his own.

Sanders Junior's long speech, filled with various excuses about why he punished Chapel in the way he did, reveals a nagging desire to absolve himself—which betrays an underlying sense of guilt and, perhaps, the knowledge that what he did was wrong and unjustifiable. The overseer's only excuse for what he has done is to invoke slaves' duty to obey, but this paradoxically places guilt on the very victims who suffered violence at his own hands.

Sanders Junior orders people to cover Whitechapel before moving his body and even gives his jacket for that purpose, realizing that he can only give it to him in death, because it would have been inappropriate otherwise. He apologizes to Whitechapel for unknowingly killing his half-brother, saying that Chapel turned out to be weaker than he thought. He merely wanted his punishment to be exemplary, he explains, and had not intended to kill him.

Now, Sanders Junior abandons his excuses and arguments, admitting directly that he did not mean to behave so cruelly—and, perhaps, that the family relationship between Chapel and him does *mean something after all. His concern for Whitechapel's dignity seems genuine, but it also reveals the overseer's hypocrisy, as he was not courageous enough to reveal his admiration for the old slave while he was alive.*

Sanders Junior reflects on his act of giving Whitechapel his jacket, which used to belong to his father, Sanders Senior. Sanders Junior concludes that he is just as severe as his father. At the same time, he considers that his father lacked Whitechapel's courage, and that he would have been glad to have the old slave as his father. He says that Whitechapel deserves this jacket and makes sure that people keep him covered as they move him.

Despite his deep-seated racism, Sanders Junior is capable of self-examination and, even, of accepting a black slave as a father figure. The contradictions inherent in Sanders Junior's words and actions show the difficulty, in such an intolerant, violence-filled society, of reconciling private feelings with public obligations marked by racism and the need to dominate over others.

FORGETTING

Whitechapel begins an imaginary conversation with his son, Chapel. He tells Chapel that, because of his biracial nature, part of him was free whereas the other one had to be a slave. He admits that he knew that Chapel was made to be free, because it was in his blood. He justifies himself for betraying his son, though, by saying that he valued Chapel's life more than his happiness. His action still tortures him, though, and he concludes he was not a good enough father.

Like Sanders Junior, Whitechapel also seems moved by the desire to receive forgiveness for his actions. His understanding of Chapel's personality, though, remains moved by racist conceptions, according to which blacks are made to be slaves and whites are meant to be free. Whitechapel remains blind to the idea that there is no reasonable justification for the oppression of blacks.

Whitechapel admits that he heard Chapel call Lydia's name in his dreams and found Chapel's sexual desire healthy, but realizes admits there is a lot he didn't know about Chapel's dreams and desires. He wonders if he should have told him about the two races in his blood and prepared him for another life, but feels lost when he realizes that he only knows life as a slave on a plantation. When he revealed his son's whereabouts to Mr. Whitechapel, Whitechapel wondered at the time if he was doing something wrong—a fear that came true, since his attempts to protect his son ultimately proved futile.

Whitechapel realizes that his own lack of imagination explains his inability to empathize with Chapel's desire to be free and to dream of a world not governed by racial divisions. Whitechapel has thus confused the habit of living on the plantation with what he considers a moral obligation to preserve that way of life. Whitechapel's fear of the unknown has led him to approve of slavery as a normal, acceptable way of life.

Whitechapel concludes that he has been wrong all his life, and that he would need several lives to make things right, though he does not even know if he could figure out how. He wonders how long slavery will exist, and whether masters will always be able to rule over their slaves. He feels exhausted and finds himself unable to see or speak, soon feeling the presence of death in his body. He concludes that he wants to rest and forget, arguing that memory is merely the survival of pain.

Whitechapel realizes that his philosophy of obedience to slavery has backfired against him, and that slavery is an inherently unjust, oppressive system. In light of Chapel's attempt to run away, he begins to think that slavery might be unsustainable, since many slaves will probably never abandon their deep desire for freedom.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Legros, Christine. "*The Longest Memory*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 21 Aug 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Legros, Christine. "*The Longest Memory*." LitCharts LLC, August 21, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-longest-memory.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Longest Memory* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

D'Aguiar, Fred. The Longest Memory. Vintage. 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

D'Aguiar, Fred. The Longest Memory. New York: Vintage. 2017.