

EPIDERMALIZED INHERITANCE: DIASPORIC REPAIR IN BRIT BENNETT'S *THE VANISHING HALF*

Moussa OUATTARA

Université Peleforo GON COULIBALY

moussaouatt@upgc.edu.ci

Abstract

Brit Bennett's novel The Vanishing Half (2020) has largely been read as an American narrative of racial passing. This article reframes the novel through the fanonian's concept of epidermalization, arguing that Mallard's light-skin ideology is not a Southern anomaly but a colonial pigmentocracy inherited from slavery and reactivated across the Black Atlantic. Stella's assimilation and Desiree's return are read not as opposite choices but as two failures of the same colonial arithmetic, since neither escapes the town's founding wound. The study then turns to Jude Winston, whose embrace of her dark phenotype marks a diasporic re-alignment with African ancestry rather than a private act of self-acceptance. Engaging F. Fanon alongside P. Gilroy, H. Bhabha, and S. Hartman, the article relocates colorism from a domestic wound to a transnational one, situating intergenerational repair on a diasporic horizon.

Keywords: pigmentocracy, epidermalization, Black Atlantic, diasporic reclamation, transnational repair

Résumé

The Vanishing Half (2020) l'œuvre romanesque de Brit Bennett a généralement été lu comme un récit américain du passing racial. Cet article propose une relecture du roman à partir du concept fanonien de l'épidermalisation, en soutenant que l'idéologie de la peau claire à Mallard n'est pas une anomalie sudiste, mais une pigmentocratie coloniale héritée de l'esclavage et réactivée à travers l'Atlantique noir. L'assimilation de Stella et le retour de Desiree ne sont pas lus comme des choix opposés, mais comme deux échecs d'une même arithmétique coloniale, puisque ni l'une ni l'autre n'échappe à la blessure fondatrice de la ville. L'étude se tourne ensuite vers Jude Winston, dont l'acceptation de son phénotype sombre marque un réalignement diasporique avec l'héritage africain plutôt qu'un simple geste privé d'acceptation de soi. En croisant F. Fanon avec P. Gilroy, H. Bhabha et S. Hartman, l'article déplace le colorisme d'une blessure domestique vers

une blessure transnationale, situant la réparation intergénérationnelle sur un horizon diasporique.

Mots-clés : pigmentocratie, épidermalisation, Atlantique noir, réappropriation diasporique, réparation transnationale

Introduction

The historical and geopolitical landscapes of the Black diaspora have long been shaped by an internal hierarchy of skin color that functions less as a local anomaly than as an enduring legacy of plantation slavery. B. Bennett's acclaimed novel *The Vanishing Half* (2020) brings this persistent dynamic to the forefront by examining the trajectories of identical twins who choose radically different paths in a society structured by racial division. While the novel has predominantly been approached through the lens of domestic colorism or national assimilation, this article argues for a critical shift, demonstrating that such localized frameworks remain theoretically insufficient. While critics such as R. M. M. Al Areqi (2022) and O. Reznick (2022) examine the twins' choices through postcolonial identity within a fixed American locale or focus on performativity, both remain largely silent on the deep colonial genealogy of the hierarchies at stake. Similarly, recent contributions by A. M. M. Ahmed (2025) on geotrauma, M. Lombardo (2025) on « Americanness, » M. Łapińska (2024) on the psychological burdens of the color line, and C. Allal and A. Khodja (2025) offer valuable critical race readings, yet none systematically analyze the novel through the combined matrix of postcolonial psychoanalysis and transnational critique.

The primary objective of this article is therefore to reframe Mallard's light-skin ideology not as an American aberration, but as a colonial pigmentocracy transplanted into a self-governing Black community and reactivated across the *Black Atlantic*. To guide this investigation, the central research question asks: how does Bennett's novel figure skin-tone hierarchy not as a bounded

domestic institution, but as an epidermalized colonial inheritance rooted in institutionalized mimicry, and what does the younger generation's embrace of phenotype and difference suggest about the possibility of diasporic repair?

To address this gap, this article posits the thesis statement that Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* dramatizes colorism as an epidermalized colonial inheritance and an afterlife of slavery whose structural haunting can only be countered through transnational disidentification and diasporic conviviality. Methodologically, this article conducts a close, theoretically informed reading of Bennett's novel, treating each of its three narrative movements: Mallard's founding, the twins' divergent adulthoods, and the younger generation's countercultural turn, as a distinct textual site read against a specific theoretical apparatus. Framed throughout by F. Fanon's (2008) concept of *epidermalization*, the analysis draws successively on H. Bhabha's (1994) *colonial mimicry*, M. Hirsch's (2012) *postmemory*, S. Hartman's (2007) afterlife of slavery, and P. Gilroy's (1993, 2004) frameworks of the *Black Atlantic* and conviviality, moving from the historical-structural to the individual-psychological, and to the collective-transnational.

The analysis unfolds in three structured parts. The first chapter examines the colonial genealogies of Mallard by tracing the internalization of the plantation wound and the daily mechanisms of institutionalized mimicry and postmemory. The second chapter analyzes the divergent itineraries of the Vignes twins, reading Stella's assimilation as an illusory completion of white fantasy and Desiree's return through the lens of opacity and structural haunting. Finally, the third one explores countercultural reclamation, demonstrating how the younger generation moves beyond national limits toward testimony, disidentification, and a transnational ethics of diasporic repair.

1.1. Mallard as a Fanonian Outpost: The Internalization of the Plantation Wound

Alphonse Decuir's founding of Mallard in 1848, on land inherited from his own father and enslaver, stages in miniature what F. Fanon (2008) describes as the colonized subject's internalization of the colonizer's value system. Decuir does not reject the racial logic that degraded his mother; instead, he inherits its metric and redirects it inward, founding a town whose explicit, multigenerational purpose is to breed Blackness out of its own bloodline: « a town that would get lighter, third by third, fourth by fourth, like a cup of coffee touched with cream » (Bennett, 2020, p. 10). F. Fanon calls this process *epidermalization*: the way a colonized subject comes to inhabit a body that has already been read and devalued through the colonizer's gaze. Read in that light, Mallard's founding gesture goes well beyond an aesthetic preference for light skin. It instills a wound that becomes structural, creating a community organized around the belief that Blackness itself is the injury to be bred out.

Crucially, this is not a wound Mallard's founder invents from nothing. Fanon's (2008) account of colonial alienation insists that the colonized subject's self-hatred is planted by an external apparatus, the plantation and the colonial administration, before it becomes self-sustaining. Decuir's genealogical project only makes sense against this backdrop: his own mixed parentage, the product of forced proximity between an enslaver and an enslaved woman, is itself the historical residue of a colonial order that assigned differential value to bodies by their proximity to whiteness. What Mallard institutionalizes, therefore, is not a novel internal hierarchy, but the afterlife of a colonial one, relocated from the plantation to the town, shifting from external imposition to internal administration.

How the town's founding legend should be read turns on this distinction. While domestic colorism frameworks tend to frame

Mallard's obsession with lightness as a strategy of racial survival within a localized American context of Jim Crow violence, a Fanonian reading combined with P. Gilroy's (1993) concept of the *Black Atlantic* insists on a broader transnational genealogy. Mallard's « mysterious math of lightness, » inherited, lost, or found again across generations, replicates a colonial grammar of value that circulated wherever plantation slavery took root, reappearing in different local idioms throughout the Black diaspora rather than remaining a feature peculiar to the American South. As P. Gilroy (1993) demonstrates by situating Black modernity within a trans-Atlantic circulation of cultural exchanges and shared traumas, Mallard reads not as an aberration of American racial history but as a single node within this transnational network, the *Black Atlantic*.

1.2. The Grammar of Belonging: Bhabhean Mimicry and Institutionalized Surveillance

Mallard's colonial inheritance does not remain confined to founding myth; it is administered daily through practices that produce, more than they simply reflect, the town's racial order. H. Bhabha's (1994) concept of *colonial mimicry* (the colonized subject's compulsion to approximate the colonizer « almost the same, but not quite ») offers a sharper analytical instrument here than the ordinary vocabulary of preference or prejudice. The residents of Mallard are more than individuals who happen to prefer light skin : they constitute a community structurally engaged in performing whiteness for an audience that will never fully recognize the performance, engaging in an anxious and unfinished imitation rather than a stable possession.

The town's annual rituals of assessment make this mimicry clearly legible: gatherings at which children's complexions are measured against the previous generation's, with any perceived darkening received as regression rather than mere variation. As H. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes, the desire for colonial imitation

inevitably engenders ambivalence and surveillance, as the subject mimics an inaccessible model while policing deviations within their own group. Bennett renders the vocabulary of this surveillance explicit: descendants who marry or bear children outside the sanctioned range of lightness are marked by the very term the town reserves for its founding fear, « blueblack » (Bennett, 2020, p. 52). The word does not so much describe pigment as pass a verdict, a way of expelling a body from the category of « almost white » that Mallard's mimicry depends on maintaining.

Marriage operates as the primary mechanism through which this mimicry is administered and enforced. Unions are evaluated not for affective compatibility, but for their genealogical yield and their capacity to move the family line closer to, or further from, the town's implicit standard. This is why Desiree's marriage to a dark-skinned man registers, within Mallard's logic, not as a private romantic choice but as a genealogical failure and a visible interruption of the multigenerational project the town's mimicry exists to sustain. F. Fanon's (2008) observation that the colonized subject polices other colonized subjects on the colonizer's behalf is directly applicable here: Mallard's residents do not require white oversight to enforce their hierarchy, since they have internalized the position of overseer along with the standard being enforced.

What emerges is a form of belonging that is always conditional and never secured. Bhabha's (1994) mimicry is inherently unstable, given that the imitation can never fully close the distance from its model. Mallard's residents live this instability as a permanent, low-grade vigilance, forming a community that polices itself not because it has arrived at whiteness, but precisely because it has not, and cannot ever fully embody it. Read alongside P. Gilroy's (1993) account of the *Black Atlantic*, this surveillance is not a peculiarly Southern neurosis, but a structural feature of any community formed under colonial

pressure to approximate a standard from which it is categorically excluded.

1.3. Transmitting the Afterlife of Slavery: Postmemory and Affective Inheritance

If Mallard's founding legend supplies the colonial logic and its daily rituals administer that logic through mimicry, the intergenerational transmission of skin-tone anxiety raises a fundamental question: how does a wound none of the twins directly experienced, slavery itself, become lived, bodily knowledge for children born nearly a century after emancipation? M. Hirsch's (2012) concept of *postmemory*, developed to describe how the descendants of trauma survivors inherit memories vivid enough to constitute memories of their own despite not living through the original event, offers a precise vocabulary for this transmission. Desiree and Stella do not remember slavery, but they inherit, through their mother Adele's vigilance and Mallard's collective lore, an affective certainty that darkness is danger, as though the plantation's calculus of value had been passed down as instinct rather than instruction.

S. Hartman's (2007) notion of the «afterlife of slavery», meaning the persistence of slavery's logic in the social and psychic structures of the present long after its legal abolition, sharpens this reading further. Mallard's twinned rituals of marriage vetting and complexion assessment are not residues of a completed history, but evidence that the plantation's grammar of value continues to organize kinship and love in the town's present tense. Adele's insistence that her daughters guard their light skin «jealously» (Bennett, 2020, p. 255) is not simply overprotective mothering; it is the afterlife of a plantation economy in which lightness once determined which children were sold and which were kept, transmitted now as maternal anxiety rather than commercial calculation.

The lynching of Leon Vignes, witnessed by the twins as children, functions in this framework as more than a traumatic event: it is the moment postmemory is violently confirmed as accurate. Bennett renders this collapse of inherited fear into lived reality directly: « they had seen their father dragged out into the night, light-skinned like them, but still a nigger to the men who killed him » (Bennett, 2020, pp. 31-32). What the twins inherit, in Hirsch's terms, is now indistinguishable from what they have witnessed; the postmemory of a plantation logic they never lived and the direct memory of a lynching they did both converge on the same lesson, proving that proximity to whiteness is never a stable inheritance but a perpetually revocable loan.

This convergence explains why the twins' subsequent choices cannot be read simply as individual decisions about identity. Both Stella's flight into whiteness and Desiree's return to Black community life are, in Hartman's sense, responses to an afterlife they did not create and cannot fully exit: a colonial arithmetic of value that Mallard's founding encoded and that the sisters' own trauma re-confirmed as law.

2. Divergent Itineraries within the Colonial Matrix

2.1. *Stella's Assimilation: The Illusion of Completed Whiteness and Ontological Secrecy*

Stella Vignes's dramatic flight from Mallard and her subsequent passage into white society have frequently been examined through the lens of individual performance or psychological survival. However, when viewed through a postcolonial framework, Stella's assimilation reveals itself not as an escape from the colonial logic of Mallard, but as its absolute, terminal fulfillment. F. Fanon (2008) asserts that the ultimate teleology of the colonized subject caught in *epidermalization* is the absolute erasure of Blackness: the desperate, ontological

ambition to « turn white or disappear ». Stella's transition from a working-class Black woman to an affluent white suburban housewife in Los Angeles enacts this Fanonian mandate almost to the letter. She crosses more than a social boundary; she acts out the foundational fantasy upon which Mallard was built.

H. Bhabha's (1994) account of colonial mimicry adds a further layer here: an ongoing anxiety, and a necessity of simulation, that no act of assimilation can fully dispel. Stella's whiteness is not a natural biological state, but an intense, unceasing performance that must be guarded against exposure. She lives in a state of ontological secrecy, constructing an entirely fabricated past to protect the fragility of her masquerade. The terror that shadows her domestic life, exemplified by her encounters with her Black neighbor Loretta, whose mere presence threatens to collapse the boundary of her adopted world, demonstrates that complete assimilation is an illusion. As Fanon (2008) notes, the alienated subject who achieves proximity to whiteness does not conquer alienation; rather, they become more deeply imprisoned by the necessity of perpetual surveillance over their own identity.

Consequently, Stella's white life is haunted by the very history she sought to sever. Her existence embodies the failure of the colonial promise: the more perfectly she mimics whiteness, the more absolute her isolation becomes. Far from breaking free from Mallard, Stella remains trapped within its founding arithmetic, having carried its obsession with lightness to its ultimate, self-erasing extreme.

2.2. Desiree's Return: Glissantian Opacity and the Limits of Diasporic Routes

While Stella's trajectory seeks absolute assimilation into white invisibility, Desiree Vignes's path moves in the opposite direction, eventuating in a return to the South and to the Black community she once fled. Yet, read within a transnational and

postcolonial framework, Desiree's return cannot be romanticized as a simple homecoming or a triumphant recovery of lost origins. Instead, É. Glissant's (1997) foundational concept of *opacity* offers a better frame: the right of the colonized or diasporic subject to remain fundamentally unknowable to the dominant regime of transparency and classification. Read through this lens, Desiree's return is marked by negotiation and constraint. She does not return to find a pure, unblemished cultural essence, because the colonial matrix of Mallard has left no such origin untouched.

P. Gilroy's (1993, 2004) distinction between fixed « roots » and dynamic « routes » provides a vital counterpoint to Desiree's trajectory. Her movement across the country, from Mallard to the urban North and back again, highlights that diasporic subjects are defined by transit rather than static belonging. When Desiree returns to Mallard with her dark-skinned daughter, Jude, she re-enters a geography governed by the very pigmentocratic metrics she initially tried to escape. Her return is therefore characterized not by liberation from the town's codes, but by the necessity of living under constraint within them. She occupies the physical space of Mallard while maintaining an internal critical distance, refusing the totalizing transparency demanded by the town's obsession with lineage and skin tone.

In this light, Desiree's itinerary exposes the limits of physical return within a colonized landscape. As S. Hartman's (2007) work on the afterlife of slavery implies, going back geographically does not erase the structural weight of history. Desiree discovers that a community shaped by the plantation's legacy cannot offer an authentic refuge; rather, it remains a contested terrain where the past continues to dictate the terms of social survival. Her return is thus an uneasy negotiation with a haunting structure, illustrating that breaking away from a colonial matrix requires more than a physical reversal of

migration: it demands a fundamental transformation of the structures of value themselves.

2.3. Structural Haunting: The Ghostly Legacies of the Vignes Split

The divergent itineraries of Stella and Desiree, the one vanishing into white suburban assimilation, the other returning to the constrained geography of Mallard, ultimately converge on a shared psychological and social condition: structural haunting. Drawing upon A. F. Gordon's (2008) sociological and psychoanalytical framework of « haunting, » the separation of the Vignes twins amounts to more than a family estrangement or a personal tragedy of broken ties. It manifests as a ghostly presence that disrupts the present reality of both sisters, making visible the violent historical structures they attempted to leave behind. A. F. Gordon (2008) defines haunting as the moment when things that are lost, repressed, or violently instituted make their return felt, transforming social life into a site where invisible forces dictate everyday consciousness.

For Stella, this haunting takes the form of constant, low-grade terror in a world built on the absolute denial of her origins. Living under an assumed identity in Los Angeles, she cannot completely excise her past; rather, her suppressed history returns as a phantom presence, threatening to collapse the fragile edifice of her whiteness at any moment. Her encounter with Loretta, her Black neighbor, operates as a kind of ghostly visitation: a moment where the repressed social reality breaks through the veil of her assimilation. As F. Fanon (2008) observes, the alienated subject lives in perpetual fear of exposure, haunted by the very skin and history they have tried to disavow. Stella's life becomes a sequestered ghost town of her own making, where isolation is the price paid for maintaining an impossible ontological fiction.

For Desiree, the haunting operates through the persistent shadow of the plantation's legacy within the very community she re-entered. The impossibility of fully belonging in Mallard without conforming to its oppressive pigmentocratic metrics means that the past is never truly past. The split between the twins stands as an open wound in both of their lives, functioning as what M. Hirsch (2012) describes as a transgenerational transmission of trauma that cannot be neatly resolved through geographic relocation. Neither Stella's flight nor Desiree's return can exorcise the ghosts of Mallard, because the town itself is built upon a foundational violence that defies simple remediation. Together, the twins embody the structural split of a diasporic community caught between the desire for escape and the inescapable afterlife of slavery.

3. Countercultural Agency and Transnational Re-alignment

3.1. *Disidentifying with Mallard: Jude, Reese, and the Politics of Becoming*

While the generation of the Vignes twins remains caught within the binary choice of assimilation or constrained return, the children's generation, specifically Jude Winston and Reese, embodies a radical departure from Mallard's colonial matrix. Drawing upon J. E. Muñoz's (1999) theory of *disidentification*, which describes a survival strategy that neither assimilates into dominant ideology nor strictly opposes it through counter-hegemonic rejection, Jude and Reese navigate their identities by working on and against the cultural codes they inherit. They refuse the pigmentocratic grammar of Mallard without seeking refuge in an uncritical, romanticized authenticity, transforming their marginalized positions into sites of critical agency.

S. Hall's (1996) conception of cultural identity as a « production » rather than a finished essence, a matter of becoming rather than being, captures this process well. For Jude,

whose dark skin and « blueblack » phenotype marked her as an exile within her mother's hometown, rejecting Mallard's aesthetic hierarchy requires reframing her body not as a site of shame or trauma, but as material for self-invention. Similarly, Reese's navigation of trans identity intersects with Jude's rejection of assigned bodily constraints, creating a shared solidarity rooted in non-normative existence. Together, they enact what S. Hall describes as new cultural politics of difference, refusing to let the plantation's historical arithmetic dictate the boundaries of their selfhood.

By disidentifying with the rigid typologies of race and gender imposed by their respective backgrounds, Jude and Reese carve out a space of resistance. They demonstrate that escaping the afterlife of slavery does not mean finding an uncorrupted origin, but actively forging new vectors of subjective possibility that bypass the local borders of Mallard entirely.

3.2. The 1986 Family Gathering as a Threshold of Testimony

If the younger generation's practices of disidentification open new vectors of subjective possibility, the structural reckoning of the novel finds its spatial and temporal crucible in the 1986 family gathering. Drawing upon S. Felman and D. Laub's (1992) foundational psychoanalytic framework of testimony and trauma, this climactic reunion works as something more than a dramatic family confrontation: it becomes a crucial threshold where repressed histories can finally be articulated and heard. S. Felman and D. Laub argue that trauma resists simple narration because it was experienced too rapidly to be fully registered at the time; it requires a « listener » and a structured witness to bring the unspeakable into the realm of shared human history. The 1986 gathering stages this necessary, if painful, crisis of address between the splintered fragments of the Vignes family.

In this framework, the confrontation between Stella and Desiree, catalyzed by their daughters Kennedy and Jude, breaks the decades-long ontological secrecy that sustained Stella's assimilated life. The meeting forces the phantom presences of their shared past, the lingering ghost of their lynched father and the oppressive pigmentocratic hierarchy of Mallard, out of the shadows and into the relational present. As M. Hirsch's (2012) work on *postmemory* suggests, the children inherit more than the silence of trauma; they actively demand a reckoning with it, functioning as the vital secondary witnesses who compel the older generation to bear witness to their own disavowals.

What this threshold moment makes visible is the impossibility of sealing off the past through geographic flight or racial passing. The 1986 gathering demonstrates that trauma, when left unarticulated, haunts the generations that follow until a collective act of bearing witness takes place. By bringing the hidden fractures of the family into the open, the gathering enacts what S. Felman and D. Laub describe as the passage from a history that repeats itself compulsively to a history that can finally be narrated, transforming the private wound of the Vignes split into a shared moment of historical and psychological reckoning.

3.3. Beyond the Nation: Gilroy's Conviviality and the Horizons of Diasporic Repair

As the novel draws toward its resolution, the narrow, provincial confines of Mallard are ultimately superseded by a vision that stretches far beyond the borders of the American nation-state. P. Gilroy's (2004) conceptualization of *conviviality*, which describes the processes of cohabitation and interaction that make multicultural life ordinary without requiring the erasure of difference, provides the theoretical framework for reading the novel's final horizons of repair. Gilroy contends that planetary humanism and planetary culture emerge as societies learn, in

practice, to live together in difference, dismantling the rigid racial categories inherited from empire and plantation. In *The Vanishing Half*, this convivial ethos is not realized within Mallard's insular, pigmentocratic grid, but within transient, urban, and cross-cultural spaces where the rigid boundaries of race and gender begin to dissolve.

The lives built by Jude, Reese, and even the hesitant re-evaluations of the younger generation point toward a diasporic repair that refuses the zero-sum logic of passing or purity. By moving across geographical routes rather than remaining trapped within fixed national or local roots, these characters enact what Gilroy describes as a planetary consciousness that bypasses the binary structures of white supremacy and internal colorism. Stella's final, quiet acknowledgments and the tentative re-establishment of contact across the generational divide do not erase the historical trauma of the Vignes split; rather, they reconfigure it within a broader transnational geography where survival no longer depends on ontological secrecy or the policing of skin tone.

Ultimately, Bennett's novel concludes by suggesting that healing the afterlife of slavery requires an outward-looking orientation toward the *Black Atlantic* and the global human community. By shifting the lens from the domestic tragedy of a Louisiana town to a transnational matrix of encounter and conviviality, *The Vanishing Half* transforms the local wound of colorism into an opening for planetary solidarity, mapping a horizon where identity is no longer an inheritance of blood or shade, but an unending, shared process of becoming.

3.4. Synthesis and Critical Limits of the Transnational Reframing

Read together, the two generational itineraries traced above are not parallel illustrations of a single thesis but a structured contrast. Stella and Desiree, the twins, remain locked within

Mallard's original colonial arithmetic: one completes it through assimilation, the other lives it through constrained return, and both are haunted by a structure neither can name. Jude, Reese, and the children of the 1986 gathering are not offered a third route that escapes this arithmetic altogether; rather, what changes across the generations is their relation to the wound, moving from the unspoken, half-conscious *postmemory* to the actively narrated testimony that S. Felman and D. Laub's framework makes visible. Disidentification and testimony, in other words, do not undo Mallard's founding violence; they make it speakable, which is a narrower and more modest form of repair than the novel's expansive final gestures toward planetary conviviality might initially suggest.

Evaluating the article's own thesis depends on this distinction. The reading advanced here treats Gilroy's (2004) conviviality as the horizon toward which the younger generation moves, yet a critical reservation is warranted: conviviality, as Gilroy himself insists, describes an achieved condition of ordinary multicultural cohabitation, whereas what Bennett's novel actually stages is a single, still-tentative family reunion and Stella's quiet acknowledgments, hardly evidence of the systemic transformation conviviality implies. Reading the ending as an opening onto diasporic repair is therefore more accurate than reading it as diasporic repair achieved, a distinction the article's earlier sections do not always maintain with sufficient clarity.

A second limitation follows from the density of the theoretical apparatus mobilized across the analysis: Fanon, Bhabha, Hirsch, Hartman, Gilroy, Glissant, Gordon, Muñoz, Hall, and Felman and Laub. Each framework illuminates a specific textual moment, but their cumulative effect risks flattening real differences between them: Fanon's alienated subject, Glissant's opaque subject, and Muñoz's disidentifying subject are not fully compatible theoretical positions, and the article's rapid movement between them sometimes substitutes theoretical

juxtaposition for sustained theoretical argument. Finally, by organizing the analysis around skin tone, the article necessarily brackets other axes of differentiation at work in the novel, particularly gender and class: Reese's transition and Stella's economic ascent are read here primarily as extensions of the color line, which risks underselling the ways gender and class operate on their own terms rather than as mere symptoms of pigmentocracy.

Conclusion

This study has reexamined Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) by displacing domestic readings of colorism toward a transnational and postcolonial framework. By analyzing Mallard not as an isolated Southern anomaly, but as a Fanonian outpost born from the afterlife of plantation slavery, the article demonstrated how the town's obsession with lightness functions as an internalized colonial legacy maintained through Homi Bhabha's mechanisms of mimicry and institutionalized surveillance. The investigation further revealed that the divergent trajectories of the Vignes twins, Stella's assimilation into ontological secrecy and Desiree's return to a constrained geography, represent alternative failures to escape a structural haunting that no physical relocation or racial passing can resolve. Finally, by turning to the younger generation through José Esteban Muñoz's disidentification, S. Felman and D. Laub's psychoanalytic testimony at the 1986 family gathering, and Paul Gilroy's planetary conviviality, the analysis established that true diasporic repair requires moving beyond the insular arithmetic of skin tone. As the synthesis in 3.4 makes clear, however, this repair remains an opening rather than an achieved condition, and the article's reliance on a wide theoretical apparatus leaves the novel's gender and class dynamics only partially addressed. Ultimately, this study suggests that healing

the historical wounds of racial hierarchy demands an outward-looking orientation toward transnational solidarity, transforming the private tragedies of the Black diaspora into an opening for collective, cross-cultural becoming.

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