

TITLE PAGE

**The Secret of England's Greatness**

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## **Abstract**

*The Secret of England's Greatness* is a portrait by Thomas Jones Barker of Queen Victoria meeting an African envoy and presenting him with a copy of the Bible. Painted around 1863, it has become an icon of British imperialism in this period and of the justification of colonial expansion in terms of the transmission of the values of the Bible. As such, the portrait appears confident and unambiguous: the secret of England's greatness is unravelled and the truth is exposed. This article seeks to disturb the apparent absence of mystery in this painted encounter and to examine what remains concealed in the meeting between the white sovereign and the black emissary. Moving from Barker's painting to William Mulready's *The Toyseller*, which was completed in the same years and depicts a black pedlar trying to sell a wooden toy to a white mother and child, the article uncovers, within the language of painting and its surrounding discourses, a different kind of disturbing and exhilarating secret, concerned with racial identity and mid-Victorian desire. Working from a reading of the surface of the paintings to related representations of blackness in nineteenth-century science and culture, the article considers how *The Toyseller* negotiates the proximity of the figures of the black pedlar and the white mother and child and the significance of the compositional gap between them and suggests that Mulready's painting visualises many of the issues that were at the heart of British imperialism in the middle of the nineteenth century, following the abolition of slavery.

## **Keywords**

- Mulready
- Barker
- Victoria

- Racial desire
- Empire
- Art

## The Secret of England's Greatness

There is a painting by Thomas Jones Barker that hangs in London's National Portrait Gallery called *The Secret of England's Greatness* (c. 1863; figure 1). Both the image and its title are emphatic and unambiguous, their aim to reveal the truth behind the mystery of England's might and success; should there be any remaining traces of uncertainty, however, there is a sub-title: *Queen Victoria Presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor*. For most viewers of this large, formal painting the secret of England's greatness is emphatically located, both visually and ideologically, in the exchange taking place between Queen Victoria and the kneeling African; the secret of England's power and empire is the Bible. The secret is unravelled and the truth exposed. Is it possible, however, to disturb the apparent absence of mystery in this painted encounter? Can the statement of fact in the painting's title be turned instead into a question that goes something like this: 'What was the secret *within* England's greatness in the age of Victorian empire?' What remains concealed or untold in the meeting between sovereign and black emissary that might articulate a more fundamental truth about empire, nation and race in the nineteenth century? In order to begin to formulate an answer to these questions, this article will move from Barker's royal portrait to a close reading of a second painting of a white woman and a black man, William Mulready's *The Toyseller* (1857-63; figure 2).

This is an article about secrets; those on the surface of Victorian culture and those woven into the layers of text or pigment on paper and canvas. It is also, therefore, an experiment in methodology and in finding ways of reading and understanding the meanings of visual images that are not solely or necessarily concerned with the context of the image but rather work with the materiality of paintings and the imaginative relationship between the spectator and the work of art. It is a delicate balancing act between providing an adequate

historical context for pictures and engaging with their material specificity. As the social history of art has shown us, works of art are not reflections of meanings created elsewhere in other types of historical discourse; we cannot read them through a filter of reconstructed historical events and find their singular truth. Meaning in art is always a more or less complex comingling of pictorial signs – that may have their preferred reading but is never guaranteed – and the viewers' imagination. The challenge that this article addresses, therefore, is how to work with historical signs *and* the visual imagination. In 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Walter Benjamin stated: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it "the way it really was"... The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized.'<sup>1</sup> In part, this article will suggest that certain visual images can perform the role of Benjamin's historical instants; they can, for some audiences and at particular moments expand our understanding of the past and, more specifically, of the relationship between the past and the present. The two paintings and more particularly Mulready's picture of *The Toyseller* that I will focus on in this article are about nation, race and empire, but their power and affect derives from the ways in which they engage with and incite the imagination; this article will propose that the visual imagination may be a tool of historical analysis that opens out possible meanings that would otherwise escape the scrutiny of context and historical reconstruction.

Both *Queen Victoria Presenting a Bible* and *The Toyseller*, which were completed within a year of each other, are scenes of colonial fantasy; of forms of contact between the heart of empire and the colonial diaspora. Both are projections of ideas about racial and national identity and about the meaning of relationships between the metropolis and the colony, the local and the global. By substituting prepositions, however, the secret *of* England's greatness, to the secret *within*, it is possible to interfere with the apparently comfortable and complacent imperialism of the first picture and find instead, in the language

of painting, a different kind of disturbing and exhilarating secret. This is not simply a matter of discovering complexity behind a surface of apparent simplicity but is about exploring pictorial ambivalence and colour; it involves rummaging in the thickness of mid-Victorian desire and racial relations.

Without dwelling for too long on Barker's painting, there are some things that need to be said about it.<sup>2</sup> Conceived as a royal portrait, *The Secret of England's Greatness* shows Queen Victoria, accompanied by the Prince Consort, the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell, and the Mistress of the Robes, the Duchess of Wellington, who bear witness to the presentation that is taking place between the sovereign and the kneeling African. As **art historian** Jan Marsh and others have shown, although the subject depicted can be related to various colonial visits during Victoria's reign, it is unlikely that the specific event that is depicted ever took place. It is an 'apocryphal anecdote' that turns out to be far more than the sum of its parts.<sup>3</sup>

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1859, the front page of the *British Workman*, a temperance paper founded by the evangelical publisher Thomas Bywater Smithies, recounted the visit of an ambassador from an African king, sent to find the answer to the secret of England's greatness. The wise white queen:

...did not...show the ambassador her diamonds and her jewels, and her rich ornaments, but handing him a beautifully bound copy of the Bible, she said, 'Tell the Prince that THIS IS THE SECRET OF ENGLAND'S GREATNESS.'<sup>4</sup>

Although the story in the *British Workman* is not necessarily the only source for Barker's image, it indicates the potency of the story and its emblematic status within imperial mythology in the years around 1860. The arrangement in the painting of the two protagonists recalls a number of iconic visual precedents such as the visit of the Magi to the Virgin and Child, whilst the kneeling black figure is reminiscent of the typical Abolitionist depiction of

the freed slave. In a sense, however, the meaning of the composition goes beyond any single artistic tradition or convention as the conjunction of white authority and prostrate black man is inevitably caught in a web of centuries of imperial iconography. What draws this image into the nineteenth century and makes its racial ideologies Victorian is, in part, the concept of 'greatness'. Mercy, generosity and Christianity made British society greater than and superior to other societies and the same values justified its colonial role; as Catherine Hall has commented: '[greatness] was riven with paternalism and superiority, and was rooted in ideas about the proper relations of different peoples, classes and genders.'<sup>5</sup>

The Bible is the focus of Barker's portrait composition, which is emphasised by the frame which has a carved Holy Bible at the bottom centre with the engraved words: 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path / I love thy commandments above gold; yea above fine gold.' The value of the Book thus exceeds the value of any goods that the African may have brought with him to give to the Queen; whatever furs and jewels he wears are rendered tawdry in the light of the spiritual value of the Christian Bible. The justification of colonisation in terms of religious conversion was a familiar trope of imperial discourses and the popularity of Barker's painting through touring exhibitions and its dissemination through engravings, is testimony to the clarity and power of its message. Its political legacy continued well into the twentieth century and as Fintan Cullen has shown in his book, *Ireland on Show*, the painting was used in Belfast and Dublin and throughout Irish homes, in the nineteenth century and twentieth century, as a political symbol for both republican and loyalist causes.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth considering, therefore, how the visual impact of Barker's picture is created. Everything in the painting converges at the point where white hands and black hands nearly, but never, *must never* meet, over the transference of the Bible (figure 3). The picture captures the moment that Queen Victoria passes the Bible into the grateful hands of the envoy. As he

takes the gift his index finger hovers, forever, close to the fingers of the monarch; if the image is forwarded a mere instant or two his hand might brush against that of the Queen; but this thought, this touch between black man and white queen, is as unthinkable as it is unavoidable. And so the gap between white hand and outstretched black fingers is fixed permanently on the canvas, suggestive for ever of the possibility and impossibility of touch and as the viewer's gaze rests on the deliberate space between hands, the emptiness seems to resonate with ideological potential.

Perhaps, then, there is a secret *within* the secret of England's greatness. The superiority of the British civilisation over all others and its right to rule a mighty empire was built on emphatic notions of difference and hierarchy and the proper relations between races and nations; all this could begin to unravel, however, through the frisson of a brushing of fingers.<sup>7</sup> There are other ways also in which racial difference begins to unravel. As Bible historian, Hugh S. Pyper has argued, the Queen is far from being an image of a pure or unadulterated Englishness; her clothes and accessories are products of the empire and he even suggests that the Bible itself may be in Arabic rather than the Authorized Version.<sup>8</sup> There is a tension, then, between the painting's efforts to represent difference and racial authority and the untidy manifestations of colonial interrelations and commercial crossings of the boundaries of nation states. In the end it is, perhaps, the representation of skin that insists most emphatically on racial difference and hierarchy. When W. T. Stead wrote about his memories of seeing the painting in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1864, he recalled most vividly:

the dusky envoy, with the flashing eye and upturned face, and the white Queen with the sacred Book.<sup>9</sup>

Stead misremembers the depiction of the envoy whose face is not upturned and whose eyes cannot be said with any certainty to flash, but his elaboration draws out the power of the figure, which lies in a combination of subservience and physical potency. Amongst other



details, critics admired how Barker had depicted the skin of the black man. The *Irish Times* pointed to: ‘many fine passages of paint in the representation of the African’s arm, his jewels, and the jaguar skin on his back.’<sup>10</sup> The diagonal line created by the creamy white skin of Victoria’s arm and hand is continued in the dark skin of the kneeling black man; lighter passages highlight the muscular forearm and the side of the face; his skin reflects the light and gleams. Remember this skin, this surface, it will be seen again in this article and used to even greater effect.

Barker’s subject can be defined as an historical portrait, in that it depicts real historical figures but in an imaginary situation; its royal subject and lofty ideals make it an elevated class of art.<sup>11</sup> The figures and faces in *The Toyseller*, on the other hand, are those of ordinary Victorian folk in a humble and unpretentious setting and these characteristics belong to a category of art, popular in the early and middle of the nineteenth century, called anecdotal genre painting. One of the foremost practitioners of this type of art was William Mulready. Mulready was born in Ireland, in County Clare, in 1786.<sup>12</sup> His father, a leather breeches worker, moved first to Dublin and then migrated to England and William was the first generation of his family to be brought up there. He entered the Royal Academy schools in 1800 and, as Marcia Pointon has pointed out, he was fifty one when Victoria came to the throne. He was, therefore, as much a Georgian as he was a Victorian. Although educated by Catholics, he was able to use his identity as an artist to assimilate into metropolitan culture; he began exhibiting at the Royal Academy of Arts in the first years of the nineteenth century and was eventually elected a Royal Academician in 1816.<sup>13</sup> By the late-1830s he had established his reputation as a devoted student of the life class, a painter of small scale anecdotal genre pictures and as a great colourist. By then, he must also have learned how to negotiate being both a successful artist and an Irish immigrant in a city that dismissed the Irish as ignorant and filthy.

Mulready's Irish Catholic heritage and his working-class background add an additional and inevitably unquantifiable layer of meaning to his paintings. He was, according to art historian Kathryn Heleniak, 'a professed democrat'<sup>14</sup> and it seems probable that he would have supported the agitation for and passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829. Whilst liberalising the relationship between Irish Catholics and the British state, in many ways the legislation seemed to harden Victorian attitudes towards both the Irish in Ireland and those who had emigrated to England; stereotypes of the 'paddy' represented him as ignorant and uncivilized and by the middle of the century he was depicted with simian features, signs of his arrested development and lack of civilization.<sup>15</sup> Anti-Irish prejudices were energetically sustained throughout the nineteenth century and galvanized through analogies between the Irishman and the African. In many texts the Irishman was defined as a white negro, whose debasement was even more abhorrent because of his white skin. In a letter, frequently cited in recent histories, written to his wife in 1860 after a visit to Ireland, the Reverend Charles Kingsley evoked a nightmare image: '...to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins...are as white as ours.'<sup>16</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Irish (and later the Jews) were described as a degenerate race within the British population; for the writers of *Punch* the mystery of the missing link between gorilla and man was solved in the figure of the Irishman:

A creature...is to be met with in some of the lowest districts in London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages; the lowest species of the Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish...<sup>17</sup>

Whilst there are clear similarities between the representation of the African and the Irishman in Victorian racist discourses, the distinctions are perhaps as significant. What was

particular about the Irish within colonial discourse was that they were both white and native; it was without question a socially and politically complex environment for an Irishman in Victorian London.<sup>18</sup> It was also, however, an environment in which Irish people could make it as cultural producers and entrepreneurs, working against the stereotype of the hod-carrying paddy and: ‘a political background where Irish matters were a continual presence...[and of] recurrent political crisis in Ireland.’<sup>19</sup> In their 2005 exhibition of portraits of the Irish in Victorian London, curators Fintan Cullen and Roy Foster included John Linnell’s 1833 portrait of William Mulready as an example of ‘the extent of Irish infiltration of London artistic establishments.’<sup>20</sup> One can only wonder about the compromises involved in this success and the extent of Mulready’s own social and psychological reinvention or camouflage.

This contextualised biographical sketch does not impute a meaning or a politics to his work, rather it introduces the possibility that Mulready felt some empathy with the colonised subjects of his art. Equally, however, it could mean that in spite of his liberal politics and outsider status the identity of the black man was different from his own and that he saw through the eyes of the white artist and coloniser. What is clear is that his Irish heritage was publicly known and was specifically referred to in such diverse texts as Richard and Samuel Redgrave’s account of his work in their *Century of Painters of the English School* (1866) and in satirical descriptions of Mulready’s design for a postal envelope in which he was given the nickname ‘Moll Rooney’.<sup>21</sup>

Mulready specialised in small, pleasing genre scenes of rural family and domestic life, and from the popular literature of the period. Many of his subjects depicted incidents from childhood, of education and truancy, play and rest, cruelty and fear. Mulready painted two versions of *The Toyseller*. The first version was painted in 1835, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1837 and is part of the Sheepshanks Collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum

(figure 4). The second and much larger, almost life-size version of the subject was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1862, shortly before the artist's death, and is now in the National Gallery of Ireland (figure 2).<sup>22</sup> The dates of the two versions of the subject, which Mulready referred to simply as 'The Black' in his Account Book,<sup>23</sup> represent highly significant chronological moments in the timeline of the history of nineteenth-century slavery. In 1833 the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, abolishing slavery throughout most of the British Empire; the legislation commenced in 1834 when slaves were officially, if not completely effectively, emancipated. The following years saw a sequence of negotiated treaties and settlements throughout the world, as one slave-owning nation after another succumbed to the global anti-slavery movement. By the late-1850s, when Mulready started working on his second version of *The Toyseller*, slavery had been abolished in most of Latin America and in 1862, the year of its exhibition at the Royal Academy, the first Treaty was signed between the United States and Britain for the suppression of the slave trade. In 1863 Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and slavery was formally abolished in the United States in 1865 following the Civil War. The period between the two versions of Mulready's painting could be seen, therefore, as marking the triumph of the anti-slavery movement. As Catherine Hall has shown, however, this was a tense and transitional period within British imperial history.<sup>24</sup> Predating the significant colonial growth of the late-nineteenth century, it was a time of emancipation *and* of a hardening of racial thinking in response to imperial crises such as the Sepoy uprising in India in 1857 and the rebellion at Morant Bay in Jamaica in 1865. These were years of competing representations of colonial subjects and of relatively unstable stereotypes; when analogies could be drawn between 'primitive' races and the indigent poor, and between African and Irishman and Hindu.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, race, in this period, was not necessarily understood in terms of a binary distinction of white race here and 'other' races there; increasingly, people of African and Asian origin and descent were settling in

England and were a more or less visible feature of the metropole.<sup>26</sup> These were years when people did not necessarily stay in the places where they had been put, but rather engaged in alternative passages that created far more direct encounters between coloniser and colonised.

By first choosing the subject of *The Toyseller* in 1835 and returning to it in 1862, Mulready was entering a world in which migrations and journeys by freed and runaway slaves were part of modern existence and in which categories of class, gender and race were changing and being contested; it was a context in which paintings could matter. There are indications also that the subject of relationships with outsiders and of imperial migrations held a particular significance for the artist. He worked on the subject of the encounter on English soil between the outsider and the indigenous population in *Train Up a Child In the Way He Should Go* (The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1841, in which two white women in a rural setting encourage a child to give alms to three begging Indian sailors. He may also have painted a portrait of the African-American actor Ida Aldridge in the character of Othello (1840-1863), currently in the collection of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Mulready also returned to the subject of the toyseller and that the second version was a large canvas, larger than many genre pictures, would also suggest that the theme had a particular resonance for the artist.

The Victoria & Albert online catalogue entry on the painting endorses the view that the earlier version should be regarded as a preparatory oil sketch for the larger version, explaining that the subject would have attracted Mulready because of his interest in the painting of colour. The idea that African and Caribbean skin offers an interesting formal challenge to the painter interested in colour was repeated throughout the nineteenth century and continues to be disseminated in some histories of art. The entry on the earlier version of *The Toyseller* in the V&A's online catalogue suggests that it was: '...a subject that clearly possessed a special attraction for a colourist of Mulready's outstanding ability.'<sup>28</sup> This

redefinition of the subject of racial difference as a formal artistic exercise is utterly inadequate; it is clear that as Mulready painted, returned to and recast the figures in *The Toyseller*, the subject had accrued layers of historical meaning and feeling that articulated much more than a love of pigment.

It is difficult to condense the layers of signification in Mulready's later version of *The Toyseller*. The key characteristics for genre painting in this period and the criteria by which they were judged were character, story and expression, and yet, in a number of his works, Mulready seemed to revel in, or at least to explore ambiguity. At the same time that he worked on the earlier and later pictures of the black pedlar, he also painted two versions of another subject that might almost be called a white interpretation of the *Toyseller* format. The Victoria & Albert Museum's 1836 painting, *Brother and Sister*, depicts three white figures in a wooded landscape (figure 5). The central figure, a young woman carrying an apprehensive baby, has her back to the viewer, while a young man puts his arm around the two figures and plays with the baby. Originally entitled *Pinch of the Ear*, the new title was perhaps an attempt to defuse the ambiguity in the relationships between these figures. The differences between this composition, however, and the contemporaneous *Toyseller* are clearly visible and need minimal description; the title *Brother and Sister*, stabilises the more uncertain relations in *The Toyseller* and makes possible the physical intimacy of the man's gesture, as he encompasses the body of the white woman with his arm in order to pinch playfully the ear of the bashful baby. Mulready reworked the brother/sister composition in a later version called *The Young Brother*, in the collection of the Tate (1856-7, figure 6). There are many generic similarities between these two later versions of the brother/sister composition and *The Toyseller*; both canvases are concentrated on the relationship of three figures and the anecdotal interest of the male figure's attempts to amuse and placate the nervousness of the baby. Far more striking, however, are the differences between the images and the pictorial tensions and uncertainties

that are highlighted through this contrast; the black pedlar is a manifestation of the transnational and intercultural exchanges of the mid-nineteenth century and of the collapse, in the aftermath of slavery, of the opposition between the local and the global – like the African envoy in *The Secret of England's Greatness*, the pedlar must never touch white skin, he must not enter the symbolic space of the white woman and child, not even in play or in genre painting.

Mulready's later version of *The Toyseller*, shows a black pedlar trying to sell to a white woman and baby, one of a basketful of wooden rattles that he carries over his arm. The baby, who is held in the woman's arms (and she wears a wedding ring, so we might assume that she is the mother), appears apprehensive in spite of the attempts of the woman to reassure him. The figures are set in an English rural location, by a cottage with trees and sunflowers. In the background, behind the head of the toyseller, there is a blue sky and an indigo sea. The painting was left unfinished at the artist's death, although it was exhibited in that state at the Royal Academy of 1862. The juxtaposition of the black pedlar and the white mother points, inescapably, to a world-embracing political system; its rural location simply emphasising the way in which the painting articulates national and global, racial and sexual identities.

The minimal but symbolically yawning gap between black and white skin that was noted in Barker's portrait of the Queen and the envoy can be seen again in Mulready's painting. Although the adult figures are in close proximity and share the objective of attracting the attention of the baby, they do not overlap either physically or pictorially. If the black man were to raise his left arm there would be no danger of his touching the body of the white woman...unless they lent a little towards each other. Instead, there is a series of compositional echoes: the angle and tilt of their heads; the lines of their shoulders and arms; the warm, complementary hues of their clothing. They are frozen forever beyond touch but

within compositional harmony. There is surely an overt politics to this spatial arrangement, this rift in the physical relations between the figures. In *Civilising Subjects*, her wonderful study of the colonial encounter in the British imagination of the mid-Victorian period, Catherine Hall puts it this way:

The right to colonial rule was built on the gap between metropole and colony: civilisation here, barbarism/savagery there. But that gap was a slippery one, which was constantly being reworked.<sup>29</sup>

*The Toyseller* is one such reworking of the gap between the local and the global within imperial rule.

The encounter within a rural setting makes **this pictorial meeting** so much more significant than if it had taken place within the city; it is the heart of the imagined indigenous community, of British civilisation that is whiter than white and purer than pure. **Paul Gilroy has discussed the association of the black presence in Britain with an anti-urbanist discourse; black life, he writes, is defined in terms of the danger and disorder of the city and he continues: ‘How much less congruent is a black presence with the natural landscapes within which historically authentic English sensibility has been formed?’<sup>30</sup> Safer, somehow, to corral colonial and racial others within the uncertain and shifting populations of the great Victorian cities than to acknowledge their presence in the traditional and natural environment of the English landscape; and yet, this is exactly Mulready’s gambit in setting *The Toyseller* in a rural location. In this move, he activates a range of meanings concerning the black presence in England and the constant migrations and journeys that is their condition of existence.**

**The subject of the pedlar, or itinerant merchant, doubles this sense of movement and journeying. The pedlar was a fairly common theme in Victorian genre painting, although the protagonist was more usually an older white man.<sup>31</sup> The pedlar was an ambiguous social type,**



basically a wandering merchant, but with connotations of being a trickster and of possibly being a threat to respectable society.<sup>32</sup> The pedlar was also depicted as a traveller, a foreigner from distant lands, who crossed the country through far-flung villages and hamlets. Whilst this interpretation of the itinerancy of nineteenth-century pedlars was commonplace, it is also important to acknowledge that pedlars came from somewhere, that they had origins and a personal and social framework, that are more usually ignored. Historian, Laurence Fontaine has described peddling as having two indivisible spatial dimensions: ‘...the homeland..[and] the marginalized regions from which it developed.’<sup>33</sup> Like the black experience, therefore, the experience of the pedlar was one of departures, journeys and marginalization within the settled population. Pedlars were part of a commercial culture; not simply a folk figure of traditional economic activity, they linked towns and villages, often picking up goods in city centres or on the continent and then spreading them throughout rural districts. The key encounter, therefore, was between the travelling merchant and the sedentary buyer; it was a ritualised exchange that mediated between urban and rural communities and created new markets and forms of consumption.

As Betty Naggar has shown in her study of Jewish pedlars in this period, peddling was a common activity for migrants and a way of avoiding begging. It was a hard life, with pedlars often working specific routes and either paying for lodgings or sleeping out. Pedlars were regulated by legislation that differentiated licensed hawkers from unlicensed ones.<sup>34</sup> Licenses were relatively expensive but were not required if the pedlar made the goods themselves; clearly, though, there was room for movement between these different forms of peddling: a pedlar might combine hawking with begging and might sell goods made by others alongside homemade wares. If the pedlar was from overseas or a recent immigrant then it was likely their English language would be limited and so the pedlar had to make a sale through an amusing performance as much as a patter, persuading their buyers through an animated

telling of their journeys and the qualities of their goods.<sup>35</sup> The arrival of the pedlar might be greeted with anticipation and excitement, or with fear and trepidation; it was an encounter rich in cultural fantasy and possibility.

So we begin to have a perception of who Mulready's toyseller might be and what kind of activity he is involved in. There is very little historical material specifically on the figure of the black pedlar and it is not possible to say with any conviction how common a sight they were in the Victorian countryside. There is, however, an anonymous anti-slavery tract, published in 1826, that offers one narrative for the black toyseller; it is, of course, a fictitious life-story, but let us take it as one possible back history to the figure in Mulready's painting, or at least, one possible narrative that the painting's viewers might have brought to it.<sup>36</sup> The tract tells the story of two boys who initially taunt the toyseller but are then persuaded by an older relative to invite him into their home and listen to his story. The readers learn through a first-person narrative that the pedlar's name is Octychee and that he was originally from Senegal and now makes his living selling toys and trinkets in England, travelling twice a year to France in order to pick up his goods. Octychee tells his listeners that he had been a slave on a Spanish plantation in St Domingo and later became a free servant on an English plantation in Jamaica, where he had established a close relationship with the family. Whilst travelling back to England with this family he had been shipwrecked on the French coast and, inevitably, it transpires that he is the faithful and long-last servant of the white family to whom he tells his tale. Octychee's story is one of constant journeys and passages, across oceans and seas and within the English landscape. It is a story of Christian charity, coincidence and reconciliation; it is a fiction that might fill the canvas of Mulready's painting. The deep blue sea behind the toyseller's head and the white tails of his headdress that are so easily, so unavoidably, mistaken for the sails of ships, make his existence

inseparable from the story of journeys, of what Paul Gilroy has so memorably named ‘The Black Atlantic’.<sup>37</sup>

This is the man who encounters the white woman and child outside a rural cottage. There is, of course, an obvious religious precedent for the relationship between these figures, that secures for it additional gravitas and moral respectability. The mother and child are an updated, secularised version of the Madonna and Child and, in this context, and in kind with Barker’s portrait of the African envoy, the pedlar takes on the meaning of an impoverished black magus, presenting a gift to the baby Jesus, rather than trying to hawk a wooden toy.<sup>38</sup> Even the Adoration of the Magi, however, unsettles the precarious meanings in the painting. If the woman buys the toy from the pedlar, there is an exchange - rattle for money; if, however, the toy is given as a gift there is a sense of indebtedness. ‘To give’, wrote Marcel Mauss, ‘is to show one’s superiority’; it serves as a method of social control.<sup>39</sup> To give also imposes an obligation on the receiver to reciprocate in some way; a debt that has to be repaid. Far better, then, for the pedlar to sell his toy than to present it to the white baby as a gift.

The whiteness of the white woman signifies her maternal purity and respectability, her ‘moral and...aesthetic superiority’, as film historian Richard Dyer puts it.<sup>40</sup> To be white is to be clean, to have erased all dirt from oneself, for a woman it is to be a member of the fair sex. Within colonial ideology, the white woman has both a domestic and a civic mission; she bears white babies and acts as the empire’s social and moral conscience. She has a civilising mission, instilling moral codes and duties and offering maternal guidance to both the white child and the black man.<sup>41</sup> The depiction of the carnation of the white skin was noticed by critics when *The Toyseller* was exhibited in 1862; most admired the beauty of the woman’s flesh tones, although others found the highlights too crude and more suited to the smaller scale in which Mulready usually worked.<sup>42</sup> The rosy blush can be seen on the mother’s face and the baby’s cheeks and arms; it gives the white skin variety and complexion and is a sign

of the subject's sensitivity and feeling; as art historian Angela Rosenthal has argued, the blush makes whiteness legible.<sup>43</sup> The suffusion of pink reveals the skill of the painter and the corporeality of the painted figure; it is a sign both of female modesty and the possibility of sexual desire, an instinctive and uncontrollable corporeal expression that has both moral and physical associations.<sup>44</sup>

The baby's Anglo-Saxon features were also mentioned by the critics; the review in the *Morning Post* commented on the 'flaxen hair' and 'bright blue eyes'.<sup>45</sup> The critic for the *Examiner* had an almost visceral response to the body of the child, observing its 'fair, soft brilliant flesh that looks as if a touch would dimple it.'<sup>46</sup> What hypothetical pictorial gesture is the reviewer imagining here exactly? What detail has conjured this thought of dimpled, dented baby flesh? The pedlar's hand flexed over the rim of the basket is one of many exquisitely finished and precise details in the painting (figure 7). Each joint of every finger is separately and lovingly articulated; every phalange, each bony knuckle and fingernail evokes the physicality of this man. If this painting is unfinished, how could the artist have done any more to this hand? Are these the hard, dark fingers that will depress the chubby arm of the white baby?

*The Toyseller* is a visual discourse on skin and the mid-Victorian meanings of blackness and racial difference. Within the inherited language of eighteenth-century aesthetics, blackness was defined as an attribute of sublime terror. Edmund Burke quoted the apocryphal story of a boy born blind but later regaining his sight:

...the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him great uneasiness; and  
...some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with  
great horror at the sight.

'The horror' he added, was nothing to do with association, but was a result of 'natural operation.'<sup>47</sup> It was natural and inevitable, therefore, that the baby should be afraid of the

toyseller; the review in the *Examiner* described: ‘a child in a fair nurse’s arms...averts its eyes from the face of *A Toyseller*...because he is black’, and while the *Art Journal* sympathised with the plight of the poor pedlar, it conceded that ‘other children would turn away in like manner.’<sup>48</sup>

The pedlar’s identity and history are projected onto the surface of his body, inscribed on his skin in a process which Frantz Fanon has described as the ‘epidermalization’ of colonial inferiority.<sup>49</sup> Black skin was not only a source of terror, however, it was also a source of fascination. For artists and racial theorists, black skin possessed a kind of sheen or gloss that reflected rather than absorbed light. In a diary entry during a trip to North Africa, Eugène Delacroix sketched a black man washing a horse and noted ‘the Negro just as black and glistening.’<sup>50</sup> Art theory in this period reprised the language of the eighteenth-century slave sale, which often commented on skin quality as a way of enhancing the value of the slave; one boy offered for sale in 1771 was described as: ‘friendly...healthy, fond of labour, and for colour, an excellent fine black.’<sup>51</sup> Perhaps, though, art does more than simply repeat the rhetoric of slavery, it gives that language a new legitimacy, formalised and rich in aesthetic displacement.

It is a short move from the slave sale notice, to the language of Delacroix and the ghastly diatribes of Thomas Carlyle in his ‘Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question’, first published in 1853 and reprinted in 1869 and several later editions. Carlyle’s writings on the black population of the post-emancipation sugar colonies are loathsome and an extended demonstration of the notion of colonial ambivalence. Images of indolence and putrescence are punctuated with visions of beautiful, half naked black men drinking rum while the islands revert to their jungle origins. Carlyle poses a rhetorical question:

Do I, then, hate the Negro? No, except when the soul is killed out of him, I decidedly like poor Quashee; and find him a pretty kind of man. With a pennyworth of oil, you

can make him a handsome glossy thing.<sup>52</sup>

What does it mean to admire shining black skin; what is the seductive quality of this reflective surface? Perhaps it lies partly in the ambivalence that Steven Connor has described between ‘the possibility of moistness or oily lubrication, and the shell-like hardness of high polish.’<sup>53</sup> The fantasy of shining skin is produced also through a linking of sight and touch; the reflective qualities of the skin create pleasures that derive from a sense of touch that is aroused by the gaze. We do not need to touch the oiled body described by Carlyle and painted by Mulready to feel the smooth, slippery curves and planes.

*The Toyseller* is lit by a source that is outside and to the left of the frame and slightly in front of the pedlar. The light thus glances across the left side of his face and shoulder and then bathes the mother and child in a direct glowing beam. It attracts the blooms of the sunflower on the right, which open and stretch in the direction of the pedlar and the source of light. The effect of this lighting is to divide the canvas in half; whereas the light on the black pedlar gives a reflective quality, the light on the two white figures suffuses their bodies and makes them glow. Richard Dyer has discussed the ways in which what might be called the racial politics of illumination has been expressed in twentieth-century film lighting. Cinematographers observed that black skin needed more lighting and advised using moisturizer to create a light sheen. As Dyer comments:

Shine...is light bouncing back off the surface of the skin. It is the mirror effect of sweat, itself connoting physicality, the emissions of the body and labour.<sup>54</sup>

The habitual uses of film technology thus share and perpetuate the white biases of nineteenth-century painting, turning the bodies of black actors into the shining, reflective surfaces of the beautiful indolent Quashee.

Almost without exception, reviewers of *The Toyseller* in 1862 saw the composition as a study in contrasting types, a demonstration of Mulready’s diverse skills at life drawing and

painting. What else, however, might this visual amalgamation of racial types represent?

There is a long tradition of the conjunction of white women and black servants in European art (see, for example, Joseph Wright's *Two Girls and a Negro Servant*, 1769-70). As Marcus Wood has shown, this device provided:

...a space for a non-threatening but intense relationship with the black body. A carefully controlled form of 'love' that could be sexually charged.<sup>55</sup>

Mulready's pedlar is not a servant but his painted body provides a fantasy space for a covert but insistent and highly transgressive sexual desire. For every expression of the hideous ugliness of the black races, there was an inescapable and irresistible confession of attraction and admiration. In his *Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man*, published in 1831, Thomas Hope described a Nubian tribe, unlike all other Africans, who might be models for Apollo:

Their complexion indeed still is dark, but it is the glossy black of marble or jet, conveying to the touch sensations more voluptuous even than those of the most resplendent white.<sup>56</sup>

Like Thomas Hope, the art critics of the 1860s are drawn into the same fluctuating dynamic of disgust and desire: they admire the 'black man's big frame'; his 'black and brawny' body and 'bronze hue'. They even admire the 'suffused whites' of his eyes...they just wish that Mulready had painted it all a bit smaller.<sup>57</sup> This was not a little genre picture, it was life-size and the black pedlar imposed himself on the viewer, made them look at his skin, his body, the effects of which could not be contained within the conventional language of art criticism.

Nineteenth-century racial theories worked to classify and separate races, to demonstrate white superiority and to justify the authority of Britain over its subject peoples. The fear of miscegenation, of inter-racial sex, struck at the heart of Victorian racial theory. Sexual mixing with inferior subjects might bring about a disastrous dilution of British racial strength and destabilise the foundations of the Empire and racial scientists pointed to the

sterility of the mule as an instance of the dangers of intermixture and of the inevitability of degeneration.<sup>58</sup> The repulsion from the idea of inter-racial sex was continually transmuted in this period into expressions of attraction towards other races and nineteenth-century representations of race were defined across what Robert Young has called an ‘ambivalent axis of desire and aversion’, he describes:

...a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically.<sup>59</sup>

*The Toyseller* is poised on this axis between attraction and aversion, between maintaining a sense of essential difference and expressing a desirability that threatens to undo the entire construct of racial distinction. In spite of its foregrounding of contrast, the painting can never undo the fact that the three figures: pedlar, mother and baby are made of the same matter, mixed on the same palette and laid on the same canvas. Mulready developed a particular technique of painting, applying thin layers of pigment directly on to a white ground and covering them with transparent glazes.<sup>60</sup> The figures have been built up together layer by layer in a painterly enactment of racial intermixing.

To look at length at this image, these three figures, is to be drawn into a way of seeing that engages not only with historical context and contemporary meaning but also with speculation and the visual imagination. It is to move beyond what is shown and to reflect on a series of ‘what ifs’. Pictorial narrative is not contained by the single moment depicted within the frame of the picture, it invites the spectator to extend the narrative, to engage in wonder and the imagination. ‘What if’ the baby was to overcome its fear of the other and to turn its head towards the black toyseller and decide to take the rattle, to reach, to stretch out for it? For surely the baby would have to stretch for the toy, which seems just beyond its grasp, it would have to make contact with the pedlar. ‘What if’ the woman were to turn her head away



from the baby and look at the black man, making their complicity to persuade the child explicit and creating a bond between them and over the body of the baby. 'What if' the black man were to give up on this panicky, nervous baby and turn away to face the blue sea, the middle passage, the space of migrations and journeys. And... 'what if' the baby was not so blatantly white but was mixed race, thus turning this anecdotal genre picture into the kind of family scene painted so often in this period by artists such as David Wilkie, Thomas Webster and Mulready himself.

In 1953 *Harper's Magazine* published an essay called 'Stranger in the Village', written by the African American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin.<sup>61</sup> It described his experiences of staying in a small, though not completely remote, Swiss village, and the reactions of the villagers towards his presence. It is immediately clear that these people have not seen a black man before; they stare, they call him nigger and the children scream in terror as he approaches. In time, they become more used to him but they never lose their sense of astonishment, amusement and curiosity. For Baldwin, the Swiss village is a microcosm of the West and his experience of being a black man in a white world; the forced good humour and the necessity of hiding his real feelings, represent a long history of the black man's experience of being in the heart of empire. It is the experience of the fictional Ocychee and perhaps both the African envoy and the black toyseller. He describes an 'internal warfare' between the conflicting emotions of 'rage, dissembling and contempt' (140), as both black and white negotiate the legacy of years of colonial power. It is 'a very charged and difficult moment', Baldwin writes, 'when the black man insists... that the white man cease to regard him as an exotic rarity and recognize him as a human being.' (141)

Is this the moment depicted in *The Toyseller* and the complex of emotions that the pedlar experiences as he patiently coaxes the frightened child? Is this the anger and contempt that are just, barely discernible in his expression and that critics almost saw in his eyes and

his body? Does the white mother recognise in the pedlar what Baldwin calls ‘the rage of the disesteemed’ (140); does she comprehend the weight of history that exists in their interaction, their encounter in this rural place?

*The Toyseller* is a painting about cultural insiderism and outsiderism; of what it means to belong to or to intrude within the imagined nation in a period of colonialism.<sup>62</sup> Rather than being built on the binary of savagery, otherness there, civilisation and belonging here, *The Toyseller* shows that colonized subjects do not stay in their place but trace alternative passages and become part of the fabric of England, dissolving that ideological and pictorial gap between the local and the global, the nation and the empire. In his portrait of Queen Victoria’s meeting with the African envoy, Thomas Barker claimed to reveal the secret of England’s greatness. The secrets proved to be more concealed than his painting suggested, however. Through a journey into Mulready’s painting *The Toyseller*, along anti-Irish prejudice and the black experience in rural Victorian England, other hidden registers have been exposed that offer different ways of understanding race and nation, gender and sexual desire. What is the secret within England’s greatness? It is that the pedlar and the white woman are connected through art and history and that they are both part of the nation. The secret is, as James Baldwin wrote: ‘This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again.’ (149)

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## NOTES

An earlier version of this article was originally given as a keynote lecture at the NAVSA, BAVS, AVSA joint conference on ‘The Global and the Local’, held at Ca’Foscari University of Venice and Venice International University, 3-6 June 2013. My thanks to the organisers for inviting me to give the lecture and to the audience at the conference for their comments and ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in Hannah Arendt, ed. *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1972) p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> On Barker’s painting see National Portrait Gallery, registered packet 4969; Adrienne Munich, *Queen Victoria’s Secrets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) pp. 143-7; Jan Marsh, ‘Icon of the Age: Victoria and *The Secret of England’s Greatness*’, in Jan Marsh, ed. *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art* (Manchester Art Gallery and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, in association with Lund Humphries, 2005) pp. 57-67; Hugh S. Pypers, *The Unchained Bible: Cultural Appropriations of Biblical Texts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012) pp. 6307.

<sup>3</sup> Marsh, ‘Icon of the Age’, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Queen Victoria and the Bible’, *British Workman*, no. 60, 1 December 1859, p. 237. The text was accompanied by a half-page engraving entitled ‘This is the Secret of England’s Greatness’.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002) p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> Fintan Cullen, *Ireland on Show: Art, Union, and Nationhood* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) pp. 71-6. For reproduction of a Loyalist banner decorated with an adaptation of *The Secret of England’s Greatness* see Belinda Loftus, *Mirrors: Orange and Green* (Dundrum, Co. Down: Picture Press, 1994) plate 10.

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<sup>7</sup> On the potential of racial mixing to destabilise empire there is a rich literature including Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) and Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality and Empire', in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds. *At Home With the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 122-42.

<sup>8</sup> For this reading of Barker's painting see Pyper, *The Unchained Bible*, pp. 63-6. The quotes on the frame of the painting militate against the interpretation of the bible as an Arabic translation.

<sup>9</sup> W. T. Stead, *Studies of the Sovereign and the Reign: A Memorial Volume of the Great Jubilee, June 22 1897* (London: Review of Reviews Office, 1897) as cited in Munich, *Queen Victoria's Secrets*, p. 145. When James Joyce drew on the story of the African delegate's visit to Queen Victoria for an episode in the 'Cyclops' chapter of *Ulysses*, his character reads a newspaper report that refers to the Queen as the 'white squaw'; see Cullen, *Ireland on Show*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 March 1864, p. 3, as cited in Cullen, *Ireland on Show*, p. 72. See also National Portrait Gallery, registered packet, 4969.

<sup>11</sup> See the entry for the painting on the National Portrait Gallery's website [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk).

<sup>12</sup> The key secondary sources on Mulready are K. M. Heleniak, *William Mulready* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) and Marcia Pointon, *Mulready*. A book with catalogue published to accompany the exhibition *William Mulready: 1786-1863* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1986-7). See also James Dafforne, *Pictures by William Mulready RA With Descriptions and a Biographical Sketch of the Painter* (London: Virtue, Spalding and Co., 1875) and Frederic G. Stephens, *Memorials of William Mulready, RA*. Revised and enlarged edition of *Masterpieces of Mulready* (1867) (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890).

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<sup>13</sup> Pointon, *Mulready*, p. 17. Pointon suggests that as a result of irregularities in his personal life and perhaps because of his family background, Mulready's election as an Associate and as a full member of the Royal Academy took longer than was usually the case for successful artists in the period.

<sup>14</sup> Heleniak, *William Mulready*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> The representation of the Irish Celt as inferior to the Anglo-Saxon and the physical stereotype of the Irish as a lower evolutionary order is discussed by L. P. Curtis in *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, Conn.: Conference of British Studies at the University of Bridgeport, Conn., distributed by New York University Press, c.1968) and in *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, c.1997).

<sup>16</sup> *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*, edited by his wife Frances Kingsley, vol. 2 (New York and London: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1877) p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Missing Link', *Punch*, 18 October 1862, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Curtis's argument that the Irish were defined as a race and in ways that were analogous to the racism shown towards the black population in the USA is refuted in Sheridan Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England 1789-1900', in Colin Holmes, ed. *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978) pp. 81-110. Luke Gibbons suggests that the stereotype of the American Indian may be a better analogy in 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', *Oxford Literary Review*, 13: 1-2 (1991) pp. 95-117.

<sup>19</sup> R. F. Foster, 'An Irish Power in London: Making It In the Victorian Metropolis', in Fintan Cullen and R. F. Foster, *'Conquering England': Ireland in Victorian London* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005) pp. 18, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Cullen and Foster, *'Conquering England'*, p. 66.

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<sup>21</sup> See Richard Redgrave and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School With Critical Notices of Their Works and An Account of the Progress of Art in England* (London: Smith Elder, 1866) chapter XXI 'Genre Painting'. Marcia Pointon refers to the anti-Irish discourse on the occasion of the publication of Mulready's design of the postal envelope in *Mulready*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> For discussion of *The Toyseller* see Cora Kaplan, 'Black Figures / English Landscape', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27:2 (1999) pp. 501-5; Heleniak, *William Mulready*, pp. 103-7; and Marsh, *Black Victorians*, p. 151. Thanks also to Brendan Rooney at the National Gallery of Ireland for his help in accessing their dossier on Mulready's painting.

<sup>23</sup> On Mulready's Account Book see Heleniak, *William Mulready*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> The literature on the visual representation of race in Victorian culture is now extensive, see, for example Shearer West, ed. *The Victorians and Race* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, eds., *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World 1660-1830* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), Julie F. Codell, ed. *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> On settlement of black people in Victorian England see David Killingray, 'Tracing People of African Origin and Descent in Victorian Kent', in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, ed. *Black Victorians: Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003) pp. 51-67.

<sup>27</sup> Aldridge married a white woman in England and following a press campaign against him was forced to leave London and live and work in the provinces.

<sup>28</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O69972/the-toy-seller-oil-painting-mulready-william>.

Accessed 4 February 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 10.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Gilroy, 'Art of Darkness: Black Art and the Problem of Belonging to England', in *Third Text*, 10 (1990) p. 49. This theme of the alienation of the black presence in the English countryside is interestingly explored by the artist Ingrid Pollard in her photographic series *Pastoral Interlude* (1988, V&A), see [www.ingridpollard.com/pastoral-interlude.html](http://www.ingridpollard.com/pastoral-interlude.html).

<sup>31</sup> Examples of the treatment of this subject in genre painting include David Henry Friston, *The Toyseller*, c. 1869 and John Burr, *The Toyseller*, 1862; the travelling peepshow was also depicted see John Burr, *The Peepshow*, 1864.

<sup>32</sup> The primary sources on nineteenth-century pedlars are Felix Folio, *The Hawkers and Street Dealers of Manchester and the North of England Manufacturing Districts Generally* (Manchester: Abel Heywood, 1858?), [William Green], *The Life and Adventures of a Cheap Jack. By One of the Fraternity*, ed. by C. Hindley (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876). The most useful secondary sources are Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, trans. Vicki Whittaker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), Betty Naggar, *Jewish Pedlars and Hawkers 1740-1940* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1992) and most recently Jeroen Salman, *Pedlars and the Popular Press: Itinerant Distribution Networks in England and the Netherlands 1600-1850* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*, p. 4. An excellent account from which my brief look here at the history of nineteenth-century pedlars is drawn.

<sup>34</sup> On the licensing of pedlars in this period see [Green], *Life and Adventures*, p. 2 and *passim*. and Salman, *Pedlars and the Popular Press*, pp. 102-4.

<sup>35</sup> Naggar discusses the question of language and specifically the use of Hebrew by Jewish pedlars in *Jewish Pedlars*, pp. 44-6. The need for pedlars to entertain is referred to in Salman, *Pedlars and the Popular Press*, p. 81.

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<sup>36</sup> Anon., *Prejudice Reproved: Or, The History of the Negro Toy-Seller* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1826). In deploying the device of the toyseller's first person narrative the author says that he has eliminated the particularities of accent, grammar and lexicon that distinguished the pedlar's speech.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> On the iconography of the Magi in relation to the representation of the black man in Western art see David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (Kingston-upon-Thames: Dangaroo Press, 1985) pp. 30-6 and Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) pp. 9-10. It is referred to in relation to *The Toyseller* in Kaplan, 'Black Figures / English Landscape', p. 502.

<sup>39</sup> On the gift see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1922) (London: Routledge, 1990) and discussed in relation to nineteenth-century class relations in Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationships Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) pp. 251-2.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 70. Mechthild Fend also refers to the superiority attributed to white skin in French art theory is discussed in 'Bodily and Pictorial Surfaces: Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1790-1860', *Art History*, 28:3 (June 2005) pp. 311-39.

<sup>41</sup> The white woman's civilising mission is discussed in Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, *Athenaeum*, 1 February 1862, p. 159 and 3 May 1862, p. 601; *London Daily News*, 5 May 1862, p. 2; *The Times*, 3 May 1862, p. 14; *Morning Post*, 3 May 1862, p. 6; *Art Journal*, June 1862, p. 132.



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<sup>43</sup> Angela Rosenthal, 'Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture', *Art History*, 27:4 (September 2004) pp. 563-92.

<sup>44</sup> The sexual associations of the blush are discussed at length in Rosenthal, 'Visceral Culture', *passim*. See also Charles Darwin, *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872) pp. 310-14 where it is argued that women blush more than men and that blushing is an involuntary response to the transgression of known social rules. The sexual connotations of blushing were of course developed by Sigmund Freud who suggested that blushing, as an excess rush of blood to parts of the body, was the female equivalent of the male erection, see S. Freud, *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and E. Jones 1908-1939*, ed. by R. Andrew Paskauskas (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) pp. 410-11.

<sup>45</sup> *Morning Post*, 3 May 1862, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Examiner*, 3 May 1862, p. 279.

<sup>47</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757) vol. I, section 15. Burke's text is referred to in Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks*, p. 43 and in Paul Gilroy, 'Art of Darkness', p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Examiner*, 3 May 1862, p. 279; *Art Journal*, June 1862, p. 132. Curiously, Heleniak refers to the toyseller as 'a menacing black pedlar', *William Mulready*, p. 104.

<sup>49</sup> On the importance of Fanon's writing on the skin in forming black identity within colonialism see for example Max Silverman, ed., *Frantz Fanon's 'Black Skin, White Masks': New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> As cited in Boime, *Art of Exclusion*, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> As cited in Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question', 1<sup>st</sup> publ. in *Fraser's Magazine*, December 1849, pp.671-679; expanded and revised as 'Occasional Discourse on

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the Nigger Question', London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853) chap. II and reprinted as 'The Nigger Question', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869) p. 182.

<sup>53</sup> Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004) p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Dyer, *White*, p. 122.

<sup>55</sup> Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 404.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Hope, *An Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man*, vol. II (London: John Murray, 1831) p. 400.

<sup>57</sup> Phrases taken from reviews in the *Athenaeum*, 3 May 1862, p. 601; *London Daily News*, 5 May 1862, p. 2; *The Times*, 3 May 1862, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> On colonial sexualities in Victorian racial theories see Levine, 'Sexuality and Empire', pp. 138-40.

<sup>59</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> On Mulready's painting technique see Heleniak, *William Mulready*, p. 136. On the skin as 'analogous to the fabric of the canvas' see Rosenthal, 'Visceral Culture', p. 576.

<sup>61</sup> James Baldwin, 'Stranger in the Village', first published *Harper's Magazine* (October 1953), reprinted in *Notes of a Native Son* (London: Corgi Books, 1969) pp. 135-49. Page references will hereafter be given in the text in parentheses.

<sup>62</sup> The theme of cultural insiderism and relationships with outsiders is discussed throughout Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure 1

T. J. Barker, *The Secret of England's Greatness: Queen Victoria Presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor*, c. 1863. Oil on canvas, 167.6 x 213.8 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London.

### Figure 2

William Mulready, *The Toyseller*, 1857-63. Oil on canvas, 112 x 142 cm. National Gallery of Ireland.

### Figure 3

T. J. Barker, *The Secret of England's Greatness*, detail.

### Figure 4

William Mulready, *The Toyseller*, 1835. Oil on panel, 17 x 22 cm. Given by John Sheepshanks, 1857. Victoria & Albert Museum.

### Figure 5

William Mulready, *Brother and Sister: Pinching the Ear*, 1836. Oil on panel, 30.2 x 24.6 cm. Given by John Sheepshanks, 1857. Victoria & Albert Museum.

### Figure 6

William Mulready, *The Young Brother*, 1856-7. Oil on canvas, 77.5 x 62.9 cm. Presented by the executors of Robert Vernon 1857. Tate.

### Figure 7

William Mulready, *The Toyseller*, 1857-63, detail.