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GHOST IDENTITY: POETICS OF SHADOW AND HYBRIDITY IN PERCIVAL EVERETT'S *JAMES* (2024)

Konan David N'GUESSAN
Université Alassane Ouattara
ORCID iD : 0009-0000-2682-5826
knguessan512@gmail.com

Abstract : This literary analysis examines the reconfiguration of phantom identity in Percival Everett's *James*. She explores the rewriting of the identity of the slave position in the socio-cultural contexts of the United States of America. Adopting the perspective of the runaway slave, this study stages an African-American subjectivity structurally fragmented by the violence of the plantation regime. The study supports the idea that the protagonist operates a conscious psychological and linguistic split, switching between the subaltern dialect expected by whites and a highly literary philosophical English that remains clandestine. With Achille Mbembe's theory of *Necropolitics*, the analysis demonstrates that this spectral condition is not a simple alienation or a psychological mutilation suffered but a perspective of structured invisibility aimed at presenting the slave as the subject of his history. This research paper analyzes the liminal space of the Mississippi River as a chromotrope of suspended freedom allowing the fragmented psyche to come together. By texting his own story, the character James breaks the necropolitical decree that condemned him to obliteration, transforming the literary ghost of the nineteenth century into a sovereign historical subject of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Code Switching, Ghost Identity, Historical Mimicry, Literary Rewriting, Necropolitics

IDENTITE FANTOME : LA POETIQUE DE L'OMBRE ET DE L'HYBRIDITE DANS *JAMES* DE PERCIVAL EVERETT (2024)

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Résumé : Cette analyse littéraire examine la reconfiguration de l'identité fantôme dans l'œuvre James de Percival Everett. Elle explore la réécriture de l'identité du poste esclave dans les contextes socio-culturels des États Unis d'Amérique. En adoptant la perspective de l'esclave en fuite, cette étude met en scène une subjectivité Africaine Américaine structurellement fragmentée par la violence du régime de la plantation. L'étude soutient l'idée que le protagoniste opère un dédoublement psychologique et linguistique conscient, basculant entre le dialecte subalterne attendu par les Blancs et un anglais philosophique hautement littéraire resté clandestin. Avec la théorie de la Necropolitique d'Achille Mbembe, l'analyse démontre que cette condition spectrale n'est pas une simple aliénation ou une mutilation psychologique subie mais une perspective d'invisibilité structurée visant à présenter l'esclave comme sujet de son histoire. Elle analyse l'espace liminal du fleuve Mississippi comme un chronotrope de liberté suspendue permettant à la psyché fragmentée de se rassembler. En mettant en texte sa propre histoire, James brise le décret necropolitique qui le condamnait à l'effacement, transformant le fantôme littéraire du XIXe siècle en un sujet historique souverain du XXIe siècle.

Mots-clés : Code Switching, Identité Fantôme, Mimétisme historique, Nécropolitique, Réécriture Littéraire

Introduction

In 1884, Mark Twain publishes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a milestone in American literature in which the figure of the runaway slave, Jim, serves as a moral catalyst for the young white protagonist. Yet, despite Twain's sympathy, Jim remains a literary subject condemned to the periphery, a passive projection whose speech is filtered through a caricatured dialect. One hundred and forty years later, Percival Everett makes a major epistemological break with his novel *James* (2024). By shifting the narrative focus to the slave, Everett is not satisfied with a simple rewriting; he proceeds to a literary exhumation. Twain's stereotypical "Jim" fades away to reveal "James", a subject with a highly philosophical conscience and a perfect command of the language of the oppressor, which he jealously conceals in the presence of white people. The tension between the performance of submission and the reality of the inner life invites to theorize what may be called the living Shadow. In the context of antebellum America, this spectrality of the Black man is not accidental, it is the direct product of what Achille Mbembe (2019) calls necropolitics. According to Mbembe, the slave regime represents one of the most radical manifestations of state sovereignty, a power that is defined by the right to decide who should live and who should die. Under this paradigm, the slave is kept in a zone of permanent "social death", deprived of legal status, genealogy and voice. So, how can a subject trapped in this architecture of death preserve his ontology?

This study tries to bring forward the idea that the slave is no longer an experimental subject, but an architect of his own history. It posits that in Percival Everett's *James*, ghost identity does not represent a submissively endured psychological alienation under necropolitical oppression; rather, it constitutes a deliberate counter-hegemonic strategy of survival and cognitive sovereignty through which the enslaved subject reclaims historical agency. In this case, dialectal performance and code-switching function as a conscious discursive mask that preserves the protagonist James' inner literacy while blinding white sovereign power. The Mississippi river operates as a chronotropic liminal space enabling the runaway slave's fragmented psyche to decompress, rebuild, and articulate a hybrid identity outside the plantation. The act of writing allows the protagonist to break the necropolitical decree of obliteration, transforming nineteenth-century literary ghost into an empowered historical subject. To examine these hypotheses, the analysis relies on interdisciplinary literary methodology. It combines close reading with Achille Mbembe's necropolitics (2019) to unpack how sovereign power dictates "social death" in the plantation regime. Focusing on Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope (1981) and Chap Nilep's sociolinguistic model of code-switching (2006), the analysis evaluates how language and spaciality function as tools of resistance

Classical literary criticism often perceives the invisibility or psychological doubling of the African-American subject, theorized by W.E.B. Du Bois. He presents the concept of "double consciousness" as a tragic and suffered psychological mutilation. The aim of this article is to reverse this perspective. The analysis supports the thesis that, in *James*, ghost identity is not a pathological alienation, but a strategy of counter-power and existential sovereignty. By voluntarily fragmenting himself through a strict code-switching, the

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protagonist Jim agrees to perform the "social death" demanded by white power to transform his cognitive invisibility into a shield of survival. His shadow becomes his best weapon. To demonstrate this hypothesis, this research paper is structured around three critical axes. First, the study examines the anatomy of this discursive mask by showing how the character James sabotages the necropolitics of the plantation through subversive linguistic mimicry. Second, it explores the geography of the novel by analyzing the Mississippi River as a liminal space, a zone of chronotropic decompression where the fragmented psyche of the slave frees itself from sovereign jurisdiction. then, the analysis evaluates the final appropriation of writing as an act of ontological resurrection, by which the literary spectrum of the nineteenth century is exorcised by ink to impose itself as a sovereign historical subject of the twenty-first century.

1. Double Language, an Anatomy of discursive Mask

The analysis of dual language in the context of slavery underlines an important instrument of dissimilation, protection and self-preservation. While observing the language of the protagonist Jim in Everett's *James*, this investigation demonstrates the capacity of slaves to use language to cover their real perception of their masters in order to avoid any external repercussion. The dual language constitutes an engine of slave identity construction in the plantation. The exploration of this linguistic duality requires to examine code switching as an ontological barrier. It consists in securing slave's identity in a world of violence and death. The inquiry unearths the mechanism of survival in plantation. Language may permit enslaved people to visualize the mask that blinds their masters.

1.1 Code Switching as ontological frontier

Code switching is a linguistic partner that allows to switch from one language to another. This term is broadly discussed in linguistic domain. As for Chad Nilep (2006, p. 1), "code switching is defined as the practice of selecting or altering linguistic so as to contextualize talk in interaction". It means that code switching permits to circumscribe an individual in term his or her social and cultural background. As important as code switching is in linguistics, it is also useful in literature given that it facilitates the understanding of slave's identity construction. In literature, particularly in the context of slave narratives, code switching allows to explore the ghost identity of slaves. In reality, it participates in slave's self-construction and guarantees his sovereignty in the plantation. In Percival Everett's *James*, code switching becomes the instrument through which slaves claim a unique identity. The current observation conceptualizes this identity as a ghost identity because it renders the slave elusive or indomitable. Therefore, slaves go from proper and correct English to a broken one which cannot be inscribe in any category of language. This broken English constitutes the language they use to claim their uniqueness. To understand this position, Everett (2024, p. 23) asserts: "and the better they feel, the safer we are". What diverts reader attention is the translation of this sentence into broken English. The narrator translates "Da mo' betta dey feels, do mo' safer we be". This translation shows the capacity of the slave to speak in a language that better represents his reality.

The vernacular language permits to the slaves to escape white domination. By sounding completely different from masters guarantees slave's freedom of expression. In fact, it reduces any idea of conspiracy and it prevents them from being suspicious. White masters cannot imagine the context of conversation of slaves. As the narrator says "White folks expect us to sound a certain way and it can only help if we don't disappoint them" (2024, p. 21). It means that this language is firstly imposed by the masters and adopted by slaves as a means to emerge from white domination. By imposing this language to slaves, masters implicitly want to figure out how inferior are the slaves. So, slaves pretend to behave in such a way in order to assure their sovereignty over white people. This tactic is what Achille Mbembe (2019) calls "social death". It suggests that slaves accept to be under the control of white people. By pretending so, white masters allow them to freely act. From this approach, the analysis frames the slave's power to speak and freedom of thought. The ghost identity is a pretended death which assures slave's freedom. For instance, Mbembe (2019, p. 75) argues "the slave, treated as no longer existing except as a mere tool and instrument of production, is nevertheless able to introduce almost any object, instrument, language, or gesture into a performance and then stylize it". This assertion demonstrates that the choice of language determines the slave's willing to construct his unique identity.

Code switching constitutes a mechanism of navigating through different worlds. This system permits to destroy barriers between slaves and their masters. It erases the difference between people in a sense that the slave can experience white realities through language. Switching from one language to another, slaves succeed in understanding and feeling the emotions of white people. Therefore, the narrator argues "There was nothing that irritated white men more than a couple of slaves laughing. I suspected they were afraid we were laughing at them or else they simply hated the idea of us having a good time" (2024, p. 27). It means that invisibly slaves control their masters given that they know to make them feel happy and superior. This idea reveals the supremacy of slaves over their masters. These masters seem to have control over their slaves, but in reality, those slaves are the ones who dictate white people how to feel and to behave. Percival Everett's *James* through the protagonist does not present the slave as historical victim. However, he considers the slave as an agent who creates his own identity. This identity compels the masters to implicitly submit themselves to the slaves.

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1.3 Dissimulation, a mechanism of survival

To survive in the plantation, slaves need to dissimilate their real projects behind a typical language. This dissimilation may give birth to the slave's ghost identity. It consists in creating what Colson Whitehead (2026) calls "indomitable personality". It is a form of identity which gives a total freedom to slave to act, think and react without any repercussion. For instance, C. Whitehead (2026, p. 4) asserts "a man cultivates a number of secret wishes that he dare not share with the world, previous things too delicate to exist outside the safe pastures of his mind". therefore, to assure his safety in a world of danger, the slave constructs an identity that mystifies his reality. This ghost identity allows white people to think that they are superior so that they cannot guest what slaves are orchestrating. Then, the narrator says

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"we must let the whites be the ones who name the troubles […] because they need to know everything before us. Because they need to know everything" (2024, p. 22). The narrator assumes that slaves give power to their masters in order to avoid creating tension between them.

To dissimulate the intention of slaves, the narration refers to the concept of parody so as to display the way in which slaves modify White realities. In this section, the slave engenders an indirect and implicit opposition. According to Gerard Genette (1977, p. 15), parody consists in modifying a word or an expression while keeping the same meaning. In *James*, parody is the tool that permits slaves to construct their own reality and system of communication. To understand the type of parody in this analysis, the study refers to words such as 'necessity' and 'heaven'. In vivifying the slave's world, the narrator asserts: "cessity" and "heaben" (2024, p. 17). The narrator uses these words to mean necessity and heaven. However, the parody operates as a mechanism of suppressing and altering certain letters and syllables ('ne' and 'v') to make in the slave's world. This process constructs a unique identity that assures the security of the slave in the plantation. Instead of utilizing the correct spelling of the adverb 'nothing', the slave prefers "nuffin" (2024, p. 18) just to convince a message that masters cannot perceive. In this analogy, the word 'superstitious' becomes a particle of this analysis. This particle underlines the will of the slave to transform the familiarity into strangeness for White folks. The reason why the slave rewrites the adjective superstitious as follow: "stupidstitiousest" (2024:40). The slave tries to guarantee his life. Then, he utilizes an indomitable language in the plantation. Differently from George Orwell's *1984* where characters cannot express their feelings due to the familiar language, Everett's *James* succeeds in generating a world which is elusive for Whites. During slavery, education is denied to all slaves because masters want to preserve the hegemony of power. In Everett's James, the protagonist Jim succeeds in teaching his fellow slaves to read and write. Referring to his ghost identity, Jim organizes the teaching program without alerting the masters. As a matter of fact, the narrator argues:

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> I was in Judge Thatcher's library, a place where I had spent many afternoons while ha was out at work or haunting ducks. I could see books in front of me. I had read them secretly, but this time, in this dream, I was able to read without fear of being discovered. I wondered every time I sneaked in there what white people would do to a slave who had learned how to read. What would they do to a slave who had taught the other slaves to read. (2024:48).

The passage is instructive in understanding how Jim dissimulates his plan to teach other slaves. In reality, Jim uses the broken language, that constitutes the ghost identity of all the slaves, to teach others. In reality, the tense of the verb demonstrates that Jim is revealing what he does. By utilizing the broken language that constitutes the ghost identity of all the slaves, Jim succeeds in breaking one of the norms of slavery which forbids to know to read and write. It means that ghost identity reveals sovereignty of the slave. This identity becomes a sort of mask which transforms the slave into an invisible being. So, it guarantees the survival of the slave.

2. Spatial and mental liminality

Spatial and mental liminality underline a new dimension of the slave's life. This section puts forward the idea that the slave moves to a new space for self-construction and reconstitution. For Bjorn Thomassen (2012, p. 21), "Liminal spaces are attractive. They are the places we go to in search of a break from the normal". In the perspective of this analysis, liminality constitutes the escape of the slave in search of freedom and new departure. Therefore, the analysis tends reveal the metaphor of the Mississippi river as a construction of the protagonist Jim's invisibility; and at the time, the river offers him a new beginning. This section also offers an opportunity to examine how the white boy Huck experiments hybridity Everet's *James*.

2.1 The Metaphor of Mississippi River

The Mississippi river reveals the slave's search for invisibility and a site of exile in Everett's *James*. This invisibility is demonstrated throughout the slave's capacity to zombify himself in order to learn how to read and write. This zombification facilitates Jim's reading and reinforces his power over his master. In reality, the slave's reading process is presented as a divine power that lands over him so that he can read in front of white people, but none of them can notice what he is doing. For instance, Percival Everett (2024:73) argues:

> At that moment the power of reading made itself clear and real to me. If I could see the words, then no one could control them or what I got from them. They couldn't even if I was merely seeing them or reading them […] it was a completely private affair and completely free and, therefore, completely subversive.

This assertion means that once the power reading takes control over the slave, he becomes fixed. Through this zombification, he can freely read and masters cannot detect any movement of intellectual activity. So, the slave appears to be static in master's eyes. In turn, he stares at the letters as something strange for him. Slaves adopt a zombifying attitude to dupe their masters. The Mississippi river renders the slave invisible and indomitable. In fact, the river permits the slave to transcend the physical invisibility to reach the psychological one. Stephanie Fryberg and Sarah Towsend (2008, p. 173) state that "the psychology of invisibility identifies rich and varied social representations as necessary for individuals of all social groups to transcend limiting categorizations and to create well-elaborated self-schemas". This quotation demonstrates that the river constitutes a wall of invisibility for the slave in the sense that when it is reached, he can do everything he wants. In other words, the river is the blind site where masters cannot see what slaves plan. Therefore, Everett (2024:73) articulates: "they couldn't even know if I was merely seeing them, or reading them, sounding them out or comprehending them". This passage illustrates the invisibility of Jim when he reaches the Mississippi river. He becomes invisible so that he can observe, interpret or understand the inner ideas of white people. consequently, Jim's indomitable personality blinds white masters from seeing him. Thus, the river guarantees the security of the slave and reinforces the power of the slave's ghost identity.

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The river constitutes a means of new departure for the escaped slave. In reality, reaching the river and being spat by it play an important role in the liberation and reconstruction of the slave. Thomas Buchanan (2004, p. 370), "the process of escape required that runaways construct a free identity, one that advertised to whites that they were not slaves". It suggests that the escaped slave needs to build an identity that maintains the integrity and the freedom of all the slaves. Under the scope of this study, Everet (2024, p. 84) asserts: "I didn't so much swim to shore as the river spat me out". The fact of being spat out of the river is very significant in the course of this analysis. It signifies the rebirth of the slave in a virgin land where he should construct his own image and assure the freedom of his fellow slaves in the plantation. To understand this new departure of Jim, the narrator adds, "my only solace was that sack of books and paper had been strapped over my shoulder" (2024, p. 84). This assertion highlights the idea that Jim must start his new life with only the skills he acquires through his readings. These skills are symbolized by the present of the books. Th adverb 'only' permits to insist on the potentiality of Jim for the new departure.

2.2 The Psyche of the Hybrid

In the case of this analysis, the psyche of the hybrid consists in exploring the mind of the character Huck in Percival Everett's *James*. This character plays an important role in that he is white boy under the control of a slave, Jim. Huck tends to navigate between his white identity and the Black one. Sometimes Huck fails in adapting himself to the reality of the slaves in the sense that he behaves like masters. As the narrator states: "Huck started laughing and that was all right with me. He pointed at me and laughed harder […] it was always made life easier when white folks could laugh at a poor slave now and again […] I'm sorry, Jim. I just thought it was funny" (2024:77). This extract illustrates the struggle of Huck not to hurt the slave. Differently from novels like Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Rebecca Wolker's *Black, White and Jewish* (2001) where Blacks are compelled to experience hybridity; Everett's *James* embodies a character with white attributes. This character is set to integrate both whiteness and blackness in order to evaluate his attitude and behavior. Huck's presence in the novel shows up the power of the to rewrite the lines of history.

The hybrid character Huck becomes an instrument of protection and security for the protagonist Jim. Split between two worlds, Huck presents himself to white folks as a white boy so as to save Jim from being captured by slave masters. Huck changes his name to sound whiter. Therefore, the narrator points out: "what's yer name, boy?" Huck answers "Johnny, sir" (2024:80). Instead of saying Huck, he chooses another name which is familiar to white people. It seems that Huck bears traces of slavery. So, calling himself Johnny, Huck moves from Black folks to white ones to capture the attention of white people. This way switching can be considered as a mechanism that Huck utilizes to protect Jim. Then, the narrator adds, "who you got under that tarp?' Th man's voice was louder. 'That there is my sick uncle', Huck said" (2024:81). In reality, white people do not ransack the boat because Huck is a white boy. The reason why when he says 'that there is my sick uncle', they automatically agree with him.

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Under the influence of his hybrid identity, Huck can be considered as a way to the liberation of the slave. Huck's hybridity becomes the instrument for the protagonist Jim to obtain the news of his fellow slaves and his family members. Therefore, Everett (2024, p. 53) asserts: "I be worried 'bout my fambly, I said 'I know dey be worried 'bout me. You gonna have to go see if'n dey awright. I cain't go there. I'm supposed to be dead". In reality, Jim utilizes Huck as a road that connects him to his family. Huck's presumable dead can be understood as a mechanism of guidance during Jim's process of escape. In this quotation, the presumable death crates a certain invisibility that facilitates the creation of connection between the slave and his family. Therefore, Huck constitutes the canal of transition from plantation to new place. In other words, Huck is set to be the guiding light over the escaped slave. So, his presence on the river is to permit Jim to reach the borders of the new land. The reason why the narrator articulates:

> I watched the boy's head bobbig in the river. Then I got sucked under by the riverboat. I admit that I entertained briefly the thought that I was going to drown to death […] I resurfaced someplace, disoriented, focused only on keeping my head above water and finding a bank. I had lost Huck. (2024"83).

This assertion underlines the temporality of the white boy Huch in Jim's process of escape. The fact of feeling disoriented after the disappearance of Huck symbolizes that Huck's primary role is to guide Jim to the new place. Hence, his absence causes a sort of disorder and disorientation. Consequently, the analysis refers to Huck as a metaphor of liberty and new departure.

3. From the Shadow of Historical Subject to Subject of History

The analysis of this section results from the awareness of the slave. The current investigation tends to move the slave from the state of historical subject to a subject of his own history. In other words, P. Everett's *James* allows Jim to write or rewrite the history of the slaves while focusing on his own experience. To explore this section, the analysis designs sub sections that contribute to the slave's transition from one state to another. Or, it is a deconstructive process through which a chance is given to the slave to manipulate history according to his own understanding of it. In this perspective, the study reveals Jim's process of rebuilding the pre-slavery period of Blacks. In the same lines, this inquiry deconstructs cultural purity which is set to display one's culture as pure and continue value. The deconstruction is rooted in the slave's ghost identity.

3.1 Recovery of pre-slavery history

To rebuild the pr-slavery life of the slaves is spatio-temporal travel in which the slave paints the traditional ways of living. In P. Everett's *James*, the protagonist Jim serves as a rebuilding artist of this traditional life of Blacks. In fact, this spatio-temporal travel permits the slave to resurrect his creativity and power of Black healing methods. This resurrection consolidates the ghost identity of the slave. from this perspective, P. Everett (2024, p. 47) argues:

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> The rattlesnake that had been attached to my hand fell off into the fire, but it managed to wriggle free across the ground and out into the rain. 'Did he get you?' Fraid so. I walked over to the mouth of the cave and dropped to my knees. I took out my knife and cut the bite, give a good suck and spat out the blood. Then I slapped some of the claymud on it.

This quotation repertories the traditional mode of healing injuries. It demonstrates the capacity of the slave to reconstruct his own history and strengthens his power of healing. The reason why A. Simon (2018:123) states that "recovery involved the reconstruction of an identity that has been lost or stolen due to socio-political factors beyond the control of the community in question". It means that reconstituting traditional ways of living is an opportunity for the slave to recover his stolen or broken identity. In *James*, the character Jim decodes the living condition of Blacks before slavery. Jim describes their living place as a sort of paradise that not only guarantees the security, but also gives them the comfort they cannot have in the plantation. The analysis of pre-slavery space allows to comprehend the will of the slave to solidify his identity that helps transcend all the realities of Blacks and whites. In other perspectives, it helps reassess Blackness not as a curse but as a symbol of power. In doing so, P. Everett (2024:45-46) asserts that "Back in our cave we listened to the storm. We might have heard lighting strike a tree. The thunder shook is hard. We chewed some bacon right off rasher. It wasn't delicious, but the longer we chewed it, the bigger it got, and so it satisfied our hunger". This assertion describes the living condition of Blacks before slavery. So, Jim and Huch are artistic devices utilized by the narrator to render the pre-slavery history immortal. By creating a space where Black and White peacefully live together, the analysis recalibrates the concept of superiority between races. As the narrator adds, "the African can easily be trained in ways of the European, of course. He can come to be more than he naturally is, to learn those manners and skills that will allow him to become equal (2024, p. 49). This quotation underlines the idea that despite his traditionality, a Black man has the capacity to easily assimilate white skills and become equal to those white people.

Running into the bush to recover the pre-slavery history can be considered as fortifying period or the slave. Jim does not present the nature or the forest as a recovering place, but he utilizes it to reinforce his reading skills and to connect to his Black heritage – which heritage strengthens his ghost identity. For B. Cullinan (2023:18), "the freedom status afforded to free Blacks prior the rise of race-based chattel slavery provided many with enough social and economic mobility to elevate themselves out of servitude". Cullinan's thesis highlights that the freedom of the slave commands Jim to connects to place where he can solve the problem of servitude. Therefore, the presence of Jim in the forest is to equip himself with the necessary power needed to rescue his people. As a matter of fact, P. Everett (2024:57) articulates:

> That relief allowed me to sleep. That I could sleep so much was slightly alarming, but I continued to improve. I felt stronger every time I awake. Strong enough to become impatient. I collected wood and kept the fire going. I collected catfish from the trotline, ate some and hung strips over the smoke to dry.

The passage puts forward the idea that nature frees the slave from any pressure and psychological charge. Then, he can recover from the traumatic experience in the plantation. Jim's presence in the bush can heal him of all injuries. The reason why Jim feels strong enough to overthrow white dynasty.

3.2 Refusing Cultural Purity

The refusal of cultural linearity or continuity consists in deconstructing the idea that one's culture should be considered pure and intact. It means that in this era of interconnected worlds, no culture can pretend to have its original features. According to M. Auger (2016, p. 1), "cultural continuity describes the integration of people within their culture and the methods through which their culture is maintained and transmitted". This approach presents cultural linearity as the capacity to keep a particular culture pure while it passes through generations. However, the current investigation considers cultural purity as a systemic lie which consists in preventing a person from expressing his own identity. The study emphasizes on the idea that this linearity is an error of structure. This error of structure compromises the ability of a person to appreciate or ameliorate his cultural values. For instance, P. Everett (2024:89-90) argues:

> And my books, once read, were not what I wanted, not what I needed. The so-called self-related story of Venture Smith became more infuriating the more I examined the work, wondering how a five-year old could have to understand the tidiness of lies, the lesson learned from stories told by white people seeking to justify my circumstance […] I was not interested in the content of the work, but its structure.

From this passage the character Jim tries to problematize cultural linearity and cultural. He presents this linearity as a system that helps white folks to justify their enactments. The analysis suggests that any culture cannot claim to be possessing its same originality. It reveals the logical fallacies of culture. Thus, the one who transmits cultural values is always influenced by his own experience of life. Consequently, this person cannot pretend to restitute culture exactly as it might be. Ghost identity interferes with the fact that culture may be fixed or static. To understand this elaboration, one must observe the metaphor of pencil in Everett's *James*. For Thomas Forster (2003), in literature, nothing is said at a vacuum. It means that writing a story with a pencil is insightful. In this case, by choosing a pencil instead of pen demonstrates that any story cannot be permanent. The reason why, P. Everett (2024:89) states: "I read and read, but I found what I needed was to write. I needed that pencil. I could not keep track of my thoughts. I could not follow my own reasoning after a while". This quotation illustrates that reading constitutes the experiences of the reader and these experiences raise up the appetite of writing a story. The problem is that one should know that what is being written reveals certain temporality. In other words, this writing reflects the realities of one period. So, it cannot be applied to another. Then, the narrator refers to pencil in order to give an opportunity to each generation to rewrite its story. Hence,

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ghost identity denies the permanence of originality and purity. In doing so, cultural purity is denial of one's freedom and it condemns him in a chain of lies.

Conclusion

This research paper demonstrates how Percival Everett's *James* operates a radical epistemological and aesthetic shift in contemporary African-American Literature. By dismantling "Jim" in Mark Twain's nineteenth-century classic, Everett's narrative endows the runaway slave with complex psychological, linguistic and historical agency. The analytical trajectory of this study enables to fully validate the central research hypotheses formulated at the outset. The analysis of linguistic dissimulation confirms that ghost identity does not represent a submissively endured alienation or a pathological manifestation of Du Bois' "double consciousness". Instead, through deliberate and strategic code-switching, James embraces the performance of "social death", as theorized in Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics, to transform his assumed linguistic subalternity into a tactical shield of survival and an unassailable locus of cognitive sovereignty.

The examination of spatial liminality validates the hypothesis regarding the Mississippi river as a chronotropic vehicle of liberation. Far from being a simple backdrop or a zone of geographical peril, the river serves as space of existential decompression and mental rebirth where the split psyche of the subaltern escapes sovereign plantation jurisdiction and orchestrates an alternative hybrid relationality. The study confirms that the physical act of writing, materialized by a pencil, shatters the necropolitical decree of obliteration. By rejecting the illusion of historical and cultural purity, James reclaims the agency of narrative construction. The pencil operates as an exorcism: it transfigures the nineteenth-century literary specter into an empowered, sovereign historical subject of the twenty-first century. Ultimately, this paper positions Everett's work as a cornerstone in the ongoing redefinition of counter-hegemonic slave narratives. While this study highlights the strategic deployment of spectrality and special liminality on the river, future research could extend this framework by investigating the natural landscape as a therapeutic and eco-critical sanctuary for the slave in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016).

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