

**Imagining Mixed-Race Futures for America: The Tragic
Mulatta in Pauline Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter***

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1. Introduction

The creative writing of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins is one of the most interesting rediscoveries of recent African American literary history...The difficult transition of the African American population from the time of slavery through Reconstruction into the twentieth century, the old strife between the North and the South, the legacy of the past, and the growing materialism and imperialism of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century was Hopkins's prime agenda. Her own fiction, journalism, historiography, and work as editor of the *Colored American Magazine* show her to be passionately committed to righting the wrongs done to her race, investigating the past, and envisioning a better future. (2-3)

Defended so gloriously by her 21st century biographer Hanna Wallinger, Pauline Hopkins was forgotten for the most part of the 20th century and it was not until the late 1980's that her work was rediscovered and published in the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers project. Since the late 1980's Hopkins has received much attention from literary critics and her work has been included in influential black feminist studies such as Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1987) and Claudia Tate's *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (1992). However, even though it can be said that Hopkins has made her way into the canon of African American literature, the critics do not always agree on the interpretation of her novels. In particular, Hopkins' use of light-skinned upper-class mulatto characters and her seemingly stereotypical representations of the "black folk" have raised suspicions in many contemporary readers.

Even though there are now several well-informed and insightful books and articles that discuss Hopkins' work, I feel that there are still important aspects that need to be brought forward. In particular, her serial fiction has not received as much merit as her first novel *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900). In the light of Hopkins' influential career as an editor of the *Colored American Magazine*, in which she published her serial fiction, I think that it is important to take a closer look at her work within the magazine context, where she might have had an even wider audience. Hopkins' first serialized novel, *Hagar's Daughter: Or A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-2) has

perhaps the most interesting set of characters, and shows to a great extent how Hopkins used the literary trope of the *tragic mulatta* to interrogate the many contradictions that had an effect on black women's roles and identities in the turn-of-the-century America. In other words, the purpose of this study is to analyze how Hopkins used the trope of the *tragic mulatta* and why it had such a significant role in her fiction. The two important themes connected with the trope, those of the mulatta "passing for white" as well as her connections to the domestic sphere will be discussed in detail in this study, with the help of feminist literary criticism and African American studies. In addition, Hopkins' ability to imagine an alternative, mixed-race future for America in her fiction will be explored in more detail. The purpose of this thesis is not only to conduct a profound textual analysis of Hopkins' novel but also to discuss and interpret the socio-political and cultural context of the turn-of-the-century America. Hopkins can be considered a pioneer in the African American literary tradition, and it is important to understand her position amidst the sometimes conflicting discourses of race and gender, imperialism and nationalism, feminism and African American activism during the time she published her novels.

I have chosen to concentrate on *Hagar's Daughter*, which is the first of the three magazine novels. I think that the theme of passing and the connections to the sentimental genre are very central and significant in the novel. All of Hopkins' magazine novels have *tragic mulatta* characters and *Hagar's Daughter* has three of them, all of which are different and revise the genre in their unique ways. Also, the female characters in *Hagar's Daughter* are positioned at the center of the novel and thus gain a lot of narrative attention and agency, whereas the female protagonist in *Winona, A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902) is somewhat equal in importance to the male protagonists, and in *Of One Blood or, The Hidden Self* (1902-3), the female protagonist Dianthe Lusk is even more in the background of the story and the male protagonist is in focus. Furthermore, unlike *Contending Forces*, in which

the story is set within the African American community, the main part of *Hagar's Daughter* concentrates on a setting of white society with black characters in disguise. This enables a closer and more sophisticated examination and analysis of Hopkins' strategy of dual address and her discussion of black and white social relations. Before briefly discussing Pauline Hopkins' personal life and her literary merit in particular, I will introduce the characters of *Hagar's Daughter* as they appear in the novel.

Hagar's Daughter introduces the reader to three major female characters, who can each be characterized as a *tragic mulatta* even though Hopkins uses them in different ways to discuss the varying aspects of the trope. Hagar Sergeant, who is introduced at the beginning of the novel and reappears as Estelle Bowen later on, is the only one of the three that has first-hand experience of slavery's horrors. She has been brought up as an upper middle-class young "Southern Belle" and only learns about her origins when the story's villain St Clair Enson uses her past as a weapon against his brother, Hagar's white and aristocratic husband Ellis Enson, in order to acquire the family estate for himself. In the tragic events after Hagar is revealed to be black, Ellis Enson tries to save his wife but is murdered¹ and Hagar, now a slave, must escape with her baby. Hagar's destiny first seems to be the very tragic one already familiar to the readers from the *tragic mulatta* canon, as she jumps to her evident death from a bridge. However, the novel is only just beginning, and Hagar re-appears in the Reconstruction period narrative as Estelle Bowen, the white wife of a Western Senator and self-made man and a step-mother to his daughter Jewel.

Jewel Bowen is the second *tragic mulatta* in the story and she is also an upper middle-class young woman of much beauty and refinement. As it turns out later in the novel, Jewel is actually Hagar's biological daughter. The latter part of the narrative focuses on Jewel and her suitor Cuthbert Sumner as they try to defy the forces against their marriage. These forces are

¹ Ellis Enson survives the murder attempt, however, and re-emerges as the detective Henson later in the story. However, at this point of the story, the characters and readers alike believe him dead.

the same villains previously encountered in the story: St Clair Enson, appearing in disguise as General Benson, and his sidekick Major Madison with his beautiful daughter Aurelia, the third *tragic mulatta* in the story. Aurelia differs from Hagar/Estelle and Jewel in various ways, because she does not fit the True Woman ideals that Hagar/Estelle and Jewel do. Instead, Aurelia is described as a voluptuous beauty, of whom “one felt impressed that girlhood’s innocence had not remained untouched” (90-91). The narrative, fuelled by suspension and hidden identities, murders and sentimental love scenes, follows the three women as they lead their lives, passing unconsciously or consciously as white women, in the racist society of contemporary Washington D.C.

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, born to a free colored family in 1859, was raised and educated in Boston, where she lived all her life and made her career as a stenographer, journalist and author. Hopkins’ political ambitions were not something unique in her family, since she was related to famous abolitionist leaders William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. As a Boston citizen, Hopkins led her life in the political, social and cultural center of the North, which also had a liberal atmosphere for African Americans (Wallinger, 23). In 1900, Hopkins was offered a chance to become one of the contributing editors and writers in the *Colored American Magazine*, an African American political and literary magazine which became a very significant pursuit in both Hopkins’ personal life and the lives of many black activists of the time. From the very beginning, the magazine set out “uplifting of the race” as its political goal, and it would contain everything from health issues and childcare tips to fashion notes. However, what made the magazine a quality journal was its numerous poems, short stories and serial novels, such as those of Hopkins (Wallinger, 54). Especially the pedagogic function of the magazine was seen as a contribution to the advancement of the race, even though the literate African American population was fairly small, and a part of the audience was inevitably white (*ibid.*, 56).

From 1900 to 1904, Hopkins held a very influential and powerful position in the magazine, which not only gave her a channel to publish her literature, but also made her an exceptional woman among the African American population for holding such an important public position as that of an editor (Carby 1988, xxx). Throughout her career in the *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins' contributions to the paper were a significant part of the magazine's content. In addition to the three serialized novels, *Hagar's Daughter*, *Winona* and *Of One Blood*, Hopkins wrote many biographical sketches and political commentaries as well as shorter literary tales. In addition, as an editor she often chose the stories and articles to be published in the magazine.

Before going into detailed analysis of *Hagar's Daughter*, however, I feel that it is necessary to connect Hopkins with the tradition that existed before her. Black history was always a priority to Hopkins and she insisted that African Americans themselves be active in rewriting their own history that included the lives and deeds of individual people, in opposition to just recording great events (McKay, 6). For this purpose, Hopkins herself wrote biographical sketches on influential black people that were published in the *Colored American Magazine*. As argued by for example Hazel Carby, Hopkins also believed that fiction had potential cultural and political significance, and it could be used in a purpose of "uplifting the race" (Carby 1987, 128). Therefore, Hopkins' fiction has to be seen in relation to the writers, activists and feminists that she was influenced by, as well as through the historical frames of slavery, emancipation and Reconstruction that affected the lives of all black people in America during the 19th century.

I begin my study by tracing the roots of the *tragic mulatta* trope to the mid-19th century and discuss the socio-political conditions in which the trope came into being. The second chapter of my thesis also takes a brief look at how other writers besides Hopkins used the trope in their fiction, and how the trope was part of a larger social and political movement of

the first black feminists and activists often called “The Woman’s Era”. In the third chapter of my study, I start my analysis of *Hagar’s Daughter*, employing theories of Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Judith Butler, among others, to discuss passing as gendered performance and to see how the heroines in Hopkins’ novel “pass for white”.² In my fourth chapter, I examine the connections between the *tragic mulatta* and Victorian domesticity. Here, I use the re-interpretations of sentimental fiction by feminist scholars like Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins, for example, as well as theories of African American feminist literary critics, such as Barbara Christian, Claudia Tate, Hazel Carby and others, to see how Hopkins used the genre of the sentimental novel and its conventions for female behavior, to question the rigid boundaries of the society and the place that black women were assigned in the racial and gender hierarchies of the time. I will also take a look at the way Hopkins portrays her heroines in terms of domesticity and family. In the last subchapter I also focus on the issue of motherhood and its importance for African American women. In my fifth chapter, I explore Hopkins’ view of the future America and its people as a kind of a utopian vision that she promoted in her fiction. The role of the *tragic mulatta* is very important for this vision, because she is the emblem of the future (mixed-) race relations that Hopkins imagines in her novel. I will also discuss why this vision did not appeal to the readers and critics of the early 20th century, explaining partly why Hopkins’ writing was lost to modern readers and literary critics for so long. As argued by Toni Morrison, the presence of African Americans in the United States has not been considered significant by the traditional canonized American literature that usually assumes being American is somehow detached from this presence (Morrison, 26). Hopkins’ novel shows that the presence of African Americans has actually dramatically influenced the overall political, cultural and legal history of the country.

² Passing as a way of “Signifying”, to use the term coined by Henry Louis Gates Jr., has also been used by Teresa Zackodnik in her study *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (2004), but she does not discuss Hopkins’ *Hagar’s Daughter*, which I find even more interesting to look at from this point of view.

2. The tragic mulatta tradition and its socio-political implications

In this chapter I intend to discuss the socio-political conditions in which the *tragic mulatta* trope was first used and what reasons could have led to the popularity of the trope throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century by black and white writers alike. The reasons for why white writers used the trope differed significantly from those of black writers. In any case, it seems that the trope of the *tragic mulatta* was a device that symbolically mirrored the surrounding society of the time as well as the specific viewpoint of the writer. Different uses of the trope enabled writers to emphasize the social position of women, both black and white, as well as the social position of black Americans in general. In other words, the particular concerns of the writer affected the ways in which she or he employed the *tragic mulatta* trope, making the meaning of the trope very diverse across race and gender lines.

In the first subchapter, I trace the origins of the *tragic mulatta* trope to antebellum times, and discuss the cultural, social and scientific forces in the American society that influenced the depiction of African Americans in literature. I also discuss the Cult of True Womanhood as a defining ideology for women's behaviour, and how that ideology connects with the *tragic mulatta*. In the following subchapter, I introduce some of the most important authors who used the trope in their fiction, and how each author used the mulatta in a slightly different way. This chapter is useful in order to compare Pauline Hopkins' use of the trope to what had been written before her. At the end of this part, I will summarize the possible reasons why African American women began to favour the *tragic mulatta* in their novels; what the trope enabled them to do and how they used it to discuss the various issues that were meaningful to them and to the African American "race". To end my general discussion around the trope of the *tragic mulatta*, the third subchapter is about the ways in which African American women writers and activists resisted the stereotypical conceptions of black women and attempted to improve the status of their people in turn-of-the century America. Their firm belief in the

power of women to elevate the whole race acted as a strong force behind the African American women's club movement and the literary and political actions of individual women.

2.1 The socio-political origins of the *tragic mulatta* trope

As argued by Maria Lauret, African American cultural production has constantly been suffering from the shadows of slavery and racism, rendering it difficult for African American authors to work with the same artistic freedom, legitimacy and recognition that white writers have taken for granted (Lauret, 66). On the other hand, it has been argued that slavery can be considered a unique literary resource to African American writers, allowing them to reflect upon its effects on themselves and on the American identity as a whole. It can even be said that reading an African American novel is to be “confronted with difference” (Graham, 3). Alongside the artistic ambitions that African American authors have had, they have also been inclined to negotiate their political and social positions as the oppressed “Others” in American society. As Maryemma Graham points out: “Writing for an African American author is often part of a larger process of cultural revisionism, of redefining history and historical memory, and of confronting the past in innovative and provocative ways that are intentionally self-reflexive” (5).

It is interesting then to note the extensive use of the *tragic mulatta* trope in the literature of late 19th-century African American women, since the trope was originally invented by white abolitionist women writers. When using the same trope for their own ends, African American writers had to transform and change the trope somehow, but still maintain parts of the original to gain authority and audience for their writing. Writers like Hopkins and Frances Harper along with Charles Chesnutt have been accused by some critics of supporting white supremacy by portraying nearly white characters, who are only meant to solicit the approval and identification of a white readership (Bost, 70). However, as recently argued by, for example, Teresa Zackodnik and Eva Allegra Raimon, the trope was employed for various

purposes and not only to solicit the good opinion of white society. The late 19th -century African American female writers used the figure to “rhetorically transgress and contest a color line that attempted to police and secure racial identities as they were interimplicated with class, gender, and sexuality” (Zackodnik, xi). Also, the mixing of prevalent literary modes and the use of metanarrative clues are said to distinguish and add value to the work of postbellum African American writers (Fabi, 34).

The birth of the *tragic mulatta* trope is most often attributed to a white antislavery activist and writer Lydia Maria Child, who published her novels in the 1840's; at a time when the problem of miscegenation and the violation of the “one-drop” -rule were heated in society and new scientific ideologies of race and Anglo-Saxon expansionism, in the form of imperialist endeavors, were fast developing (Raimon, 27-28). The legislation forbidding miscegenation and condemning any possible offspring of illicit mixed-race unions to follow the “condition of the mother” had taken effect already by the early 18th century following the state legislation of Virginia and Maryland (Zackodnik, 11). However, it was not until the mid-19th century that the problem of illicit sexual relationships between whites and blacks was really starting to surface, as the slaves were becoming whiter and whiter, and thus proving that the law was not a reliable enough mechanism to prevent the white race from black “contamination”. Due to the economic consequences of children following the condition of their slave mothers, plantation owners used their female slaves for reproduction purposes, to produce work force for their plantations.

The racialized scientific discourses of the time, such as phrenology and theories of polygenesis claimed that races were created unequal and that the black race was inherently inferior to the white race. This inferiority of the black race would then be distinguishable from a single person of the race, no matter how “white” their appearance might be. Thus, by the mid-19th century, in the white middle-class society, race was becoming conceived through

questions of blood purity and inheritance (Smith, 29). The studies of Josiah Nott (1804-1873), among others, claimed that the races were in fact distinct species, which then lead to the conclusion that interracial mixing would result in unproductive, weak offspring that would “contaminate” the Caucasian stock (Smith, 33). Hence also the name of the mulatta/mulatto: a “mule” or the offspring of two incompatible species. The scientific theories in their turn emphasized racist stereotypes and attitudes and provided the justification for Western colonialism, imperialism and racial segregation. The discourse of blood purity was further enhanced by eugenicists, who claimed that the intellectual and moral capacities of a person were contained by their blood (Smith, 45). A theory of retrogressionism claimed that after their emancipation, black people had become even closer to savages than they were before, and thus they were characterized as not only intellectually inferior, but also as “lazy, ugly, intemperate, slothful, lascivious, and violent, indeed, bestial” (Tate, 10).

Teresa Zackodnik (2004) has examined court judgments from the mid-19th century concerning cases in which the identity and status of a mulatto person was in question. She states that while the courts were ultimately unable to distinguish black from white in any consistent way, they would try to naturalize this racial difference by looking at the person’s external characteristics as well as her reputation and social accomplishment. Because the courts had to face cases in which there was no possible way to rely on human perception in distinguishing whether there indeed was a drop of black blood in the veins of the accused, the court would sometimes turn to the social behavior, reputation and acceptance among the white community as signals of the “whiteness” of the person in question (Zackodnik, 8-10). This variation in the way the courts decided the status and race of a mulatto, sometimes relying on pure perception and sometimes on the social aspects, is thus in contradiction with the way race was generally conceptualized at the time: as a purely biological, externally visible and marked category.

This impossibility of actually determining whether a person was distinctly black or white was an important reason for the use of the *tragic mulatta* in the fiction of antislavery writers. As Eva Allegra Raimon claims, “indeed, the device [of the *tragic mulatta*] can be seen as the most logical literary response available with which to interrogate the inextricable discourses of racial and national incorporation” (31). The common characteristics by which a *tragic mulatta* can be identified are first of all, that she is usually a woman. When the educated, light-skinned and sexually vulnerable female character is exposed to sexual threat due to being revealed as the offspring of a black slave and thus, a slave herself, she awakens the sympathies of the reader as well as functions as a necessary plot mechanism (Raimon, 5).

Since the questions of illicit sexual relationships between the races always centered on the reproductive female body, it was almost obligatory for the protagonist to be a female. There were also male mulatto characters, but their depiction and function in the plot was not as unified and stereotypical as that of the female *tragic mulattas*. Barbara Christian argues that until recently in America, “the women of any group represented the body of ideals that the group measured itself by” (1985a, 4). Thus, even black male writers, such as William Wells Brown, used “black” women characters to discuss the overall social position of black people in society. Additionally, in order to represent the contradictions between the races, the mulatta had to be able to represent both groups; white and black. The near-white appearance and manner of the mulatta protagonist also enabled the white female readers to identify with her and imagine themselves in a similar situation. The characteristics of the mulatta designate her as a person who deserves to be free, because of her beauty, refinement and courage that resemble those of white women (Christian 1985a, 4). Other typical characteristics of the *tragic mulatta* include that she is usually deprived of her family and white benefactors in order to be sold at a slave market or otherwise left at the mercy of white male desires. This sensational event in the protagonist’s life is typically set in motion as her racial status is

revealed, often to her own surprise and horror as well. The tragic destiny of the mulatta is most often fulfilled when she commits suicide in order to escape the consequences of slavery.

Another reason for why the *tragic mulatta* came to feature in such a great role in antebellum antislavery fiction was that she resembled the protagonists of sentimental fiction, which was popular entertainment for women at the time (Carby 1987, 27). In order to appeal to female readers, white and black alike, writers believed that by using a formulaic story and set of characters they could reach a wider audience. The Cult of True Womanhood, which was the determining ideology for middle-class women's roles in the antebellum America, produced a chaste, pure and angelic heroine whose characteristics differed significantly from those connected with black women and their sexuality (Carby 1987, 21). As argued by Barbara Welter, in a society of sudden social and economic mobility, approximately from the 1820's to the 1860's, the Cult of True Womanhood was the one stable thing that held the Anglo-Saxon value system in place (Welter, 152). The True Woman, whose characteristics, "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity", assigned her firmly to the roles of a mother and wife was the defining ideal for white femininity. The ideal would be circulated in literature and magazine intended for a female readership, and even though many women resisted True Womanhood, finding it difficult to adapt to its standards, the model persisted throughout the 19th century, having an effect on the way women perceived themselves and how they were depicted in literature and popular culture (Welter, 174).

As argued by Hazel Carby, the ideology of True Womanhood placed the two differing female identities in opposition to each other, balancing the naturalization of the divide between black and white womanhood. Whereas white women were supposed to be the chaste, fragile Southern Belles who would successively in marriage give birth to the Anglo-Saxon heir of a plantation, black women were assigned the role of reproduction of property, in the form of new slaves for their masters (Carby 1987, 25). These roles were further enhanced by

excluding black women from womanhood altogether and representing them as over-sexual, immoral beings who would lure white men away from their white wives. In fact, the need to rule out the potential existence of white women who would voluntarily seek sexual relationships with black men necessitated the rhetoric of the licentious black woman. Such a relationship between a white woman and a black man would have questioned the very boundaries of the patriarchal slave system (Smith, 39). In this system, the white woman had to remain pure in order to draw a clear bloodline between the races. Her purity had to be protected by the patriarchal white man. Paradoxically, it was the very white man who raped the black woman that simultaneously protected the white woman from the presumed sexual assault by black men (Smith, 47).

In the opinion of white women, the black women who survived the rape and abuse by their masters failed the test of True Womanhood, since the true white heroine would rather die than be cast down as a “fallen angel” (Carby 1987, 34). In fact, death is often the ultimate choice of the *tragic mulattas* that appear in white writers’ texts. Karen Sànches-Eppler has argued that the connecting ideologies of abolition and feminism in white women’s texts did not function for the benefit of the black woman. Instead, the emphasis on the female slave’s trial of sexual abuse functioned to project the white woman’s own sexual anxieties onto the female slave’s body (Sànches-Eppler, 33). Furthermore, using the *tragic mulatta* enabled white female writers to interrogate the ideology of True Womanhood without actually opposing the ideology as such. Whereas the mulatta did prove the white ideology as unstable and restrictive, at some point of the story, the mulatta protagonist would be assigned her black racial status. The revelation would then work to point out that actually the fate of the mulatta character depended on her inherent black sexuality and not her white manners and conformance to True Womanhood (Zackodnik, 51). Consequently, she could never be the “True Woman” since she had a drop of black blood coursing through her veins.

2.2 The *tragic mulatta* in 19th-century fiction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first writer or inventor of the *tragic mulatta* trope was a white abolitionist, Lydia Maria Child. There are many similarities between Child and Hopkins, even though they are separated by half a century in time, and much more significantly, by their racial statuses. In her writing, Child builds the foundations for the *tragic mulatta* tradition that followed her. Similarly, she is one of the most prominent writers belonging to the tradition of sentimental literature, which is a genre that Hopkins most extendedly uses in her fiction. In her short story “The Quadroons” (1842), Child depicts her heroine, a quadroon woman as “highly cultivated in mind and manners, graceful as an antelope, and beautiful as the evening star” (2nd paragraph). Like *Hagar’s Daughter*, the story presents a near-white woman, Rosalie, falling in love and marrying a white upper-class man, but in Child’s case, the couple are aware of Rosalie’s blackness and cannot thus be legally married. The plot revolves around the love story of Rosalie and Edward, even though Edward abandons her and their daughter, Xarifa, in order to marry a white woman. Repenting, but unable to overcome the social and political barriers set by the society, Edward tries to protect his “true” family, but like many *tragic mulattas* afterwards, Xarifa is deprived of both her parents and becomes the victim of slave trade, consequently killing herself in desperation.

Thus, for Child, there is no happy ending for a mixed-race couple and the fate of the mulatta woman is always doomed. However, the sentimental style and the theme of interracial love are established by Child and shared by Hopkins. So is perhaps the most illuminating fact about the *tragic mulatta* narrative that “though the brown color on her [the mulatta’s] soft cheek was scarcely deeper than the sunny side of a golden pear, yet was it sufficient to exclude her from virtuous society” (18th paragraph).

Eva Allegra Raimon points out that Child’s fiction must be seen in connection with her antislavery activism and its didactic intent (Raimon, 41). Child’s most important mission was

to show black people as intellectual and emotional beings, who white readers could identify with, thus proving the cruelty of slavery as an institution. Indeed, in Child's writing, the goodness and gentleness of white women is emphasized, and there is even a sisterly bond between them and their slaves (opposing white male patriarchy), like in Child's "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" (1843) between the mistress and her slave Rosa, after the plantation master, who is the white woman's husband, has raped Rosa: "'Poor child,' said she, 'I ought not to have struck you; but, oh, Rosa, I am wretched, too.' The foster-sisters embraced each other, and wept long and bitterly. . . ." (7th paragraph).

Even though sympathetic, Child's white characters still retain a patronizing attitude toward their slaves. Indeed, writing almost half a century before Hopkins and also during the antebellum time, Child's position is very different from Hopkins'. In order for a black woman writer like Hopkins to be able to write a story in the first place, a white writer had to first persuade the readership of sentimental novels that black people actually were human beings as much as white people were. Raimon argues that despite the fact that Child used mixed-race characters in her fiction, such as "The Quadroons", "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" or "A Romance of the Republic" (1867), her nationalist and expansionist views override her positive attitude to the liberating power of miscegenation (Raimon, 36). However, I agree with Raimon when she states that Child's radically encouraging perspective to mixed-race unions at the time manages to convert the fear of amalgamation into an imagined multiracial and multiethnic harmony (Raimon, 39). In my opinion, this is actually what Hopkins does in a more revolutionary way about fifty years later.

Following Child's fiction, the *tragic mulatta* narrative continued to be popular in the works of white writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). One of the main works of sentimental literature, the novel was also immensely popular in its time and its effects on the national sentiments about slavery that eventually initiated the Civil War have

been estimated significant. Stowe uses many of the themes that Hopkins later came to use in her fiction: the importance of family ties and the power of motherhood to change the world are just two of them. However, Stowe also establishes many of the stereotypes of black people that also Hopkins comments on, such as those of the mammy, the good-hearted Christian “Uncle Sam”, the Sambo and the aggressive black brute. In addition, Stowe has many mixed-race characters in the novel.

According to Hazel Carby, white writers like Stowe did not manage to free themselves of their hegemonic discourse altogether, and their mixed-race protagonists often have to make way for superior Anglo-Saxon characters (Carby 1987, 33). Agreeing with Carby, I note that while Uncle Tom is the locus of the story, his role is much diminished as soon as Little Eva’s white family enters the narrative, and afterwards, the readers are very much encouraged to identify with the white, rather than the black characters. The way black characters have to make way for white ones is shown in Stowe’s narrative, for instance, as her octoroon character Cassy is distanced from her white lover in order for him to be able to marry a white woman. In Raimon’s argument, Cassy’s marginalization is even more complete, when she kills her own child in desperation. In this way, even though a resistant act toward the slavery system, Cassy is forever excluded from True Womanhood, as she violates one of its most important principles; the principle of maternal virtue (Raimon, 110). However, it must be remembered that even though victimized, Cassy, a “black” slave woman, is allowed very strong agency when she invents an escape plan and manipulates the slave owner Legree to her own will. Also, Cassy is united with her daughter at last and the restored family connections heal the psychological wounds she has received from slavery. Furthermore, both Carby and Raimon seem to have forgotten in their analysis the other significant mulatta in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Eliza, who escapes from the plantation where she is held as a slave in order to save her child from being sold to a slave trader. Unlike the *tragic mulatta* narrative would suggest,

Eliza is allowed to escape and even reconnect with her husband, to build a better life in Canada, where the fugitive laws cannot reach. Thus, Stowe's treatment of her mulattas diverges from the central tragic narrative and allows for a liberating analysis as well. Since it is one of the most discussed novels in criticism of sentimental literature, I will return to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* later in my chapter on sentimental literature.

The first published novel by an African American author was written by William Wells Brown, a free black man and an antislavery activist in 1853. The novel, *Clotel, or The President's Daughter* would borrow the core narrative of the *tragic mulatta* from Child and aim at unsettling "the very categories of identity at work in the construction of founding U.S ideologies of national origin and identity" (Raimon, 64). In Brown's text, the core narrative remains the same: a woman of mixed-race has a child with a slave owner, who then abandons her for a white woman, leaving the mother dead and the daughter to be auctioned at a slave market. The narrative is framed by pieces of "authentic" evidence about the institution of slavery, which include for example biographical notes and clippings from newspapers. The pastiche created by these fragments, as well as the significant role of the narrator in the story, is, according to William Andrews, a way for a black writer to retain the authentic appeal of earlier slave narratives and at the same time be free from simply using a white mode of narration, which was renowned for its stereotypical portrayal of black people (Andrews, 1990, quoted in Raimon, 69).

Clotel contains scenes from the slave auction, in which the beauty and refinement of the mulatta heroines is depicted in contrast with their commodity status. Emphasizing the Anglo-Saxon features of the mulattas, Brown questions the audience's fixed conceptions of black and white bodies. However, like the *tragic mulattas* in the preceding tradition, Brown's character is also denied a happy ending and she jumps to the Potomac River and to her death, showing that Brown was ultimately not able to imagine a different ending for the mixed-race

heroine.³ Hopkins makes an explicit intertextual reference to Brown in *Hagar's Daughter* when one of her tragic mulatta heroines, Hagar, also jumps to the same Potomac river with her baby in a desperate act to salvage them both from slavery. However, Hopkins has transformed the story by letting her heroine survive the jump, thereby allowing a different kind of resolution, one that is not tragic at all. I will discuss this theme in more detail later in my thesis.

One of the first *tragic mulatta* narratives by African American women is Harriet Wilson's biographical slave narrative *Our Nig or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). The mulatta heroine of the novel, Frado, is abandoned by her white mother as a result of the death of her African American father, and has to live her life as a servant in a white family who greatly abuse her. *Our Nig* was the first *tragic mulatta* novel that connected class issues with race prejudice. It also transformed the *tragic mulatta* trope in two different ways. Firstly, the protagonist Frado's mother Mag is a white woman, not the objectified and raped black concubine. Frado's African American father Jim is described in rather positive terms, and it is the clash of race and class boundaries that causes the difficulties for the mixed-race couple. This can be explained partly by the fact that the novel was published before the Civil War, at a time when the race purity discourse was not yet as heated as some decades later. Secondly, Frado does confirm to the beautiful, exotic prototype of the *tragic mulatta* depictions, but within the public educational system, she gains subjectivity and agency. Frado herself becomes a mother in the novel, and thus the novel is also about regaining motherly love despite alienation caused by racial oppression (Tate, 38). However, compared to the sentimental fiction written by white women, Wilson's style is very factual and compact,

³ Because late 19th century male narratives are not the focus of this study, I have not discussed the work of such writers as Charles Chesnutt, Sutton E. Griggs or Paul Laurence Dunbar here. As a general remark, Claudia Tate says that the black male text of post-Reconstruction depicts pleading for social justice through the agency of frustrated patriarchal desire, whereas the female text discusses race as a gendered construction, within the domestic discourse (Tate, 67).

without the expressive, picturesque language of for example Harriet Beecher Stowe, even though Christian piety is one of the themes in both writers' novels.

Wilson's novel is an autobiography, and it is preceded by her own apologetic note addressed to her potential critics as well as succeeded by the comments of her (white) patrons and patronesses to ensure readers of the authenticity of Wilson's story as well as the reliability of her person. These apologies and comments prove the lack of artistic freedom granted for a black woman novelist at the time, which is also probably why Wilson refrains from using poetic language and instead remains in plain facts. However, the greatest difference between Wilson and the white woman novelists is that she depicts white women as the ultimate evil in her novel. Characters like Mrs. Belmont and her daughter Mary are the ones who abuse Frado both mentally and physically, showing the most cruel treatment toward the black girl: "Mrs. B. and Mary commenced beating her inhumanly; then propping her mouth open with a piece of wood, shut her up in a dark room, with-out any supper" (21). Thus, in Wilson's novel, there is no trace of the sisterhood that existed between white and black women in Child's or Stowe's novels. However, the themes familiar to the *tragic mulatta* tradition such as the psychological as well as physical trials of the mulatta she has to overcome because of her drop of black blood are very much continued in Wilson's narrative.

Like in Wilson's novel, also in Harriet Jacobs' 1861 novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, white women are depicted abusing the black woman. Hazel Carby has analysed the novel in detail and argues that the novel was a true accomplishment, since the writer did not have the education or the social status of white writers, being a domestic servant herself. Drawing from her own life experiences, she was depicting True Womanhood in her novel to actually critique conventional standards for female behaviour and their inapplicability to black women (Carby 1987, 47). The novel's main character Linda Brent is born a slave and thus conscious of her racial status. During the novel, Linda Brent is at the mercy of her white

mistresses, the first of which is just a child. The white men in the narrative haunt Linda for her beauty and want to possess her sexually, but the most radical thing that differentiates the novel from the preceding *tragic mulatta* narratives is that Linda Brent actually resists the attacks and abuse toward her. One of her conscious choices is to escape into a liaison with a white man, who promises to give her a better future. This decision to commit an act that would result in the loss of her virtue puts Linda firmly outside the boundaries of conventional womanhood, but it is a resistant act that does not condemn her, but instead condemns the institution of slavery (Carby 1987, 61). For Jacobs, freedom is not just about escaping from slavery as a political condition, but also about “gaining access to the social institutions of motherhood, family and home” (Tate, 32). Furthermore, at the end of the narrative, Linda is freed from her fugitive status and does not have to commit suicide in order to survive. According to Claudia Tate, both Wilson and Jacobs’ novels first and foremost portray the desire of black women to have households of their own, and to be able to influence the lives of their children (Tate, 24).

A novel that is most often compared and discussed in tandem with Pauline Hopkins’ work is Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* (1892). Frances Harper was, like Hopkins, a political activist, lecturer, and feminist who intended her work to contribute to the uplift of the race. At the time of the publication of *Iola Leroy*, Harper was considered one of the leading African American political figures, and she was active in prominent political organizations like the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the American Woman Suffrage Association (Zackodnik, 84). Hazel Carby assesses the novel as being more of a kin to the female domestic novels than those of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson, whose novels were more realist and male-dominated (Carby 1987, 64). Harper’s novels have often been criticized for not having any literary merit, but this can be explained

partly by the notion that Harper was writing with a didactic purpose: to teach as well as to entertain her female readers (Carby 1987, 72).

Unlike some of the *tragic mulattas* before her, Iola Leroy is unaware of her racial status and brought up as a white woman. By showing the downfall of a seemingly white character to a “non-human” position of vulnerability, Harper drew a line from the experiences of an individual to the experience of the whole race (Carby 1987, 74). The significant action that Iola takes when compared to the protagonists before her is that she refuses to marry a white man when pressured to do it on the condition that she never reveal her race, and instead marries a black man. Even though Iola Leroy refuses to pass for white and is partly united with the black community (her maternal community), she remains distinct from the masses because she is an educated woman. Harper’s representation of Iola and her family members as the intellectual elite has been criticized by many critics who dismiss her writings completely, but Hazel Carby claims that the novel must be interpreted as a more complex discussion of the race relations. Further, Carby proposes that the overall goal of the novel was to “forge a new, alternative vision, a new role for black intellectuals” (1987, 93), not having to look for support from the white society, but becoming independent and self-sufficient⁴. Because Harper’s *Iola Leroy* is so often discussed together with Pauline Hopkins’ work, I will return to the novel also later in my thesis.

As outlined above, the *tragic mulatta* trope appeared in both white and black writers’ texts throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, and was indeed a very popular and multifunctional literary device. Even though some of the characteristics of the mulatta remained unchanged, much of what she represented and how she was able to function changed from writer to writer. In the first white writers’ novels, the mulatta was mostly

⁴ Claudia Tate mentions also Amelia E. Johnson, Emma Dunham-Kelley Hawkins and Katherine D. Tillman alongside Hopkins and Harper in this late 19th century “specific category of African American fiction in which a virtuous heroine generally undergoes a series of adventures en route to marriage, family happiness and prosperity” (Tate, 5).

granted a passive role, she was used symbolically to represent the general consequences of slavery, but could not act or speak for herself. In later texts, especially African American writing, the mulatta became more active and was allowed to make individual decisions about her life and destiny.

Since she was light-skinned and a perfect emblem of True Womanhood, the use of the character by African American writers has, however, often been criticized. One of the first critics was Sterling Brown, when he in his famous study *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937), argued that the novels were abstract, clichéd, unrealistic and unoriginal and that the fiction actually supported racism because it represented inherent characteristics divided by “good” white blood and “bad” black blood (Zackodnik, xv). When examining a critique written by a black male, one must, however, always consider the contradictions that gender issues bring into black theory. Mostly written by black women, about black women and for an audience consisting of black women, the mulatta narratives might have been rejected by male critics for this particular reason. The concerns of the race were not considered to be sufficiently taken into account in these female writers’ texts. However, one of the reasons why the *tragic mulatta* has been dismissed by later, feminist critics as well is that she belonged to the genre of sentimental fiction.⁵ From a modern perspective, sentimental fiction reflects an “ambience of gentility, hyperbolic representation of emotion, tightly circumscribed household settings, and the development of an exemplary heroine” (Tate, 12). Lauren Berlant, for one, has argued that because of the individualized and personal nature of sentimental fiction, it renders itself poorly to any political purpose (Berlant, 641; see also Douglas, 1977).

⁵ As argued by Elizabeth Ammons, post-Civil War fiction in America experienced a shift from romanticism to realism, with writers like William Dean Howells, Henry James and Mark Twain afterwards being considered the major literary figures. Ammons explains that from the mainstream critical tradition’s point of view, American literature descended into a valley during the turn-of-the-century, from which it rose only in the 1920’s with the emergence of writers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner. Thus, the critical tradition generally forgot black writers of the turn-of-the-century and black female writers of sentimental fiction even to a greater extent. (Ammons 1991a, 3).

There are, however, many scholars in the field of black feminist literary criticism who have a more positive viewpoint to the matter of the *tragic mulatta*. Hazel Carby argues that historically, the mulatta served two purposes: firstly, it was a vehicle to explore the relationship between the races, and secondly, it expressed the same relationship as it was in reality. In addition, Carby notes that the trope was used as a mediating device in the narratives of black writers, allowing movement between two worlds, white and black (Carby 1987, 89-90). Teresa Zackodnik, who writes twenty years after Carby, sees more in these texts than just their mediating quality. The mulatta according to her is a double-voiced character, who is able to address both white and black audiences enabling multiple readings and a subtle critique of the prevailing social order. She argues that the texts are rather contesting than mediating the boundaries of racial and racialized gender identities, because their writers (as well as women orators who used the trope) dared to “trespass on territory that was fiercely protected and policed in their day and continues to be in our own” (Zackodnik, xix). Furthermore, Zackodnik proposes that African American women *intentionally* rather than subconsciously used the signifying figure of the mulatta to interrogate contemporary notions of black womanhood and identity (xvi). Claudia Tate, whose study was published after Carby but a decade before Zackodnik, reads the novels of Hopkins and her female contemporaries as chronicles of the successful lives of African American heroines within the sanctioning Victorian social, political and economic viewpoints and also as reflecting the authors’ political desires to be an active subject in a society that yet had not recognized them as such (Tate, 9).

Since the late 1980’s when Hopkins criticism really surfaced in literary scholarship, there can thus be seen at least two different phases of criticism, Carby and Tate belonging to the first phase, taking place roughly until the mid-1990’s, in which the value of Hopkins’ work is largely seen in the way she combats stereotypes of black women thereby building the

foundation for a black female literary tradition.⁶ The second phase of Hopkins criticism, starting at the end of the 1990's and continuing at the beginning of the 2000's, concentrates more on the way Hopkins' fiction transgresses, contradicts and de-stabilizes racial relations in a more radical way. Critics like Zackodnik, Susan Gillman, Janet Gabler-Hover, Augusta Rohrbach, Jill Bergman as well as Kate McCullough (to mention only some of them) belong in the second phase of the critical tradition. My position regarding the meaning and significance of Hopkins' work is in some ways close to Tate's, because I see the value of *Hagar's Daughter* in the way Hopkins expands the possible roles and functions for black people in general, and black women in particular, in the American society. However, I also see the second phase of criticism as important, with its emphasis on the fluid identity of the mulatta. From there I derive my perception of Hopkins' imaginary utopian future, where race loses its significance and the world-view based on racist, economic or political principles is replaced by a world-view grounded on principles of domestic and familial values.

Because the *tragic mulatta* was used by so many authors, it can be thought of as a coherent and mutually constitutive tradition and as such, it was influenced by both white and black writers (Raimon, 16). Balancing at the color line, the *tragic mulatta* becomes an agent of social change instead of a victim in many writers' work (Raimon, 7). But the use of the trope did not occur in a vacuum, and the purposes for which she was used by so many writers were to a great extent political as well as literary. In the next subchapter I will discuss the political atmosphere in which black women activists and writers wrote, lectured and organized their resistance in the late 19th-century America.

⁶ Jane Campbell (1986) and Houston A. Baker (1991) may also be classified as belonging to the first phase of Hopkins criticism, although their perspectives toward Hopkins are much more critical and less appreciative than those of Carby or Tate. Campbell sees a certain value in Hopkins, but she also sees her fiction as partly patronizing and escapist (Campbell, 14). Baker's even more pessimistic criticism is discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

2.3 Transforming the stereotype: resistance by end-of-the-century black women

Though African American cultural and literary history often recognizes the turn-of-the-century as a period of influential men, such as Booker T. Washington or his adversary W.E.B. Du Bois,⁷ this period has also been called The Woman's Era and it was indeed a very important period of political and intellectual activity for African American women. After emancipation, black women had been active in the community by setting up mutual aid societies, benevolent associations and local literary societies as well as been actively involved in the black church (Carby 1987, 4). These activities co-existed with the economic gains that African Americans were making, enabling them to attempt to organize their family life after slavery's horrors (Giddings, 24). However, the normalization of African American life was rendered impossible by the segregation and violence toward blacks in the Southern states, and racist attitudes continued to influence the life of blacks in the North as well. It was not an easy task for African Americans to rid themselves of the stereotypical images that had circulated in the American society since the 17th century.

Especially black women's position and status in the slave system had become firmly instituted by the laws of capitalism, the influence of the protestant church and the psychological needs of white men (Giddings, 39). Immoral and promiscuous beings, black women were assigned the roles of breeders and whores, in opposition to the chaste, pure white woman held on a domestic pedestal (*ibid.*, 43). Even though slavery became domesticated as the consequence of Northern abolitionism in the 1830's, and the image of blacks shifted from savage barbarians to that of harmless, obedient children in need of patriarchal guidance, this shift only added to the stereotypical representation of blacks. The *Jezebel*, or the exotic, luring and oversexualized female slave was complemented with the

⁷ Booker T. Washington was a founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and a race leader who is known for his assimilationist politics, with which he achieved an influential political position during the late decades of the 19th century. It can be said that Washington was also the primary force behind the events that made Hopkins lose her editorial position in the *Colored American Magazine*. Another prominent race leader and successor to Washington, W.E.B Du Bois replaced his views with a more radical political agenda. (Wallinger, 74)

Mammy, the obese and loyal domestic servant, who allowed for white women to stay fragile, vulnerable and pure (Robinson, 141). The stereotypical images of black people were, according to Claudia Tate, “so heavily interwoven into the texture of American life during this era that they became stock decorative features of the mass-produced items that the Industrial Revolution efficiently furnished for broad consumption” (10). However, it was the image of the *Jezebel* that black women were most eager to combat against. Attempting to be accepted into the definition of “woman”, black women believed that their proved morality could even be a “steady rock upon which the race could lean” (Giddings, 81). The moral uplift of the race became the mission of black women activists, but first they had to convince society that they actually were a distinct political force, being undermined by both black men championing for African American rights, and white women advancing Women’s Rights through the suffrage movement. Thus, as Paula Giddings (7) argues, black women became the linchpin between these two of the most important social reform movements in American history.

Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) was one of the African American feminists and activists who especially promoted the idea of women having a special power to change the attitudes and morals of society, since they could influence it through their sons already in their childhood (Carby 1987, 98). Cooper spoke for the education of African Americans and especially girls, who could benefit most from gaining knowledge and becoming equal with men (*ibid.*, 100). For this purpose, many black women founded their own schools after the Reconstruction period, and also to fill the void left by the Freedman’s Bureau, that had tried to do this directly after emancipation, but with poor results (Giddings, 76). Cooper’s influence on Hopkins was significant, and both women shared the view that women should be the “morally uplifting agent, capable of elevating the race” (Wallinger, 101). However, many of the educated black women soon found that they had educated themselves to fill places that did

not exist for them. The professions that were open for women were often limited to domestic and menial work, even though the late decades of the 19th century saw the first black women physicians, journalists and teachers (Giddings, 77).

Together with many of her colleagues, such as Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper recognized that one of the main obstacles for black women's development was white women's racism and the exclusion of black women from the suffrage movement (Giddings, 66). As an example, the presence of few black women feminists in the World's Congress of Representative Women held in 1893 was not to prove the significance of black women's actions, but as part of a discourse of the "exotic" (Carby 1987, 5). In the Congress, Anna Julia Cooper talked about the "the painful silent toil of mothers to gain title to the bodies of their daughters" and Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944), another black feminist, draw attention to the fact that the rape of black women was not something that black women could themselves affect (Giddings, 87). However, white women failed to see that black women actually held the key to their own liberation; the critique of the Victorian ideal of True Womanhood that kept all women oppressed (*ibid.*, 88).

One of the most influential women activists of the time was Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), a journalist who became outraged by the increased amount of lynching and mob violence taking place in the 1880's and 1890's. She embarked on a personal mission to investigate the lynching cases and based on the evidence, concluded that the increasing violence toward blacks had nothing to do with their alleged criminality. Rather, lynching was a tool of white terror to diminish the growing economic and political influence of African Americans (Giddings, 27). Lynching, which was justified by the pretence of protecting white women from rape, had actually become an institutionalized practice, which was supported and encouraged by the Southern leaders, as well as the press (Carby 1987, 111).

Partly as a reaction to Wells' antilynching campaign, and as a supportive movement, black women began to organize their resistance into what became known as the Black Women's Club Movement. An organization for black women activists was founded in 1895 to oversee the activities of local clubs. This organization, The National Association of Colored Women, was led by another prominent black feminist, Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954). The NACW was influenced by white women's organizations, and had many things in common with them. Both organizations depended on the membership of middle-class women, and promoted middle-class values, which were to a great extent family-centred (Giddings, 95). However, black women, unlike white women, recognized the fact that their own improvement depended on the fate of the poor, uneducated and underprivileged masses (*ibid.* 97). Following the motto of the NAWC, "Lifting as We Climb", the clubs were encouraged to organize children's day-care, community aid and education for their African American sisters. Also Pauline Hopkins was involved in the Boston Women's Era Club, even though she might have felt somewhat alienated from the other clubwomen, as she did not have a wealthy husband or a family background of great prosperity (Wallinger, 105). However, Hopkins shared the mutual views of the club movement regarding the importance of education, and the position of black women toward black men and white women.

An important part of the activity of the black women activists at the time had something to do with journalism and thereby promoting literacy among black people. A magazine revolution from the 1880's onwards guaranteed the rapid expansion of the magazine industry, and by and by they gained mass audiences (Carby 1987, 123). Magazines were among the primary means for black women to spread their political message to a wide audience. Activists such as Ida B. Wells, Frances Harper and Anna Julia Cooper gained their national recognition through the daring political articles that they published. In addition to factual and political writings, novels were widely read and could be used for the purposes of uplifting the

race. The idea that literature should be used for racial uplift was crystallized in Victoria Earle Matthews' (1861-1907) concept of "race literature", which she brought up in her speech at the First Congress of Colored Women in Boston, 1895. In this speech, Matthews argued that literature should be used as a vehicle against prejudice and injustice. She stated that "race literature" should be simple, but dramatically varying, romantic and tragic, but still based on educated and well-considered arguments (Wallinger, 139). Also Anna Julia Cooper, in her *A Voice from the South* (1892), talked about the value of "race literature" as presenting the reality of African American life and history. As Hanna Wallinger summarizes: "race literature...was defined by the choice of the African American as subject and by certain standards in the presentation of this topic, including high moral attitudes and an adherence to the general values of the American nation. It possessed a social function and every writer had to be committed to it" (Wallinger, 143). No doubt, the activity of the club movement also made the reading and writing of novels more popular, by creating a reading audience and promoting the writing of "race literature" (Tate, 4).

Pauline Hopkins, as an editor of one of the most popular African American magazines, was in a position to influence the contents of the magazine and disseminate her political message all over the country. Her novels and short stories can certainly be thought of as exemplary "race literature". Writing at the time of this intense political and intellectual activity by black women, she is one of the key persons of the "Woman's Era". Her writing should then be understood as part of the influential pursuit of black women, such as Cooper, Wells, Harper and other black feminists in the late 19th-century America.

3. The *tragic mulatta* and passing

Jewel Bowen's beauty was of the Saxon type, dazzling fair, with creamy roseate skin. Her hair was fair, with streaks of copper in it; her eyes, gray with thick short lashes, at times iridescent. Her nose superbly Grecian. Her lips beautifully firm, but rather serious than smiling. (*Hagar's Daughter*, 82)

The most common accusation from critics of Hopkins' fiction and the fiction of other African American authors who used the *tragic mulatta* trope concerns the way these authors depict their protagonists. Some critics assert that the near-white character spectrum of Hopkins and also Frances Harper, for example, results from a latent shame of blackness and reverence for whiteness (see Bost, 70). One of the strongest negative opinions is voiced by Houston A. Baker, when he says that writers like Hopkins transform the mulatta's body as an icon of white male violence and rape during slavery into something "pleasing" or a "black code of beauty, grace, intelligence, and historically embodied prominence" (24). Perhaps the first to start this tradition of neglect toward the "mulatta-canon" was Sterling Brown, who already in 1937 expressed his concern over the fact that most of the heroes and heroines of the turn-of-the-century African American literature had to be near-white. The issue of the mulatto/a has been a constant site of debate among critics throughout the 20th century and even though there are some feminist studies that seem to defend Hopkins, even some of those studies include apologies for the deficiencies of the genre (see Bost, 71⁸).

Intimately connected with the physical appearance of the mulatta characters is their ability to pass for white. The utter impossibility to read race from a person's physical appearance is the key to passing and it has profound consequences for Hopkins' characters. It also provides a way to explain why Hopkins used near-white protagonists so exclusively in her fiction. When taking into account her political aims, it was not simply to appease her white readers,

⁸ Bost detects these apologetic tones in the work of Hazel Carby, Mary Helen Washington and Deborah McDowell. In her study, Washington does declare that "There is a strong sense of social hierarchy in Hopkins, with light-skinned blacks at the top and dialect-speaking dark-skinned blacks at the bottom. Her women characters also suffer from her hierarchical values, becoming less politically active and less central to the story as men take over the political affairs of the community" (Washington, 79).

nor even to evoke the familiar trope of the *tragic mulatta* which was widely circulated in contemporaneous fiction. Her reasons for using a “black” female protagonist as an agent to portray and exhibit extreme whiteness are more complex and they have to do in the first place with what being a white woman versus being a black woman meant in the socio-political situation of the turn-of-the-century America. Therefore, in addition to passing for white, Hopkins’ heroines also pass for a certain kind of whiteness connected with the ideology of the True Womanhood and the way white and black women were conceptualized in the society.

When discussing Hopkins’ work, in which some of the characters voluntarily agree to pass for white for a period of time, the question of passing is complicated from the perspective of the *tragic mulatta* tradition. This is because in the fiction before Hopkins the mulatta would either be forcefully revealed as black, resulting ultimately in her tragic suicide or death (in white writers’ fiction) or alternatively, proudly acknowledge her race and refuse to pass (in black writers’ fiction). The latter happens most famously in Harper’s *Iola Leroy* in which the protagonist receives an offer of marriage from a white man but declines it because she feels that: “There are barriers between us that I cannot pass” (109). In fact, before Hopkins, the *tragic mulatta* was not permitted to pass for white, at least not for a lengthy period of time and consciously. Therefore passing could be considered as kind of a treachery toward the African American community. Besides passing for white, Hopkins also discusses passing in the sense of “masquerading”: in *Hagar’s Daughter*, there is also the black maid Venus dressing up as a boy and the aristocrat Ellis Enson masking himself as the detective Henson, thereby passing for a lower social class than what he is born into. Mistaken and hidden identities are one of the main themes in the novel, as can also be seen in the name-changes of St Clair Enson to General Benson and the slave trader Walker to Major Madison. In fact, all the “white” characters seem to be going through a transformation between antebellum to post-bellum time, whereas the “black” characters, the Sergeant’s servant

family, retain their identities after the war. This seems to be quite ironic, since it is now the “white” characters, not only the biracial women, but also the aristocratic Southern gentlemen and the slave trader, who are passing.

In her first novel *Contending Forces*, passing is not as prominent a theme as in *Hagar’s Daughter*. *Contending Forces* begins in the antebellum era, and tells the story of the Montfort family. Grace Montfort, the wife of a British plantation-owner, is revealed to be a mulatta and her fate seems to be similar to the *tragic mulattas* in the literary tradition; her husband murdered, she herself brutally mutilated in the hands of his murderers, she decides to commit suicide. The latter part of the novel tells the story of Sappho Clark, who is a near-white mulatta, but who is actually living amidst the African American community and acknowledges her race. In the other magazine novels, *Winona* and *Of One Blood*, passing is one of the themes, but not as much as in *Hagar’s Daughter*. *Winona* is an octoroon who has a mixture of ethnicities but looks near-white. Living with her Indian father and a black step-brother she has identified herself with Native American identity. Later in the novel *Winona* dresses up as a man in order to enter a prison in which her suitor is being captured. Mistaken identities and identity play is thus present in the novel, even though the characters are not passing for white. In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins seems to return to the original *tragic mulatta* theme in presenting Dianthe Lusk, a beautiful mulatta singer who despite her white appearance is not passing for white but whose fate is very tragic. After learning about the incestuous relationships between herself and her two brothers, simultaneously her suitors, Dianthe is devastated and finally dies, poisoned by one of her brothers. Passing in this novel is a theme very much connected with unconscious passing, caused by slavery and its terrifying consequences. Due to the disappearance of family connections and the illicit blood intermingling, brothers and sisters can become lovers.

Indeed, it seems that the question of passing and identity play are very central themes for Hopkins and they are closely connected to the way she revises the *tragic mulatta* narrative as well. This chapter of my thesis will examine the issue of passing in *Hagar's Daughter* more closely; attempting to counter the statement that Hopkins' writing would only be a contribution to the "soothing mulatto utopianism" (33) as described by Houston A. Baker in his critique of the nineteenth-century black women writers.

In the first sub-chapter about passing, I discuss representation and stereotyping with the help of Stuart Hall and Michael Pickering's theories as well as whiteness studies; concentrating on understanding the representation of black women in relation to white women in Hopkins' society and how passing is connected to the issue of representation. In the second chapter, I follow Teresa Zackodnik's reading of Hopkins' characters passing as a "signifying performance", using Judith Butler's groundbreaking theory of performing gender as well as Henry Louis Gates' theorization of black writing as Signifyin(g). I will also take a look at how Hopkins uses the biblical Hagar story in an empowering fashion, by using Janet Gabler-Hover's examination of this aspect of *Hagar's Daughter*. Eventually, I will arrive at an interpretation of *Hagar's Daughter* that celebrates the way Hopkins shows identities as constantly shifting and socially constructed, rather than static and predetermined. Following the analysis of some of the recent Hopkins' critics,⁹ I argue that the unique power of Hopkins' characterizations lies in their complexity and their refusal to be fixed or pre-decided. It is ultimately the reader upon whom the characters signify, and it is also the reader who has to decode the meanings from the text. In the third subchapter, I arrive at an understanding of especially Hagar and the black maid Venus as characters that have subjectivity, something that was very uncommon for contemporary black women. Gaining subjectivity and the ability to define oneself instead of being defined by others was and still is one of the main aims of

⁹ The critics, besides Zackodnik, that consider the value of Hopkins' writing to lie in the complex, de-stablizing and shifting identities of her characters include at least Kristina Brooks, Susan Gillman and Augusta Rohrbach.

black feminism (Christian 1985a, 161).¹⁰ It was also one of the main reasons why contemporaneous black feminist political discourse was very different from that of white women feminists. Therefore, I also touch upon the trope of the New Woman, which emerged particularly in connection with the white suffragette movement and how black women have responded to that system of representation. The movement's influence on Hopkins herself is clearly seen in the way she depicts one of her mulattas, Aurelia Madison.

3.1 Constructing whiteness to counter stereotypes

This morning Hagar washed the silver with the sleeves of her morning robe turned up to the shoulder, giving a view of rosy, dimpled arms. "A fairer vision was never seen," thought the man who paused a moment at the open window to gaze again upon the pretty, homelike scene. (*Hagar's Daughter*, 34).

Jewel was his saint, his good angel; and he loved her truly with all the high love a man of the world can ever know. He trusted her for her womanly goodness and truth. And Jewel returned his love with an intensity that was her very life. (*Hagar's Daughter*, 103)

Answering the question of why Hopkins decides to tell the stories of near-white, angelic, and domestic women is at the heart of interpreting her work. As explained in the introduction, one of the main aims of the newly-emancipated black women was to counter the stereotypes that defined and restricted their daily lives. Most importantly, the stereotype of the licentious, over-sexualized Jezebel was something that black women regarded with contempt, trying instead to emphasize their own innate morality. The stereotype of the sexually immoral black woman was so widespread that "virtually every black woman who took up a pen felt obligated to defend black women against these charges" (Washington, 73). In the preface for her first novel, *Contending Forces*, Hopkins sets as her aim neither to make her work known to the public nor to gather profit but to "raise the stigma of degradation from [her] race" (13).

¹⁰ One of the effects of stereotyping or "othering" is that it denies the right of its objects (those being othered) to name and define themselves, thereby divesting them of their social and cultural identities, because they are homogenized and reduced to a stereotypical representation (Pickering, 73).

To understand stereotypes it is necessary to first understand representation, and representation is something connected with the production of meaning. The nature of meaning is not fixed, but instead, meaning is produced and exchanged in social interaction (Hall, 3). Meanings and categories of meaning are shared in a culture or a society, and they are needed in order to define what is “normal”, giving us a sense of who we are, where and with whom we belong. Therefore, culturally shared meanings also define who we exclude from “normality”. Meanings organize and regulate social practices and therefore they have real effects on our daily lives (*ibid.*). As argued by Pickering (xiv), even though meanings are usually taken for granted, what is taken as normal or legitimate is “never absolute, never fixed for all time, and always the site of different and conflicting ways of knowing it”. This is liberating for those who are being stereotyped or “Othered” in the society, because there are ways to change meanings, even though it is a difficult task.

Thus, even though meanings cannot be fixed, people have a natural tendency to try to fix the meanings they value and prefer. This practice is done by looking at difference. In fact, difference is something that is essential to meaning, because otherwise meaning would not exist. However, people often do not see meaning as a spectrum but instead as binary oppositions. These binary oppositions often exist in the fields of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Hall, 228). Oppositions such as black/white, licentious/moral, dirty/pure, savage/cultured, primitive/advanced, ugly/beautiful and active/passive are key to understanding how black and white women were represented as binary oppositions in the 19th century. Pickering argues convincingly, that stereotypes are always historically contingent so that they depend on the social and historical circumstances in which they operate (Pickering, 12). In 19th -century America, the [female] body became a discursive site of representing “difference” and a medium through which much racialized knowledge could be produced and circulated (Hall, 244). The bodily differences were there as “natural”, unlike cultural

differences, and thus this strategy allowed the culture to fix meaning permanently. Thus, black people were represented stereotypically, using only their physical appearance to simplify and fix their difference into place (Hall, 249).

In *Hagar's Daughter*, in the first shocking moments after hearing about her racial inheritance, Hagar shows, by examining her black servant Marthy, how firmly those stereotypes were present in her “white” mind: “Hagar suddenly arose, caught her [Marthy] by the shoulders and turned her toward the light, minutely examining the black skin, crinkled hair, flat nose and protruding lips. So might her grandmother have looked” (56). Despite the warm relationship between the Sergeant family and the black servant family, in this situation where Hagar is, she reduces Marthy to the familiar stereotypical representation of black people. Furthermore, facing the shock of suddenly having to embrace the Other,¹¹ the threatening, frightening site of aggression that is fundamental to the constitution of the self (Hall, 237), she continues: “Her name gone, her pride of birth shattered at one blow! Was she, indeed, a descendant of naked black savages of the horrible African jungles?” (57)

According to Stuart Hall, stereotyping has essentializing, reductionist and naturalizing effects (257). It tends to hold on to the “few, simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity” (258). In this way, stereotyping [or othering] denies its historical basis and its dependency on that which it tries to exclude (Pickering, 49). This is exactly what Hagar does in the above passage of the novel. However, the exaggerated description of her racist attitudes is fundamental to the point that Hopkins wants to make here: Hagar’s white self is unable to connect her person with blackness, even though she now knows that she is biologically partly

¹¹ Pickering argues that the concepts of stereotyping and the more recent concept of the Other are very close to one another and mutually compatible, but the concept of the Other pays more attention to those involved in the process of othering as well as the objects of this process. In this way, the concept of the Other ties stereotypical misrepresentations more closely together with power structures and relations, which are at the heart of stereotyping (Pickering, 69).

black. Hopkins wants to show her readers that even though a person can look white, act white and feel white, she is not necessarily white and thus there is no essential whiteness.

In order to turn the representation of black women around, Hopkins emphasizes and underlines her heroines' literal whiteness, which turns out to be artificial in the sense that the heroines are mulattas. Before Hagar's racial origins are revealed, she is depicted by his admirer and future husband not only as having "pure *creamy*¹² skin" (35), but she also frequently dresses in white: "Just at this moment Hagar opened the door, pausing on the threshold, a fair vision in *purest white*..."(53); "Mrs. Bowen, in *white* velvet...stood near the entrance" (111). Hopkins also connects Hagar with the snow: "Her dark eyes shone like stars, her face was *white* as the snow that covered the fields outside" (69), and later she reappears for the first time as Estelle Bowen to snowy and wintery Washington in a sleigh. In the same sleigh is Jewel Bowen, Estelle's stepdaughter, who also has "*creamy* roseate skin" (82), and who is described by her suitor Cuthbert Sumner as a "maiden in *white*" (84). Jewel also has "a slender, *white*-robed figure" (116) and she is compared to "a delicate lily, or a *white* rose" (140). Furthermore, Hagar/Estelle is depicted by onlookers as having a throat and shoulders of "*alabaster*" (113), and being "*a creature of snow and ice*" (114) with "*a white* impassive countenance" (114) even when the readers already know that she is only passing for white. The exaggerated reminders of whiteness also partly apply to Aurelia Madison, who looks as white as the other mulattas, but who does not act in the same fashion. She enters the novel as "young in years, but with a mature air of a woman of the world..." (90) having "a woman's voluptuous beauty with great dusky eyes and wonderful red-gold hair....dress of moss-green satin and gold [which] fell away from *snowy* neck and arms on which diamonds gleamed" (90).

¹² All the italics in the quotations on this page are mine.

By over-emphasizing her heroines' whiteness, Hopkins seems to want to make the readers pay special attention to their whiteness and the irony of it. Even when the readers are still unaware of Jewel and Aurelia's mulatta identities, they start to expect this revelation because, strangely enough, particular detail is given to depicting their whiteness. Furthermore, since the novel is called *Hagar's Daughter*, one of the young women must consequently be Hagar's daughter, and thus, have black blood in her veins. At this stage of the novel, the reader knows that not only Hagar but at least one other "white" character is only passing for white, but it is still quite impossible to identify her.

The purpose of stereotyping is to maintain existing structures of power (Pickering, 3). According to Hall, stereotypes should not be resisted by avoiding the terrain completely, but instead, by taking the body as the principal site of representational strategies and attempting to make the stereotypes work against themselves (274). Furthermore, Pickering (71) argues that in order for stereotyping to work, it needs not to be seen and acknowledged for what it does. At the very moment stereotypes are being looked at more closely, their status as ultimate truths starts to become questioned. By insisting on gazing at blackness and whiteness makes the act of looking de-familiar and explicit. In a way, Hopkins aims at "counter-stereotyping" her characters by reducing them to only one, vivid and memorable characteristic: their whiteness. The whiteness becomes, then, under extreme scrutiny by the narrator and the reader, exposing its constructed nature.

The social construction of whiteness has been the interest of a spectrum of studies labelled under the theme of whiteness studies from the 1990's onwards. Whiteness studies posit race as the core narrative of American history, and build upon the now commonplace idea of race being historically, biologically as well as anthropologically a construct rather than an objective means of classifying people (Kolchin, 157; Hartman, 24).¹³ One of the most well-

¹³ Whiteness studies can be divided into several areas of inquiry or perspectives, depending on the field of the researcher (social studies, education, cultural studies, historical studies etc.). John T. Warren sees at least three

known studies from this field is Richard Dyer's *White* (1997) in which he promotes the idea of making whiteness strange, of making the invisibility of the privileges that go together with whiteness more pronounced and visible, to dislodge and de-centralize whiteness from its authority that is often taken for granted in our culture. As argued by Dyer, whiteness has always been a flexible category, and to be accepted as white has attracted many nonwhites who have had the slightest chance to cross the border (Dyer, 20).¹⁴ By emphasizing the whiteness of her protagonists, Hopkins shows that crossing the border is actually fairly easy, and that whiteness is not a rigid, closed category. Furthermore, Hopkins' characters are not only white but they are also upper-class ladies. In the hierarchy of whiteness, the upper-class lady was as white as anyone could get, leaving upper-class white men, working-class whites as well as non-whites below her in her ultimate white purity and virtue (Dyer, 57).

In this way, the rhetoric of whiteness is also connected to the True Woman –discourse. Thus, the whiteness of Hagar and Jewel also explains their other qualities, like purity, high morality, domesticity and intelligence, because those qualities were intimately connected to white womanhood through the True Woman ideal. Furthermore, in Dyer's words, whiteness itself in the Western imagination carries with it connotations of moral and aesthetic superiority: "All lists of the moral connotations of white as symbol in Western culture are the same: purity, spirituality, transcendence, cleanliness, virtue, simplicity, chastity" (72). In Aurelia's case, however, Hopkins has not as neatly disposed of the licentiousness and immorality connected with the stereotypical representations of black women. This choice can

different branches of study: firstly, there are studies that aim at social critique and reform of policies. Secondly, there are studies that investigate the construction of whiteness in cultural products, such as literature and film. Thirdly, the positionality or the location of whiteness is scrutinized in order to find out how it works as a privileged place of power (Warren, 187). Some of the most well-known scholars include Peggy McIntosh, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Ruth Frankenberg, Grace Elizabeth Hale, David Roediger and Alexander Saxton among others (for further information about these scholars, see Warren).

¹⁴ Dyer means the historical fact that people like the Irish or Jewish immigrants in America, for example, have at one time been accepted inside the category of whiteness whereas at other times have not (Dyer, 51). Furthermore, he argues: "In sum, white as a skin colour is just as unstable, unbounded a category as white as a hue, and therein lies its strength. It enables whiteness to be presented as an apparently attainable, flexible, varied category, while setting up an always movable criterion of inclusion, the ascribed whiteness of your skin" (57).

be explained by Aurelia's victimization and the evil influence of Major Madison and General Benson, her motherlessness and her New Woman –ideals, which I will discuss further later in my study.

What do Hopkins' representations of her mulatta heroines as white means, then, from the perspective of passing? As argued by Werner Sollors (248), a constitutive aspect of passing in the 19th century was the belief that some descent characteristic, such as black blood, would be so essential and deeply defining that it would overrun physical appearance, individual volition, self-description, social acceptance or economic success. Furthermore, passing was mainly a phenomenon of a particular historical era, in which there existed such amount of social inequality that it would create the need for "passing". As the narrator tells the readers, Hagar's fate seems to be like a precondition to her decision to pass:

Here was a woman raised as one of a superior race, refined, cultured, possessed of all the Christian virtues, who would have remained in this social sphere all her life. . . . But the one drop of black blood neutralized all her virtues, and she became, from the moment of exposure, an unclean thing. Can anything more unjust be imagined in a republican form of government whose excuse for existence is the upbuilding of mankind! (62)

Also, it must be recognized that passing in the antebellum context was very different from passing in the postbellum context. Firstly, before slavery had officially been abolished, at a time when Hagar learns about her racial origins, she would not have many options to choose from. If she had decided not to pass, she would have become a slave; property to be sold at a slave auction. The other option, implied already in the name of the trope, *tragic mulatta*, was to choose death instead. Joining the "African American community" which in the South meant the slave community, was not, thus, an option for Hagar, because that would mean for her to subject herself to slavery and probably lose her child as well. From this viewpoint, comparing the decision of Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* to Hopkins' Hagar is thus void; Iola, who refuses to pass for white, was a Northern free black, whereas Hagar's situation was entirely different. Due to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the Northern states had a lawful

obligation to return any runaway slaves back to their owners. This meant that escaping to the North would not have been an option for Hagar either.

However, in the postbellum context, passing had a different meaning, because then it was perhaps more of a conscious, deliberate choice made by those near-white blacks who thought they could improve their social position and wealth by passing. As mentioned before, the abolition of slavery did not, however, mean that the social or political atmosphere would have become any easier for black people, emancipated though they were. To the contrary, toward the end of the 19th century, racial relations were becoming more tense and violent than ever before. This is one of the reasons why Hagar chooses to continue “passing” even though it is sometimes painful and difficult.

The myth that “one could always tell” or distinguish those passing for white even though this was impossible in reality, highlights an “illusionary sense of certainty in what is actually an area of social ambiguity and insecurity” (Sollors, 250). By portraying a passing Hagar, Hopkins makes the statement that while it was actually impossible for Hagar to be openly black and retain her social and material status, she could in fact do it by consciously passing for white, and still remain biologically black. Having been exposed biologically black does not turn Hagar into the “descendant of naked black savages” that she herself fears. The representations of black people are thus only stereotypes, they are not self-fulfilling prophecies. Hagar is still the same “Southern Belle” that she used to be; only now she knows that in order to survive, she has to be able to construct and perform her former self as an “outsider” to the white, aristocratic society she is used to living in. Thus, Hagar’s (nor Jewel or Aurelia’s) innate qualities, her virtues and her social status, were not in fact naturally determined by her biological race. Furthermore, the inability of Hopkins’ white characters as well as the reader to identify the other “passing” mulatta, the obligatory daughter whose existence is promised already in the novel’s title, is a further proof of the artificiality of race

as a differentiating device. In this way, Hopkins shows that race is not a biological, but a social construction. This also allows Hagar to perform whiteness in order to survive as Estelle Bowen.

3.2 The signifyin(g) performance of passing

Historically, as explained above, the ability to pass for white was the precondition not only for citizenship, but also for being regarded as a complete human being. In fact, black slaves were in the US Constitution of 1787 counted as three-fifths of a person (Schlossberg, 4). For this reason, passing could mean “the difference between life and death, community and isolation, status as property and status as subjects” (*ibid.*). At the individual level, passing means that the person becomes white by suppressing, denying, forgetting or ignoring their African identity (Mullen, 72). This aspect of passing is the one causing most critique from within the African American community toward those who pass. In the negative criticism toward mulatta fiction, the mulatta is seen as a “doomed, whitened ideal who communicates white notions of racial difference to a largely white audience” (Zackodnik, xiv).

The position of the person who passes is problematic, because at the same time as white people have attempted to assure the purity of whiteness by excluding all else, black African Americans have sometimes also regarded biracial people as “not black enough” (Zackodnik, xiv). Thus, from the African American perspective, the mulatta who passes can be seen as a selfish traitor to her race, denying her ancestry in order to acquire a better life for herself. To the white community, the mulatta embodies the social taboo of miscegenation. Her existence is a cause for fear, because she threatens the hierarchical mechanisms of race, such as Jim Crow laws, racial sciences and eugenics, which were put in place to ensure the separation of the races and the purity of the white blood. Consequently, mulattas have been targeted, by both white and black communities, as the source, the cost and the evidence for racial mixture (Bost, 14).

For authors, such as Hopkins, who used the mulatta character, the problematic position of the mulatta was a challenge: on one hand, they had to prove black women could be True Women, meaning beautiful, pure, upper-class and non-aggressive, if only they did not have to face racism. On the other hand, by representing black women as mulattas, they took the risk of losing a part of themselves, and being charged of submitting to white values (Christian 1985b, 235). Teresa Zackodnik (xxi) argues that for the black women authors and speakers, the figure of the mulatta was not in any way a straightforward means to discuss racialized womanhood and that it always came with a certain risk, but it also enabled them to discuss the issue more diversely on both sides of the colour line. The figure of the mulatta, as controversial as it was and still is, was well positioned to “reveal writers, and therefore the culture’s conflicted visions of national and racial exclusion and belonging” (Raimon, 12). The mulatta is an ambiguous character who testifies that race is an uncertain and shifting construction. As Suzanne Bost argues convincingly:

...the mulatta character is a fetish for both African-American and white American writers because of internal contradiction: she embodies both the taboo against miscegenation and the omnipresence of miscegenation: she reinforces white standards of beauty and propriety at the same time that she denies white supremacy by being not white. She supports and negates the framework of racism. (Bost, 72)

The way the mulatta actually contests and contradicts racism is connected to her passing. Identity categories are usually built around what we see as visible in ourselves and in others. There is an assumed relationship between what we see and what is believed to be true. Furthermore, our culture is highly visual, meaning that in order to be recognized as white, the person needs to embody whiteness on the surface, even though whiteness itself is a non-corporeal construct (Dyer, 42). The mulatta, who looks like white but turns out to be black, disrupts this logic, blurring the lines between the races, and showing that identity categories are constructed and deconstructed, intersecting and overlapping (Schlossberg, 2). The mulatta

is able to abandon her “authentic” identity and perform another, making it questionable whether there can even be such “authentic” identities in the first place.

Judith Butler’s theorization of gender as performance helps to understand the mulatta’s transgressing power. In feminism, the distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender has been acknowledged for a long time, but Butler goes further, in claiming that actually there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender and that gender is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results (33). Thus, gender is “doing” and not “being”. Butler claims that it is particularly those individuals who “appear to be persons, but fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined” (23) that problematize personhood completely. These beings appear “incoherent” or “discontinuous” because they are not performing their gender right. Butler states drag queens as one example of this kind of individuals, because their gender parodies “reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (175). If we understand gender more broadly as a complex identity construction that also contains a person’s race, we can apply Butler’s theory to the *tragic mulatta*.¹⁵

The *tragic mulatta*, like Hagar Enson in Hopkins’ text, is this kind of a person, because she fails to perform black womanhood as it is conceptualized in the cultural imagery of the time: Hagar is biologically black but she is not licentious, over-sexed or immoral. Everything in her person suggests, rather, that she is a white woman. In order to survive, Hagar decides to perform white womanhood even after she learns about her black ancestry. She is able to do this by performing successive imitative acts that “jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self” (Butler, 176). Even more illuminating is the fact that the other two

¹⁵ I agree with Keith Alexander Bryant here, who takes up Judith Butler’s theory in connection to whiteness and claims that whiteness is sustained by performative acts, much like gender is. He also criticizes Whiteness studies and claims that Whiteness is the performance that undergirds them, so that the Whiteness scholarship actually reproduces and sustains whiteness by centering it (Bryant, 654-655).

mulattas, Jewel and Aurelia, are passing for white unconsciously and succeed so well that even the reader is perplexed as to which one is actually black. As Butler argues, gender should be understood as a constituted social temporality, meaning that gender is produced by constantly performing gendered acts and both the social audience (the society) and the actor herself, believes in its stability and performs accordingly (179). Thus, passing individuals are not *necessarily* conscious agents who assess and select the appropriate acts to perform in order to appear “right” to the outside world, but rather, this process happens automatically and naturally through conforming to society’s ideals, like true womanhood, for instance. This further proves that there are no authentic, fixed identities like “white woman/black woman”.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. is one of the most significant African American literary critics who have contributed to the way African American texts should be critically read and analyzed. He studies African American texts from the point of view of difference: how African American texts differ from Western forms of writing and what it is that sets African American writers apart from white writers. In other words, what makes a text black? Gates answers to this question by pointing out that the African American tradition can be characterized by a Signifyin(g) tendency: “Signifyin(g) . . . occurs in black texts as explicit theme, as implicit rhetorical strategy, and as a principle of literary history” (Gates 1988a, 89). What Gates means by Signifyin(g), is that black texts engage themselves in rhetorical games and formal revision, such as troping, pastiche, and repetition of formal structures and their differences (Gates 1988a, 52). The interplay between what is literal and what is figurative is central to Signifyin(g).

In *Hagar’s Daughter*, Hopkins plays with the whiteness/blackness of her characters that are simultaneously black and white. Thus, what is considered literal whiteness in Hagar at the beginning of the story becomes figurative, as she consciously passes for white in the latter part of the novel. The beginning of Hagar’s story also reminds the reader of the trope of the

tragic mulatta by portraying a typical representation of the trope, but the latter part of the novel revises this trope by portraying a passing Hagar. As argued before, Hagar's survival from tragic death or suicide is a dramatic revision to the white *tragic mulatta* tradition, whereas her conscious decision to pass for white (and not embracing her "real" ethnicity) is a betrayal within the terms of the black *tragic mulatta* fiction. In this way, Hopkins repeats some of the elements of the genre, but chooses to revise others.

Additionally, Hopkins is repeating the biblical Hagar story with a difference.¹⁶ In a similar way to the biblical story, Hopkins' Hagar, an African American woman, is banished from her home with a child and is then salvaged by the marriage proposal of Senator Bowen. One way of revising the Hagar myth is that in Hopkins' version, Hagar does not have a son, but a daughter and the mother-daughter reunion becomes a central theme of the novel. Janet Gabler-Hover's study of the Hagar myth and how it was used by authors in the 19th-century America reveals that there was actually a whole canon of Hagar fiction in existence, mostly written by proslavery white women. According to Gabler-Hover, the connotations of the Hagar character to black ethnicity were clear to both white and black authors at the time (7). The Hagar myth enabled authors to embrace Hagar as the African woman with a free sexuality, a spiritually and sexually empowered woman (*ibid.*, 30). Thus, the objective of these authors was to re-imagine white womanhood through an ethnically complex Hagar character, for whom they could imagine sexuality outside of rigid patriarchal barriers (*ibid.*, 8). This was accomplished, by portraying a heroine who was white enough for the readers to identify with, but whose ethnic background was unclear enough for her to "pass for black", meaning that she could express her sexuality and individuality more than a white woman generally could. However, in doing this, the white women authors would ultimately rely on

¹⁶ In the biblical story, Hagar is the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh, who is given to Abraham's wife Sarah as a handmaid and who is commanded by Sarah to bear a child for Abraham because she herself cannot. However, as God later grants Sarah a child of her own, Hagar is ultimately banished to the desert with her son Ishmael. In the end, God rewards Hagar's sacrificial motherhood and saves her and Ishmael, promising that the boy will become a great leader in his life.

projecting immoral sexuality to blackness and salvaging this way their white womanhood from the “taint”. In other words, the Hagar characters were portrayed black enough in order to escape patriarchal charges against women’s sexual and political rebellion (Gabler-Hover, 9). This proves that the tragic mulatta trope was flexible enough to be used for the purposes of white as well as black women writers and the meanings the trope carried could be very different from one another.

Another way, in which Hopkins then revises the Hagar canon, is by portraying a black woman passing for white, instead of a white woman attempting to pass for black in order to be able to implement her sexual and political rebellion toward the patriarchal society. Thus, the “passing of a black woman as white to survive in a racist world displaces the passing of a white woman as black to survive in a patriarchal one. Hopkins resists colonial appropriation by Hagar ‘miming’” (Gabler-Hover, 134). Instead of splitting black and white womanhood from each other by excluding black women from sentimental motherhood, as previous Hagar authors did, Hopkins combines different womanhoods and creates a truly hybrid heroine. According to Gabler-Hover, Hopkins does this by using the conflicting traditions of tragic mulatta / white racist Hagar fiction to contradict each other.

Firstly, in white racist Hagar fiction, Hagar must first be coded black in order for the white writer to be able to liberate her white heroine sexually and then ultimately split her away from tainted blackness. In tragic mulatta fiction, the mulatta must first be white and then be revealed as black in order for the plot to work. The ambiguous identities of Hopkins’ mulattas who appear to be white but are black and then decide to pass for white render all identities fluid showing that Hopkins does not directly follow either of these traditions, but revises them and de-stabilizes the bases from which they work. Accordingly, Gates argues that African American texts Signify upon each other by tropological revision or repetition and difference (1988a, 88). In this way, we can see that Hopkins Signifies upon both canons,

using their tropes, repeating and revising them with a difference. In addition to using the themes from the Hagar myth and the *tragic mulatta* –genre, Hopkins mixes elements from the sentimental novel, detective fiction and adventure stories. Her way of combining and repeating elements of popular fiction in her magazine novels is one way of Gates’ Signifyin(g) intertextuality that characterizes much African American writing.¹⁷

The term double-voicedness or double-consciousness has been used to describe the way African American authors have been able to use the vocabulary, categories, representations and rhetorical or narrative techniques from the dominant white discourse, while simultaneously addressing the issues of African American audience (Zackodnik, xviii).¹⁸ While the first critic to use this term, W.E.B DuBois, saw double-consciousness as a curse or a burden for black Americans, modern critics have interpreted it differently. Henry Louis Gates includes this in Signifyin(g) and Stephen Soitos claims that it creates positive creative tension to African American narratives. Double-conscious detection is one of the tropes he claims have been used by African American detective novelists to transform the generic conventions of detective fiction into a specific African American detective tradition (Soitos, 36). By using these strategies, African American writers attempt to draw attention to how texts should be interpreted, how appearances are unreliable, and how the politics of the production and transmission of knowledge can be questioned (Fabi, 38). In the context of Hopkins’ writing, this is achieved, for instance, by evoking the characteristics of the *tragic*

¹⁷ Despite the fact Hopkins can be considered a pioneer in [African] American popular fiction (Soitos, 60), I have chosen to ignore this viewpoint of inquiry almost completely in this thesis. The field of popular culture studies today is vast, with approaches from semiotics, structuralism and reader-response criticism that have been used to interrogate media texts, movies and literature. The way we nowadays interpret something as popular culture and something as fine art is perhaps not very relevant from the historical point of view, because the African American literary tradition was only taking its first steps at the time. However, one part of popular culture studies, the study of genre, could be a very relevant avenue to discuss Hopkins as well, even though it is not within the scope of this particular study.

¹⁸ This term comes originally from Hopkins’ contemporary, W.E.B. DuBois, who in his work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) wrote about the way American racism forces African Americans to see the world from two different viewpoints: firstly from a white consciousness that sees black people as unworthy of American citizenship, secondly (and only after looking at themselves through the eyes of white people) from their own understanding of themselves as Americans.

mulatta, of the Hagar myth, and of the widely circulated representations of white and black womanhood. Hopkins' way of writing thus enables multiple readings depending on the readership (Zackodnik, xxi). In other, words, the whole novel *Hagar's Daughter* can be said to pass with readers "who are unable to notice or comprehend the inherent irony or site and mode of . . . [its] critiques" (Zackodnik, xx). In this perspective, it can be assumed that Hopkins was aware of her audience being mixed-race and that she anticipated different kind of responses to her novel. Also, this explains why her writing has received so much critique during the 20th century. However, the notion of double-consciousness also implies that the African American audience would be able to interpret the novel in a more positive way, because they would understand that Hopkins Signifie(s) and speaks figuratively. The use of near-white mulatta characters would thus be explained by the underlying uses and functions of the trope, such as those that I have been discussing in this thesis.

However, as mentioned before, Hopkins has perhaps received the harshest criticism from African American critics. In my opinion, this complex issue of double-consciousness has to do with both race and gender. The African American community is not a unified one, and thus there are different readings among different members. To be able to understand the hidden, underlying tones in Hopkins' work, one must take the perspectives of race and gender into account simultaneously. In fact, both Sterling Brown and Houston A. Baker, who have voiced the most negative opinions about Hopkins, are African American male critics. It can be argued that Hopkins' text "passes" with African American men in the same way as it "passes" with some white readers and critics. Thus, part of the meaning of the text could be invisible to those who cannot interpret it from the black *and* female perspective.

Essential to the Signifyin(g) performance of passing done by Hopkins' heroines is also their ability to perform, not just imitate, the True Womanhood ideals that were intimately connected with white womanhood and so aggressively denied from black women. Hagar and

Jewel, in particular, seem to conform to these ideals in full. Jewel's depictions are picturesque, even slightly exaggerating her beauty, purity and innocence: "...she was a happy-hearted girl, full of the joy of youth and perfect health. She presented a bright image to the eye...as she galloped over the surrounding country on her thoroughbred mare..." (83). All three mulattas have been educated in a convent; they are at home in balls and social events, and display their elegance and beauty at all occasions. As a stepmother to Jewel, Hagar/Estelle is the domestic goddess, who from the moment they met had "shared the Senator's worship of Jewel" (83). With a mother's ardent love, she has treated Jewel like she was her own daughter. As a perfect wife, Hagar/Estelle is a "well-educated woman, versed in the usages of polite society . . . [who] recognized her husband's sterling worth in business and morals" (81). By depicting the African American mixed-race mulattas as True Women, Hopkins exposes True Womanhood as a racialized gender identity which is constructed and regulated by mere appearances and behavior and which was "performable by the very women it arguably sought most to exclude" (Zackodnik, 101).

It is now clear that Hopkins' fiction belongs to the literature of passing, in the sense that it "demonstrates the actual fluidity of ostensibly rigid racial boundaries that define the power relations from margin to center" (Mullen, 74). This tendency in Hopkins' writing is most visible in *Hagar's Daughter*, even though the theme of passing is also present in the other magazine novels *Winona* and *Of One Blood* as well as her first novel *Contending Forces*. Besides passing for white, Hopkins uses the passing theme in other ways as well. Two of her female characters, Venus Johnson in *Hagar's Daughter* and the protagonist in *Winona* dress up as men in order to gain agency and be able to function in a patriarchal setting such as the prison. However, passing is not a simple, straightforward issue, and thus Hopkins' fiction can also have different readings depending on the viewpoint of the reader. In *Of One Blood*,

Hopkins shows the dark side of passing and the consequences of slavery become apparent in incestuous relationships within families.

The multiple accusations and several recent attempts to defend Hopkins' literary merit are proof that the issue of passing is yet unresolved. Passing can be liberating and revisionist, but at the same time, there is something about it that is fundamentally conservative: it holds larger social hierarchies firmly in place (Schlossberg, 3). What passing enables Hopkins' characters to do, however, is to gain agency and subjectivity in a historical context as oppressing and limiting to black women as the turn-of-the-century America was.

3.3 Identities in flux: self-determined passing

It could be argued that Hopkins has failed in her quest of seeking agency for black women, because her protagonists are near-white and even after learning about their African American roots, they decide to continue passing for white. From this perspective, Hagar, for instance, does not affirm the racial consciousness that many critics have used as a defence to discuss the late 19th-century writers who used mulatta characters (Lewis 2003, 33). However, at a time like Hopkins', it was very difficult for a black woman to write a novel in which credible black women could be the focus (Christian 1980, 22). For as Barbara Christian says: "The problem was not whether black women were heroic, but whether they were women at all" (1980, 32). Thus, the near-white skin and beauty of the protagonist was almost a precondition in order to be able to say anything about the position of black women in society. For Hopkins, the passing of her mulatta characters seems to be an asset rather than an obligatory nuisance. She uses the theme to her own advantage and gains agency for her protagonists in a different way. In addition, her strategy enables Hopkins to talk to both black and white readerships, which had different and often opposing perspectives, historical experiences and knowledge of black culture and its significance (Fabi, 37). Being able to address wide audiences was important to Hopkins, and it is important to any African American writer, because it can be

said that the African American novel is characterized by the need to serve both ideological and social purposes as well as aesthetical ones (Graham, 7).

Depicted initially as a white Southern Belle, the fragile and angelic Hagar seems to rely completely on Ellis when they decide to marry, both in concrete business matters as well as emotional support when her mother dies: “Soon Ellis was taking the bulk of the business of managing her estates upon his own strong shoulders” (39), “Then followed days that were a nightmare to Hagar, but under Ellis’s protecting care the storm of grief spent itself. . . and she yielded to his persuasions to have the marriage solemnized at once, so that he might assume his place as her rightful protector” (39). Thus, Hagar is depicted as the passive white woman on a pedestal, protected by her husband and not having any authority over her own life. However, as soon as Hagar’s black origins are revealed and Ellis is found dead (as it seems at this point of the novel) leaving Hagar without his protection, Hagar starts to stand up for herself and becomes a courageous and proud woman, fiercely defending what is left of her dignity: “Hagar came straight up to the two men ...’I have come without your bidding, sir, for I have something to say to you,’ . . .’I do not fear you. Life has no terrors to offer me now.’ . . . No one had ever seen the gentle Hagar Sargeant in her present character. . .’Yes,’ she shouted. ‘You are his murderer!’” (69-70). Thus, Hopkins also makes a feminist statement here. She emphasizes that under the protective [patriarchal] care of their white husbands [white] women became powerless and passive. In the end, Ellis’s protection is not strong enough to protect Hagar and she has to defend herself. In directly and loudly accusing St Clair for the murder of Ellis, Hagar becomes more heroic and courageous than Ellis ever was, because even though he finally admitted that his love for his family was stronger than his racist prejudice, he leaves Hagar and the child unprotected in the house.

Hagar’s behaviour is interpreted by Walker as “hysterics” (71), a condition which was considered a female illness at the time due to the fragility and weakness of women. However,

Hagar proves him wrong, remaining calm and controlled even though she knows what lies ahead of her: “With a defiant smile, Hagar paused on the threshold and said: ‘It’s the truth! you’re his murderer, and in spite of the wealth and position you have played for and won, you have seen the last on this earth of peace or happiness’” (71). This defiant act by Hagar also proves that she has come to accept her racial status and begins to find the means of coping with it. Even though at first devastated and in great shock after finding out her racial roots, Hagar overcomes her prejudice and gains agency by accepting herself. She is still the same Hagar as she was before, only the outside world considers her different. The breaking of the mirror is Hagar’s first step from denial toward acceptance:

She examined her features in the mirror, but even to her prejudiced eyes there was not a trace of the despised chattel. One blow with her open hand shattered its shining surface and the pieces flew about in a thousand tiny particles. . . Then she laughed a dreadful laugh. . . Aunt Henny and Marthy stood outside the locked door and whispered to each other: ‘Misse Hagar done gone mad!’ (57-8).

In her despair, Hagar even denies her child: “They brought the child to the door and begged her to open it. She heeded it not. Let it die; it, too, was now a slave” (58). Thus, Hopkins shows that Hagar is going through the familiar struggle of the *tragic mulatta* to whom the drop of black blood, a significant part of her identity, comes as a dreadful surprise. However, in her lamentations, Hagar remembers her namesake’s story in the Bible and quotes a poem in which her emerging aggression and defiance are shown: “Farewell, I go but Egypt’s mighty gods Will go with me, and my avengers be. . . the wrongs that you have done this day to Hagar and your first-born, Shall waken and uncoil themselves, and hiss Like Adders. . .” (58). Thus, Hagar connects herself with the biblical Hagar and for the first time, acknowledges a non-white identity, which is simultaneously an identity of someone who survives triumphantly, despite the hardship she has to go through. A few pages onwards, Hagar is depicted as fallen into apathy, and then, she is in “mortal agony” (68) after hearing about Ellis’s death. However, it does not take long before she decides to confront St Clair.

Unlike the *tragic mulatta* canon would have her readers expect, Hopkins thus allows Hagar to survive the revelation of her racial origins, both psychologically and physically. Even though she jumps to the Potomac River and to her evident death, she re-surfaces later on as Estelle Bowen. Hagar/Estelle's past is unclear, but it is known that she worked as a waitress when she met her future husband Senator Bowen. While the True Womanhood ideal would not allow a woman to work outside the home, Senator Bowen does not count this as a defect for Estelle, perhaps because of his own background: "Every characteristic of his was of the self-made pattern...one might easily trace the rugged windings of a life of hardship...before success had crowned his labours...[he was] one of those genial men whom the West is constantly sending out to enrich society" (80). Thus, the Bowen couple had both been able to build a grander life for themselves: to fulfil the American ideal and myth of the "self-made man". The increased social mobility that came with the industrialization and urbanization of America together with the rising amounts of European immigrants made it at least remotely possible for anybody to occupy a position of prosperity and power, such as Senator Bowen holds in *Hagar's Daughter*. Hopkins emphasizes the differences between the East and the South even more than she emphasizes the North/South divide in terms of attitudes and atmosphere. For Hopkins, the West symbolizes a more open-minded, tolerant atmosphere, where a person's conduct and abilities matter more than their heritage or biology. The Bowen family is very much keen on their Western identity, like Jewel: ". . . I miss the freedom of the ranch, the wild flight at dawn over the prairie in the saddle, and many other things" (119). Thus, the American myth of the West as a place where anyone could venture in search of a better life is very visible in Hopkins' text as well.

Furthermore, in Victorian society, the capitalist structure started to determine people's success based on their personal moral and not external circumstances (Bussey, 301). This was partly evidenced in the sentimental novels, in which it was the division between the domestic

sphere and the public sphere outside the home that enabled men exclusively to venture for wealth and success. However, it is largely the result of Estelle's rare talents that the Bowens are so wealthy and successful: "Thanks to her cleverness, he [the Senator] made no mistakes and many hits which no one thought of tracing to his wife's rare talents...All in all, Mrs. Bowen was a grand woman and Senator Bowen took great delight in trying to further her plans for a high social position for himself and the child" (82).

Thus, by performing her role as a white, True Woman, Hagar/Estelle is actually more than the submissive, docile, passive domestic wife and mother that the ideal white woman would be. Instead, she is very much involved in political and social life as well. Using her "talents", which are actually learned skills and not just the natural cause of her beauty and wealth, Hagar/Estelle is able to perform white womanhood and maintain a respected social status. In fact, Hagar/Estelle can be entitled a "self-made heroine" (Bussey, 306). Instead of destroying herself as the result of the one drop of black blood in her veins, Hagar/Estelle engages in an identity play that enables her to live the life she wants to live. In addition, her life as the wife of an influential politician is something Hagar dreams about at the beginning of the novel already: "She longed to mix and mingle with the gay world; she had a feeling that her own talents, if developed, would end in something far different from the calm routine, the housekeeping and churchgoing which stretched before her" (33). Consequently, Estelle's life is something Hagar, as the wife of a Southern white plantation owner, would never have had. If Hagar and Ellis' family bliss had remained unbroken, Hagar would have been forced to become the passive, docile wife in need of patriarchal protection. Thus, from this viewpoint, passing enables Hagar not just to survive, but to pursue her ambitions in life. Furthermore, heroic in much greater extent than her first husband Ellis Enson, who fails to protect his wife and child, Hagar symbolizes the black woman's defeat over slavery as a metaphor for sexual

exploitation and abuse of power (O'Brien, 119). Thus, Hagar/Estelle self-determines her own fate and her own identity.

The fact that Estelle's true identity is eventually revealed is not the result of her poor passing performance, but the fact that she is the victim of St Clair Enson's schemes. There are actually several self-made men in Hopkins' novels, and most of them differ from Hagar, the self-made woman, in a fundamental way: men like Major Madison, the former slave-owner and St Clair Enson's accomplice in *Hagar's Daughter*, as well as John Langley, the politician and lawyer as well as the main villain in *Contending Forces*, use their talents to acquire power and wealth but "at the expense of the non-development of every moral faculty" (*Contending Forces*, 335). John Langley, talented and intelligent enough to lift himself up from poor conditions and acquire education, had "given no thought to the needs of his soul in his pursuit of wealth and position" (*ibid.*, 336). To the contrary, Hagar/Estelle as a self-made heroine is loyal, loving and generous toward her new family and never lets her wealth and position dim her moral principles. Thus, it follows that Hopkins allows Hagar a happy ending, which is not something she grants for her male self-made characters.

However, no matter how successful Hagar/Estelle is in her passing, it is not something very pleasurable for her. Onlookers seem to detect something out-of-place in Hagar/Estelle's countenance, as they describe her beautiful, but cold as "a creature of snow and ice" (114) and that "there is a story written on her face" (113). At times Estelle is described as hopeless and sad: "In truth, her heart was bitter within her breast" (135), "...a settled look of pain crept like a veil over the beautiful proud face" (136). Sometimes, it takes Hagar/Estelle great pains to remain hidden and to keep the surface calm: "The expression of her face was intense, even fierce: her mouth was tightly closed, her eyes strained as though striving to pierce the veil which hides from us the unseen" (202). The readers are also sometimes allowed to hear

Hagar/Estelle's thoughts, and in some of them, she wonders suggestively: "Why did the past haunt her so persistently?" (197)

However, when Hagar/Estelle lastly hears from General Benson that he has recognized her as Hagar, this information is too much for her: "Mrs. Bowen stood there panting, crushed: her eyes alone gave signs of animation; they glared horribly. As the door closed behind her enemy she sighed; she sunk on the carpet. She had fainted" (207). After this event, Hagar/Estelle seems to be paralyzed and unable to function anymore. When Jewel is kidnapped, "trouble was wearing her out, and there was danger of her becoming a confirmed invalid" (217). The final revelation of Estelle's true identity as Hagar that happens in the courtroom seems to be a relieving act for her: "Mrs. Bowen sprang to her feet with a scream...while these words thrilled the hearts of the listeners: '*Ellis, Ellis! I am Hagar!*'" (261, author's italics).

Thus, Hopkins shows that while Hagar/Estelle is able to pass for white and thus create a new identity for herself, the prejudiced and racist society in which she lives will make her passing a painful act, as well as a salvaging one. Hagar's destiny, however, is to become reunited with her first husband Ellis Enson and thus, she overcomes not just the fate of the *tragic mulatta*, but also the prejudice of society, as Ellis' love for her is stronger than his prejudice: "I wavered and wavered, but nature was stronger than prejudice. I have suffered the torments of hell since I lost my wife and child" (270). Here, Hopkins wants to address her white readers and make them see how pointless the idea of racial separation is, as she makes Enson claim: "'When a man tries to practice . . . against the laws which govern human life an action, there's a weary journey ahead of him'" (270). Furthermore, the union of Hagar and Ellis seems to show that the power of true love can defeat racism (even though fate is not so kind for Jewel and Cuthbert, which is another matter). This idea of true love is something I will return to in the following chapters of my thesis.

Claudia Tate discusses Frances Harper's protagonist Iola Leroy's agency as one constructed from her being a free racial agent, because she is near-white and can thus function without restrictive racial classifications. Compared to a dark-skinned, educated Lucille Delany, who is Iola Leroy's role model in the novel, Iola is, however, able to function better because of her lighter skin colour (Tate, 145). In a similar way, Hopkins puts her mulatta characters, such as Hagar and Jewel, in the spotlight of the story as its main protagonists. However, Hopkins also has a dark-skinned heroine, Venus Williams, to whom she grants perhaps even more agency than to the mulatta characters. Venus, who is the maid servant of Jewel Bowen, offers to help detective Henson (Ellis Enson) in catching the story's villain and helping Jewel and her grandmother to escape from captivity. To do this, Venus dresses up as a boy, Billy. When Hagar is paralyzed after hearing about Jewel's kidnapping, Venus takes matters in her own hands: "...the brain of the little brown maid was busy. She had her own ideas about certain things, and was planning for the deliverance of her loved young mistress" (218), "I'll see if this one little black girl can't get the best of as mean a set of villains as ever was born" (221). The depiction of Venus is significant, because at the same time as Hopkins portrays her several times as "the little black girl", she is also described as someone with "an extremely intelligent, wide-awake expression" (223). Boldly, Venus goes to meet detective Henson and offers to help him in investigating the case: "I need help, Venus; are you brave enough to risk something for the sake of your mistress?" –"Try me and see", was her proud reply. . . " (227). Venus is an educated girl, who unlike her mother Marthy, has very high morals regarding men. Venus's language is usually standard English and she only talks in the vernacular when agitated: "Venus forgot her education in her earnestness, and fell into the Negro vernacular, talking and crying at the same time" (224). It seems that Venus is self-conscious of the two different cultures between which she works as a mediator and is able to act differently in them. Venus has the kind of a double-consciousness often mentioned in

black criticism: she even calls herself “the little black girl” to point out the way her person is seen from the point of view of white people.¹⁹

Kristina Brooks discusses Hopkins’ characters in *Hagar’s Daughter* as a kind of a paired set, in which the mulatta characters occupy the subject position and the black characters have an objectified status, which is rooted in the minstrel tradition. Therefore, the depiction of Venus’ family may seem at first to reinforce the very stereotypes that Hopkins sought to counter: those of the mammy, the buck and the wench (Brooks 1996, 119). Indeed, Venus is also described stereotypically, like a minstrel figure: “Venus showed her dazzling teeth in a giggle. She ducked her head and writhed her shoulders in a surprised merriment...” (227). Brooks, however, sees that the objectification of darker African American characters serves many purposes. Firstly, they act as foils for the racially mixed and free African American characters, in the sense that they complement and highlight their personalities (Brooks 1996, 125). Thus, Venus and Jewel share many similar qualities such as courage and high morals, but whereas Jewel is an ideal True Woman, a genteel girl living in the confined and patriarchal Anglo-Saxon world, she is not able to escape from captivity without the help of a more modern, down-to-earth, black servant girl, skilful and able to enter the African American community as well. Furthermore, I argue that in a similar way, the pair of villains St Clair Enson and his black man servant Isaac (who is also Venus’s father) as well as the pair of Aurelia Madison (a fallen “white” woman) and Marthy (the black wench) complement each other.

Brooks’ (1996, 125) second purpose for the objectification of black characters is that they act as tricksters. By performing minstrel acts like jollity, stupidity and sensuality, they operate in disguise in many different class and race settings. Thirdly, Brooks (*ibid.*) argues that the black characters exhibit the Southern tradition of folklore and a more diverse African

¹⁹ Stephen Soitos (61) claims that Venus is actually the first black detective to appear in literary tradition. For a thorough analysis of the way Hopkins can be seen as one of the pioneer writers using African American detective tropes to discuss social and political concerns, see Soitos (59-76).

American culture than what the Northern bourgeois characters could exhibit. Furthermore, for black audiences, recognizing the elements of the minstrel tradition functioned as a simultaneous self-irony and self-acceptance; Hopkins, a writer of musical dramas herself, trusted that the audience would find pleasure in laughing at the familiar; thus creating a sense of group-belonging (Brooks 1996, 129).

By portraying Aunt Henny as a typical mammy, her daughter Marthy as a typical wench and Isaac as the typical black buck, Hopkins however takes a great risk, which is balanced then in Venus and her brother Oliver's characterizations. Particularly with Venus, Hopkins has aimed at creating a new generation heroine. Contrasting her with the objectified Marthy, Venus has agency to think, speak, and act as a full subject (Brooks 1996, 137). Venus is able to disguise herself and even challenge her own father in her own investigations. I will return to the depiction of the black Sergeant/Johnson family in later chapters of my thesis.

Another risk besides depicting black people in a comical way taken by Hopkins in her novel is the characterization of Aurelia Madison. Aurelia, unlike Hagar/Estelle and Jewel, who generally follow the *tragic mulatta* and True Womanhood patterns in their innate moral characteristics, is an adventuress who will deceive and trick other people in order to achieve purposes in her life. St Clair Enson/General Benson describes Aurelia as someone who “can join a man in a social glass, have a cigar with him, or hold her own in winning or losing a game with no Sunday-school nonsense about her” (78). Being motherless and under the guardianship of just a chaperone, Aurelia has led a life of gambling and seduction, luring men to lose their money in her father's schemes. In Aurelia's character, Hopkins wants to take a stand on the ideals of New Womanhood that were replacing the Cult of True Womanhood in the social and cultural atmosphere of the turn-of-the-century America. Largely a model for white, native-born and bourgeois womanhood, the New Woman was an ideal that had its roots in the suffragette movement for women's rights and it promoted themes like female sexual

freedom (including abortion and birth control issues), women's participation in the workforce, and women as independent consumers (Patterson, 8).²⁰

Representing modernity, the New Woman ideals faced critique as well as praise: the most common accusation was that they promoted lasciviousness; a threat to both marital fidelity and maternal devotion deemed necessary for the continuation of racial progress (Patterson, 40). Lasciviousness, previously connected with black womanhood exclusively, was something that Hopkins would have wanted to battle against, yet the New Womanhood ideals were also something progressive that could open the door for black women's advancement in society (Bergman, 87). It was argued by Margaret Murrey Washington, for example, that black women should adopt dominant middle-class identities in order to uplift the race and this should be done especially by being an excellent home-maker (Patterson, 23). The importance of being able to have a family and a home were also very important for the newly-emancipated black women, because these basic rights were something they did not have during slavery. Broken family connections and the separation of children from their mothers as one of the most inhumane consequences of slave trade was one of the prevalent themes in abolitionist literature already. At the same time as white women were putting family-centred values aside for a more individual, politically-active and sexually less inhibited "New Woman" ideal, black women were ready to embrace motherhood and family as something sacred and highly valued, because for the first time, they could actually run a household and family of their own.

Consequently, Hopkins' attitude to the individualistic practices and the sexual freedom represented by the New Woman ideals was more doubtful. For Hopkins, the advancement of the race is a primary concern, and the advancement of women's rights must support it.

²⁰ In the field of literature, the work of white feminist authors Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman can be considered representative of some of the New Woman ideals. Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1891) can be interpreted as a critique of women's restricted and confined role in the domestic sphere. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) on the other hand, discussed female sexuality in a way that it had never before been discussed in literature.

Therefore she judges Aurelia's pursuit of personal pleasure which indicates her as a New Woman. Thus, Aurelia's agency as an independent, sexually uninhibited woman with manlike manners and habits is the wrong kind of agency. This is revealed to Aurelia (and the reader) in a forceful way as Cuthbert Sumner along with the whole society rejects her determinedly because of her status as an octoroon. However, Hopkins also admits that Aurelia's evil nature is not completely her own fault: "Terrible though her sins might be – terrible her nature, she was but another type of the products of the accursed system of slavery – a victim of 'man's inhumanity to man' (238). Aurelia's final fate is left unknown to the reader, but she is told to have "vanished forever from public view" (272). This fate, to a New Woman who is supposed to be society's pet, achieving "autonomy outside the patriarchal family, professional visibility and political power" (Bergman, 87), must have been a tragedy indeed. The motives for Aurelia's actions and her agency are rooted in self-interest, just like those of the self-made male villains in the story, except that she is partly the victim of circumstances. Aurelia's motherlessness and discontinued or distorted family ties affect her character and thus, make her partly a victim too. Hagar and Venus' agency, on the other hand, is rooted in their high morals and devotion to the family. These themes will be discussed further in later chapters.

As seen in the partly risky depictions of Hopkins' characters and the theme of passing, the novel *Hagar's Daughter* does not offer a clear and stable reading or a ready-made position to occupy. It is complex and challenging, forcing the reader to position and re-position themselves in relation to issues of race and gender, for example. Hopkins' writing has been described by Augusta Rohrbach (483) as characterized by multiplicity and antigenealogy, meaning that Hopkins not only inverts existing hierarchies of the self, history and race, but also resists the stabilizing principles that organize these hierarchies in the first place. The form and plot complexity of a serial novel such as *Hagar's Daughter* enables Hopkins to play with double identities, riddles and uncertainties, making it difficult for readers to retain a

fixed, preconceived notion of the concept of identity. The most useful reading of Hopkins' novel is, thus, an open one. The reader must constantly decode meanings from the text and the experience thus allows different readings and interpretations. In the next chapter of my thesis, I will discuss the theme of domesticity, and how Hopkins signifies upon the sentimental novel tradition as well as how she brings forth her message of racial uplift through domesticity and the re-establishment of family.

4. The *tragic mulatta* and ideal domesticity

The *tragic mulatta* as a literary trope was very much connected to the genre of sentimental literature already when she made her first appearance in white women's fiction. A feature of sentimental literature, domesticity was an important theme that discussed issues related to a woman's life as a wife and a mother, as the gentle and patient influence of the domestic sphere that the ideals of True Womanhood entailed. From the point of view of this thesis, it is important to discuss domesticity in connection to the *tragic mulatta* in *Hagar's Daughter* because sentimentality and domesticity are such prominent themes in the novel, partly necessitated by the fact that the role of the *tragic mulatta* is so evident, but also perhaps because it was *the* genre that black women writers first adopted and transformed into socio-political use.²¹ As essential as passing was for the *tragic mulatta* character's story, it was also important that she was depicted as a True Woman; whether it was in order for her to sink from her high pedestal into despair and destruction in white writers' novels, or to show that black women could actually qualify as True Women in black women's novels. The ideals of domestic happiness and true love that I touch upon in this chapter are followed up in the next chapter in which I show how Hopkins builds two alternative national destinies for America based on whether the country accepts and adopts domestic principles as guidance to the relationship between the races.

Roughly from the beginning of the 19th century to the 1870's, the genre of the sentimental novel was the most important literary movement affecting middle-class American women's daily lives. Writing several decades after the peak of the white women's literary movement, and with a distinctly different background, Hopkins still found its conventions useful and

²¹ In addition to the sentimental novel, Hopkins also used the generic conventions of the detective novel. It can be argued that she was one of the first writers to use and transform these conventions to discuss issues of class, gender, and race in meaningful ways, thereby showing the value of popular fiction as a vehicle of social criticism (Soitos, 61).

employed them excessively in her writing.²² One of the reasons was the wide success of abolitionist writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, in using sentimental fiction to capture their readers' sympathies and to pose black people as "natural Christians" who possessed inherently feminine qualities like gentleness and willingness to serve, qualities that the white man lacked (Christian 1980, 21). Indeed, white abolitionist writers had started the work, but it was not nearly finished, and before the late 1800's, there had been very few chances for African Americans themselves to talk about matters of importance to them.

As argued in this thesis, the need to conquer stereotypes and to improve the social status of black people, especially black women, was a strong motive for Hopkins and her contemporary black female writers. Thus, the very strong intention to bring forth a socio-political message understandable for her readers is another reason for Hopkins to choose a popular genre. In order for a novel to be successful and attract readers, it has to embody elements of recognition and identification (Dietzel, 159). The sentimental form had already become familiar and popular among white and black readers alike, and, taking into account the special requirements set by the serial form, the need to persuade readers to buy the next issue, Hopkins' choice can be justified.²³

²² In the mainstream American literature, the movements of realism and naturalism dominated the end-of-the-century. Realism, according to Hart, is a movement that "aims at an interpretation of the actualities of any aspect of life, free from subjective prejudice, idealism, or romantic color" (Hart, 628). The movement, that emerged as a reaction against romanticism, was influenced by the development of science, rational philosophy (*ibid.*) Thus, the themes of sentimental novel with its emphasized idealism were considered outdated at the time. Realism characterizes the work of Henry James, Samuel Clemens, William Dean Howells and Edith Wharton (Conn, 1989; Hart, 1983). Naturalism, on the other hand, was a movement that aimed at detached, scientific objectivity and held to the philosophy of determinism with a belief in the power of instincts, passions, social and economic environment and circumstances as controlling human life (Hart, 525). This movement in American literature took place at the turn-of-the-century and was represented by authors such as Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. Unlike Hopkins and other African American activists, naturalists did not believe in the power of man [or woman] to change the world. On the contrary, influenced by Darwin's biological determinism (Hart, 525), many of them believed in the "biology is destiny" –statement that Hopkins especially tried to reform.

²³ The use of the serial form is a central characteristic of popular fiction, as argued by modern scholars of popular culture (see Cawelti, 70). However, an extensive analysis of Hopkins' fiction as popular fiction, or the significance of genre/genres in her novel is not the focus of this study. However, Hopkins' choice of the sentimental novel is also connected to the strong moral polarization that is a convention of the genre. She wanted to use the strong opposites of white/black along with good/bad and subvert them so that the goodness/badness of characters did not depend on their skin color. The same polarization is also a feature of the detective novel the conventions of which Hopkins also used. The roots of the detective genre are actually in the genre of romance (Soitos, 15).

The sentimental novel was, however, mainly a feminine literary genre. Its main characteristic is that it was written by women, about women and for women (Tompkins 1985, 125). Therein lays one of the controversies of the genre. Many 20th-century critics have dismissed the sentimental novels as completely unworthy from an aesthetic as well as a socio-political viewpoint (besides the male critics such as Houston Baker and Sterling Brown mentioned previously, see for example Douglas (1977)).²⁴ However, the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe's hugely popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in advancing the abolition cause was significant, and it must not be forgotten. Jane Tompkins, one of the feminist critics to defend the genre, summarizes the charges laid against sentimental novel as follows: "what all of these texts share, from the perspective of modern criticism, is . . . an absence of finely delineated characters, a lack of verisimilitude in the story line, an excessive reliance on plot, and a certain sensationalism in the events portrayed" (Tompkins 1985, xii). For these reasons, the 19th-century female writers, black and white alike, have been dismissed in the American literary canon and instead, male writers such as Melville, Whitman and Thoreau have been praised. However, there are also critics, like Tompkins, Nina Baym, Hazel Carby and Claudia Tate, who defend the genre mainly on the same basis from which it is criticized: because it is specifically a female genre. The upsurge of novel writing as well as reading during the 19th century can also be seen as a very important way for women to gain voice in society and to be able to exert influence in it outside the domestic sphere.

The way Hopkins embraced the sentimental novel can also be explained by the fact that it was a literary genre mostly connected to (upper) middle-class values and lifestyle that were idealized by the aspiring black middle class. The mere act of reading novels as a pastime was

²⁴ In her study, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Douglas argues that women could not gain any real power in the society or in politics, because they consented to being idolized as mothers and wives. The feminization of American culture was actually the joint effort of women and the Protestant clergy; two groups that were both marginalized and losing their influence in a capitalist world. According to Douglas, instead of granting them more power, the feminization movement only helped to boast and strengthen the existing power base, the patriarchal and capitalist society.

considered something afforded first only to the middle-class ladies, who did not have to work outside the home. Thus, the sentimental novel is very much connected to the ideal of True Womanhood as well. Being a little outdated in the mainstream by the turn of the twentieth century, however, Hopkins' choice of genre reflects the way black and white women's interests differed during that time. While white women were already looking ahead for a more independent, less family-oriented era in which women's rights were the prime concern, black women were still eager to embrace the middle-class values, domesticity and motherhood, that they had previously lacked. In this respect, Hopkins' novels resemble those written almost half a century before her, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, celebrating motherhood and family connections as the overriding motives in her novels. However, in *Hagar's Daughter*, Hopkins discusses the differences between a black and a white family, which was something Beecher Stowe or the other white writers did not emphasize.

Furthermore, Hopkins writes about mother-daughter relationships which were particularly important during slavery and after; firstly, because of the sexual vulnerability of young black women, and secondly, because of the African American community's need to develop and advance the interests of the race specifically through female influence. This was comparable to the white middle-class ideal of women being responsible for the moral development of children. In the case of the African American community, the same idea was connected to the moral and intellectual development of the race, through the same kind of moral influence in their families. Furthermore, as discussed in the first chapters of the thesis, the black women's club movement exerted female influence also outside their own families, by founding schools, giving aid to poor families and lecturing about issues related to home-building to the more unfortunate members of the race. This public action is a sign of the more significant role that black women had in their communities compared to white women, who were more often only responsible for their immediate family.

In the first subchapter, I will discuss the genre of the sentimental novel in more detail, paying attention to the characteristics that make *Hagar's Daughter* a sentimental novel and to what intertextual references Hopkins makes to previous sentimental novels. I will trace the sentimental conventions back to the beginning of the 19th century and discuss especially abolitionist writing by white women, since that was what influenced Hopkins the most, even though the sentimental genre was quite diverse, ranging from political tracts to religious pamphlets, from newspaper articles to novels. In addition, I use Nina Baym's, Jane Tompkins' and Claudia Tate's studies on sentimental fiction to discuss *Hagar's Daughter* as feminized but still (or because of it) powerful and politically meaningful novel.

In the second subchapter, I will discuss the depiction of white and black families in Hopkins' novel. There are significant differences in how Hopkins portrays the upper middle-class, plantation family and the black servant family. By emphasizing family-centered values Hopkins wants to celebrate the middle-class lifestyle now granted for African Americans for the first time in American history. In the third subchapter I will take a closer look at the mother-daughter relationships present in the novel. Biological motherhood will be compared with social motherhood and I am also going to consider the impact of being motherless to the villains of the story.

4.1 The excess of the sentimental: writing for the benefit of the race

'Oh, how selfish I am, Ellis! You need comfort as much as I do,' she cried, her love on fire at sight of the tears in his eyes, which he tried in vain to suppress. And then for a little while the childless parents held each other's hands and wept. (*Hagar's Daughter*, 279)

'Lor, now, Missis, don't—don't!' said Aunt Chloe, bursting out in her turn; and for a few moments they all wept in company. And in those tears they all shed together, the high and the lowly, melted away all the heart-burnings and anger of the oppressed. O, ye who visit the distressed, do ye know that everything your money can buy, given with a cold, averted face, is not worth one honest tear shed in real sympathy? (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 84)

The lachrymose scenes of characters crying and weeping in deepest emotion, such as the above, are perhaps the most controversial details of sentimental fiction and the reason for why it has not been taken seriously by literary critics.²⁵ The genre has been controversial from the beginning, and also contemporary authors, such as Hawthorne, condemned it as trash: “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash” (quoted in Tompkins 1986, 288). Many feminist critics have, however, reassessed the excess of sentimentality in these novels and learned to analyse it in a more profound way.²⁶ Cathy Davidson (123), for one, notes that the language of sentimental fiction might sound unrealistic and naive for the contemporary reader, who is used to a more direct and less rhetorical expression, but that even everyday discourse of the time, such as private correspondence, actually employed the same kind of language as the sentimental novels did. To look at the generous display of emotions, on the other hand, Nina Baym (144) argues that crying can also be considered a way for women to express not only feminine tenderness and sensibility but also rage and frustration at their powerlessness in society. Baym is one of the most influential 20th century critics defending sentimental fiction, or woman’s fiction, to employ her term.²⁷ The major sentimental writers included in the studies of Davidson and Baym, for example, include Susan

²⁵ Tompkins discusses the issue of lack of criticism of sentimental literature in her *Sensational Designs; The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (1985). According to Tompkins, it is not so much a question of critics directly attacking sentimental writers rather the mainstream critical community’s dismissal of their writing completely, based on the criteria for “good literature” that sentimental fiction was judged to lack, in comparison to male writers’ fiction, such as that of Melville, Thoreau and Hawthorne. These criteria include for example a distinguished prose style and a “concern with the unities and economies of formal construction” (Tompkins, xii).

²⁶ Part of this re-assessment is due to the study of melodrama that has emerged in cultural and literary studies during the last couple of decades. The excess of expression represented by the sentimental novel is closely related to the notion of melodrama that is described by “hyperbolic figures, lurid and grandiose events, masked relationships and disguised identities, abductions, slow-acting poisons, secret societies, mysterious parentage” (Brooks 1976, 3).

²⁷ Baym insists on differentiating 19th century woman’s fiction from the sentimental fiction of the 18th century, and the so-called novel of seduction or novel of sensibility written by male writers (see the next footnote). Despite the fact that she only discusses white women’s novels written between 1820’s and 1870’s, her theory is very useful when interpreting Hopkins as well.

Warner with her most widely known novel *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) as well as Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Sedgwick and E.D.E.N Southworth.²⁸

Baym, who only discusses women writers in the mid-19th century, identifies a so-called master-narrative in those writers' novels that is shared to a great extent by Hopkins in *Hagar's Daughter*. This narrative is the story of the "'trials and triumph'...of a heroine who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them" (Baym, 22). Many critics have adopted Baym's theory as a compact tool to investigate sentimental fiction, which is perhaps one reason for her great influence as a critic. The theory also suits the purposes of this thesis because at least Hagar and Jewel are this kind of heroines who, after being pampered and protected throughout their childhood, find themselves in adolescence suddenly without legal or financial support and having to rely entirely on their own abilities and character to succeed in life. Whereas Hagar's story is set in motion by the revelation of her racial origins, followed by the death of her husband, Jewel's case reminds the white women's master-narrative even more, because she becomes self-reliant directly due to her father's death and her suitor's imprisonment. In fact, the difference in Jewel's character before Senator Bowen's death and Sumner's imprisonment and after those events is striking. Before, she is the passive, carefree and pampered girl, but after, she becomes very determined; she takes matters in her own hands: marries Cuthbert Sumner in a prison cell, and goes to meet a private detective on her own. Jewel's actions show the same determined independence as Hagar's, who in her own youth gains a job and afterwards social status as the wife of Senator Bowen.

²⁸ There are a lot of writers that are discussed, but these are perhaps the most well-known ones. The genre of the sentimental or domestic fiction had its roots in the 18th century "novel of sensibility" that relied on the power of human feelings and the belief in the inherent goodness of people. Whereas Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) is often stated as the beginning of this tradition, later examples of the genre in American literature include Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789).

Baym argues that the sentimental novels firmly reject the idea of female passivity and reliance on fatherly or husbandly support and instead focus on the heroine's self-development. Thus, the eventual marriage of the heroine at the end of the novel is not a primary objective, but instead, a way for her to form a union of equals within which to implement and distribute her female-centred values (Baym, 41). However, the matron Estelle Bowen, as opposed to Jewel, is not empowered by her second husband's death. On the contrary, Estelle is almost paralyzed and helpless even before she becomes a widow: "What can we do to help him? It is unfortunate that your father is away" (181), "Mrs. Bowen looked about her in a helpless, bewildered way. Then she appealed to her daughter, 'Jewel, what do you advise, dear?'" (182). After receiving the first shock of a dead husband, Mrs. Bowen becomes more alike the passive, fainting, fragile woman that sentimental fiction has been criticized for. Her behaviour differs significantly from her former self, who after the death of her first husband, furiously defended herself and the baby from St Clair and the slave trader, even though her future looked hopeless. Confronted once more with her enemy St Clair/General Benson, she "sunk on the carpet...fainted" (207) and again when she hears about Jewel's kidnapping: "Mrs. Bowen fell back unconscious in her chair" (209). While these faintings on the one hand prove Hagar/Estelle's ability to feel strongly about her family, on the other hand they show that she is not anymore the independent, self-reliant heroine she used to be. However, this is perhaps necessary for the plot to work: since Jewel is now the young girl on her way to womanhood, and Estelle is already the domestic matron, there is a need for Hopkins to emphasize Jewel's and not Hagar/Estelle's self-development at this point. As Cathy Davidson (113) argues, in sentimental fiction, the emphasis is placed on a young woman deciding whom to marry rather than the domestic matron whose time is occupied in raising her family.

Thus, even though the characters of sentimental fiction frequently cry, sigh and even faint, the display of emotions is as important as being able to control them. The rhetoric and ideology of the sentimental novel centre around the concept of love, which means to feel strongly but also to take responsibility for the objects of love; the family and the social community (Baym, 27). Thus, in Baym's argument, sentimental fiction is not merely about the "pretty and tender", but it aims at transforming the surrounding society toward more feminine, family-centred and domestic values. Domesticity, according to mid-19th century female standards, is not about patriarchal restrictions for female behaviour in the form of marriage and motherhood, but instead, it promotes the idea of society being based on domestic relations of love, support, and mutual responsibility (Baym, 27). These ideals are in great contradiction with those of economic capitalism, a masculine ideology that to a great extent ruled the American thought at the time. Thus, women's greater domestic power was the primary form of feminist reform at the time, because it was thought that it would lead to greater forms of equality as well (Davidson, 130)

In aiming to displace passive womanhood with a more active heroine, the white women writers also criticized the True Womanhood ideal of the "belle" who "lived for the excitement and the admiration of the ballroom in the mistaken belief that such self-gratification was equivalent to power and influence" (Baym, 28). Hopkins' character Aurelia Madison, abused by her father and General Benson for her beauty and social skills, seems to be just this kind of a "belle" and therefore, she suffers an unhappy fate. Aurelia's primary motives are not those of a sentimental heroine, because she fails to develop psychologically and morally in order to be able to represent domestic values. As Jane Tompkins (1985, 176) argues, learning to control her own desires is the most important lesson for a sentimental heroine. Aurelia lives the life of a social butterfly, and even though she has had a chance for domestic happiness with Cuthbert Sumner earlier in their lives, she flirts with another man and causes Sumner to

break the engagement. On the other hand, not all of Aurelia's behaviour is just the ignorance and innocence of youth. She seems to be quite selfish and able to perform the role of an innocent, fragile woman in order to get what she wants from other people, even recognizing this ability in herself: "Miss Madison had evinced no interest until now, but at the words 'ten millions' uttered. . .she seemed to awaken from her lethargy. She retained her self-possession, however, and maintained her unruffled calm, remarking carelessly, even sarcastically: 'May I ask the nature of the plan, General, and where my usefulness comes in?'" (97). Thus, Aurelia is not interested in creating a home nor founding a family, neither does she value these things more than the admiration, wealth and social position she has in society.

Part of Aurelia's bad luck is, of course, not her own fault, but the consequence of her miserable past. At times she seems to genuinely regret her actions and claims that her motive is her love toward Sumner and that if only she could achieve the married status, she would change: "Once his wife, she told herself, she would shake off all her hideous past and become an honest matron" (*Hagar's Daughter*, 92). However, achieving this goal is impossible for Aurelia, because she is not strong enough to control her passions for money and social position in order to become a true domestic woman. To a great extent Aurelia is the victim of circumstances and for that, she gains the reader's pity, but not acceptance: "Terrible though her sins might be – terrible her nature, she was but another type of the products of the accursed system of slavery" (239). As we can see, Hopkins also connects Aurelia's evil character and poor fate to the issue of slavery and the wounds it has left on American society. I will explore this issue further in the next chapters.

To summarize the lesson in white women's sentimental novels, in order to rise above [male] worldly power and authority, a sentimental heroine has to achieve moral authority through her own good example. Only after she has internalized the values she means to live by, can she become powerful. In an imagined society governed by feminine values, women

gain agency through the “faithful power of the household tasks” (Tompkins 1985, 168) that they perform. Even though the idea of developing one’s character through hardship and trial is clearly a Victorian one, it had enormous potential for the women writers who thought that by serving as models, they could transform the society (Baym, 49). Being at the centre of the home, exerting her influence over children, husbands and the social community alike, the woman could revolutionize society. Virtue would be rewarded by not just good marriage for the young heroine in search of a husband, but also by greater legal and political power gained through influencing the people [men] around her (Davidson, 130). Thus, the popular sentimental novel of the nineteenth-century represents “a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view” (Tompkins 1985, 124).

Jane Tompkins discusses *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as one of the primary examples of sentimental novel, even though in Nina Baym’s opinion, it does not actually belong in the woman’s fiction –genre, because it does not repeat the master-narrative and the plot does not centre around a young woman’s self-development (Baym, 49). In my opinion, there is, however, the story of Topsy that fits the pattern very well. Even though Topsy is a minor character in the novel, her self-development from a wild and mischievous child to an honourable, intelligent woman missionary is somewhat like the master-narrative, even though as a slave she does not occupy a position of wealth nor does she have a male protector in the beginning. Tompkins (1985, 127) argues that the power of a sentimental novel is in its ability to move the audience by presenting the same attitudes and values that the audience already has toward such concepts as the family, social institutions and religion.²⁹ Thus, the lachrymose scenes such as Little Eva’s death in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are related to a cultural

²⁹ Here the genre of sentimental novel connects again to the notion of melodrama. According to Peter Brooks, melodrama is “a form of post-sacred era in which polarization and hyperdramatization of forces in conflict represent a need to locate and make evident, legible and operative those large choices of ways of being which we hold to be of overwhelming importance even though we cannot derive them from any transcendental system of belief” (Brooks 1995, vii). Thus, the melodrama is decidedly a feature of the modern ages in which people’s need for a bigger purpose are no longer fulfilled by religion. Ann Douglas’ view of sentimental literature is similar, because she sees it as fulfilling a kind of spiritual void in the 19th century women’s lives.

myth of salvation by redemption. By exaggerating human emotions and the stereotypical nature of her characters, Stowe thus aims at re-enacting the myth of Christ's crucifixion in a form that the readers would instantly recognize. Stowe does this in order to explain and solve the socio-political problem of slavery with the means of reinforcing the values of Christian love, the sanctity of the family and motherhood (Tompkins 1985, 145). In her conservatism, Stowe is still a radical, because she wants to apply the principles of domesticity not only to the private sphere, but also to the public sphere, in the courtroom, marketplace and factory (*ibid.*).

To a great extent Tompkins's (re-) evaluation of Stowe is valid and powerful. However, the question of race complicates matters. For Stowe, the readership she frequently addresses personally in her novel as "mothers" is inevitably white, and even though she almost aggressively seeks for their sympathy toward black people, Stowe does not really acknowledge that black people could participate as equal members in the white American family. Instead, she suggests very firmly that black people should be educated until "they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America" (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 390). Unlike Hopkins, then, who is later able to imagine mixed-race harmony and domestic happiness regardless of race, Stowe makes it clear that black people should adopt the same values, but to implement them only among their own people. Thus, white women writers like Stowe did not include black women in their ideal of changing the world through female, domestic influence, because to them, black people were, like children, among the objects of this influence.³⁰

³⁰ Having said this, sometimes black and white women *did* work together to advance the cause of abolitionism, but as argued by Paula Giddings, for example, only the few wealthy and educated black women were accepted into white women's societies, and the issues and obstacles white women were trying to solve were often not relevant for black women's lives (Giddings, 55).

According to Nina Baym, by the 1870's the sentimental novel along with its firm belief in domesticity as the redemption of society was fast becoming less credible. The reasons for this were, among others, that the Civil War had demonstrated that even fellow citizens could easily turn against each other and that familial love was perhaps not as strong a value in modern America as the women had thought. White women soon started to juxtapose domesticity with women's independence and suffrage, which meant that the home became a restriction and a burden (Baym, 50). Why then would a black woman writer such as Hopkins still persist in using the sentimental genre a couple of decades later, at the turn of the century?

One of the reasons for why black women writers used the sentimental novel's conventions significantly later than white women was that before, there had not been any possibilities nor an audience for black women writers. However, during the decade of the 1890's, the emergence of black women's clubs created such an audience (Tate, 4). Furthermore, the popularity of formulaic domestic novels, such as Hopkins', proves that the newly born black readership must have found them pleasurable and self-affirming (*ibid.*, 6). As Jane Tompkins (1985, xi) argues, literary texts should be read as products of their historical time, meaning that they offer a way for us to see how the contemporary culture conceptualized itself and what solutions it proposed to the socio-political problems of its time. Thus, a novel should not be criticized for its popularity, but instead, the popularity of a novel shows that the writer has been able to reproduce for the readers the familiar and the common. I interpret this quality in black women's sentimental novels as something that provided a feeling of safety and continuity for the newly emancipated black people, living under constant racial discrimination and even fear of racial terror, even though at the same time, wanting to believe in the possibility of full citizenship. While the happy domestic life portrayed in these novels was not necessarily *currently* familiar and common for black people, it was not a utopian vision. They could identify with the dream of such a life, for the first time in history. Thus, instead of being

able to capture something universal, the novel offers for its readers a “blueprint for survival under a specific set of political, economic, social, or religious conditions” (Tompkins 1985, xviii).

Tompkins’s argument is viable when thinking about Hopkins and her motives for writing a novel. Even though the conventions of the sentimental novel were already becoming alien for the daily lives of white women, it was a totally different matter for black women. The middle-class values and attitudes, the didactic nature and belief in the transformation of society through domestic routines were still very relevant for black people, who were emancipated but living in a very hostile, racist and prejudiced society. Reading the novels of idealized family formation was important for the black audience, because it enabled them to imagine a successful, middle-class life as American citizens at a time when racial oppression often made such a life merely a dream (Tate, 7). Consequently, the issue of achieving true freedom in society became also a question of internalizing middle-class values, and this became a goal for the black women activists and novelists alike. It must, however, also be remembered, that the reading class consisted mostly of upwardly mobile and elite black people, and not the total black population (Tate, 60). This is, according to many critics, the reason for the use of mulattoes in many novels: their light skin colour implied that they belonged to a racial “elite” and thus could be awarded a better social status than most of the race.³¹ However, from the point of view of African Americans at the time, it is difficult to say what their view on light skin colour was, because on the one hand, the cultural atmosphere was full of racialist sciences telling them that one race was superior to the others, which would entail that any part of the superior white race in a person would make them superior to their black brethren. On the other hand, the issue of intraracial reproduction and finding a marriage partner from inside

³¹ W.E.B DuBois coined the controversial term of “The Talented Tenth” in an influential article speaking about a minority of intelligent black people that could become “race leaders” among their own people through high education: “The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this work and Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men” (DuBois, 1903)

the race was also thought proper by some, as described in the conduct manuals written by the black intellectual elite during the late 19th century (Mitchell, 214). The idea behind the cultivation of intraracial rather than interracial desire was the fear of the African American race slowly fading into white, when miscegenation was a fact. Some, like Hopkins, even ventured to argue that there was no longer such thing as unmixed blood on the American continent (*Contending Forces*, 151).

I disagree with Claudia Tate when she says that in the black domestic novels written by women, the tenets of Victorian conduct are best fulfilled by near-white characters (Tate, 64). There are also black working-class characters in *Hagar's Daughter* that are entitled to possess domestic values, such as Venus, Oliver and Aunt Henny of the Williams family. In fact, whereas the mulatta characters are under strict Victorian codes of behaviour that come with the status of being a True Woman, Venus is able to function more actively, even though she still maintains her domestic values of caring, familial love and sexual purity. At the end of the novel, Venus is married to Sumner's black valet John Williams, who is a "'perfec' gent'man'" (219) also in the opinion of Marthy, who cautions her daughter that "'gittin' jined to a man's a turrible 'spons'bility, 'specially the man'" (219). Thus, even Marthy, who in her youth has been a wild, even sexually loose woman, becomes conscious of the good values of domesticity later in her life.

If the white women's sentimental novel was supposed to re-enact the prevalent values of society, Hopkins' aim was to prove that black people had these same values but had not been given the opportunity to fulfil them, because slavery had prevented them from marrying or forming families. If granted the same social opportunities as white people had, black people could become as much Americans as white people and they also had the right to form an American identity. Thus, in my view, Hopkins' aim was to go even further than the white women writers and claim that the values of domesticity, the sanctity of motherhood and

family were to be extended not only to society at large but especially to the relations between the races, meaning that the principles of love, not those of racial segregation or racial purity, should govern family formation and domestic life. This also means that Hopkins was championing for black people's equal rights to be American and to live in America. The claim for participation in America is something I will consider in more detail in my third analysis chapter. In addition, Hopkins' depiction of the black family as matriarchal reinforces her opinion that black women as much as white women could be agents of change in society through their domesticity and that the home is equally important to them as it is for white women. This idea will be developed further in the following chapters.

Like the sentimental novel of white women writers, also black women's domestic novels had a didactic purpose: the purpose of teaching black people how to exercise citizenship and to promote social justice (Tate, 64).³² In a society that appreciated material comfort and family security as signs of virtuous life (Tate, 88), it is easy to understand why by portraying domestic happiness along with its material settings was important for Hopkins. Her novels are decidedly race literature: not in the aggressive, contradicting way of the 20th century, but in the emancipatory, integrative way of the 19th century. For Hopkins and her contemporaries, bourgeois domesticity was liberating, and it enabled them to give practical examples of how black people could affect their own life through domestic influence. Using the same strategy as white women before them, black women novelists posit sentimentality as a narrative strategy for female agency, and specifically, black female agency. The novels expand the possible roles imagined for black women in society: they can be powerful as mothers as well as wives (like Hagar/Estelle and Marthy) but they can also work outside the home (like

³² There are a few well-known black writers besides Hopkins who wrote at the turn of the century, including Frances Harper, Amelia E. Johnson, Emma Dunham-Kelley Hawkins and Katherine D. Tillman, all of whom are discussed in Claudia Tate's study. Tate argues that it was the appearance and success of black women's clubs during the 1890's that enabled the accelerated writing of novels for black women as well (Tate, 4). The decades 1890 to 1910 have also been called "The Black Woman's Era" by Henry Louis Gates Junior (1988b) because black women published more fiction during this time than black men had published in the preceding half century (Gates 1988b, xvi)

Hagar, Marthy, Aunt Henny and Venus) or be active in politics and the high society (like Estelle) as well as even help solve crimes (like Venus) or be witnesses in a courtroom (like Aunt Henny). Claudia Tate argues that the rhetoric of sentimentality defines the heroines of black women's domestic novel as agents who "use the mantle of feminine bourgeois comportment to authorize the enactment of their own decisions about social advancement in an idealized, *intraracial* [my italics] domestic sphere that impacts on their communities" (69).³³ Thus, in Tate's view, the excess of the sentimental is actually the excess of a political desire to become active citizens in society.

4.2 Families apart: the functioning of the white and black families

As already recognized above in my thesis, black people's participation in the institutions integral to domesticity, namely those of family, marriage and home, was very restricted if not completely impossible before emancipation. Slaves were considered the property of their masters, and therefore, their familial relationships were often severed when children were sold away from their mothers, lovers from each other and so on. This theme is the one that abolitionist writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe battled against in their writing, aiming to gain the sympathies of her white peers toward slave families, whose right to humanity could thus be established in the white American mind. However, black writers, such as Hopkins, were themselves among the oppressed, so their viewpoint to the matter was slightly different, and they had a stronger and more passionate interest to speak to the members of their own race and to disassociate themselves from the stereotypes of black people (Mitchell, 10).

Michele Mitchell has studied the formation of a collective black identity during the period from the 1870's until the 1930's in America and argues that domesticity was a strong

³³ However, whereas Tate only talks about the black women protagonists of the novels as agents in *intraracial* contexts, Hopkins' emphasis, as we will see, is more on the *interracial* context; the mulattas are precisely agents in the relationships between the races. In addition, Venus as a black female character is very much connected to and active in both black and white communities.

organizing principle for the black race near the turn-of-the-century. According to Mitchell (10), there was a strong belief among the black aspiring class, of whom Hopkins also was a member that morality, propriety and hard work were essential to the progress of the race. All of these principles centred around domesticity, because the black activists believed that by emphasizing black morality and respectability, they could counter the attacks toward the collective character of the race, in the form of racist stereotypes, as well as the concrete physical and sexual assaults experienced by individuals (Mitchell, 84). As mentioned before, promoting domesticity and in that way shaping the image of the race in white society's eyes was also connected to achieving civil rights, because it was among the few means of black people to actually affect public policy. Tracts and conduct manuals for black domestic life and sexual behaviour written by black activists, both women and men, were common during the turn of the century, but the ideals were also heavily promoted in popular culture like fiction and music, because it enabled the activists to show, in a concrete fashion, the believed impacts of proper conduct on the success of characters in life.³⁴ In every way, the writers of tracts as well as fiction aimed at glorifying marital bliss and moral motherhood as the best possible ways to aspire for a better life at the individual as well as community level (Mitchell, 118). Housing was not only a political and ideological question for black people, but it was also a question of better living conditions, and better health for black families. Therefore, the home came to have not only cultural, social and political significance, but also a material one and it was believed that through the home, race pride and black self-determination could be achieved (Mitchell, 148).

However, whereas Mitchell (148) argues that conduct literature particularly emphasized patriarchy and the authoritative role of black fathers, Hopkins seems to have taken a different

³⁴ In addition to the message of proper conduct as in the promotion of marriage as the only viable context for sexual behavior, there was also, however, a contradictory discourse in music and other forms of black popular culture, that contained references to "sexual skill and endurance, rape, desire and rapture" as well as "jokes and stories that touched upon topics ranging from prostitution to incest, infidelity to homosexuality" (Mitchell, 107).

path regarding that question. Her black families seem to be founded on a more matriarchal basis and the role of black fathers is diminished. In both *Hagar's Daughter* as well as *Contending Forces*, the black households are led by women, even though male characters do appear as sons or absent husbands. The rhetoric of moral conduct and improvement of race was intimately connected with feminine behaviour and the female body, because black women were considered to be the primary agents for recreating the race's home life. Thus, women were supposed to "steer youths from urban vice, keep errant husbands in check, and maintain a sanitary home environment for the sake of producing better children" (Mitchell, 172). Moreover, women were not only considered to be the main targets of reform, they were also the principal agents in advancing domesticity, because they wanted to lift the weight of stereotypical promiscuity and immorality from their shoulders.

It is not surprising, then, for Hopkins to emphasize the matriarchal order that reigned in her black households. She saw black women's role as most important in educating and moulding the behaviour of the family members, also that of the black fathers, who she considered to be morally below the black woman. In fact, Isaac Johnson in *Hagar's Daughter* is an example of such a man; he seduces and marries Marthy but is more loyal to his previous white master, St Clair, than to his family, leaving home for long periods of time as well as letting Marthy provide for the family:

Life had been checkered for Marthy since emancipation when she had joined lot with St Clair Enson's Isaac . . . 'Like master, like man' was a true prophecy in Isaac's case, and had caused the little brown woman a world of worry. . . he had been a ne'er--do-well, working when the notion pleased him. . . at other times swearing, drinking, and fighting (174).

Isaac's loyalty is to St Clair rather than his family, because he imprisons his own mother-in-law, and when St Clair has finally been captured, Isaac voluntarily takes his place in prison, forcing himself somehow even through stone to save his "master": "In the prisoner's bed crouched Isaac Johnson in vain endeavour to cover up his former owner's flight...how Isaac

had managed to cut his way through the solid masonry always remained a mystery to the authorities” (273). Isaac’s character has partly been corrupted by living as St Clair’s companion throughout his childhood, but it does not explain why he has sought his former master’s company even when he would have been free to lead his own life. The younger generation black men, who have been under the influence of their mothers, such as Venus’ brother Oliver in *Hagar’s Daughter* or Will Smith in *Contending Forces*, are more likely to become successful in life, because they follow the path set by the moral guidelines of black women in their lives, such as Aunt Henny and Marthy, in Oliver’s case.

Although it can be said that Marthy has partly failed in her domesticating mission, because she has not been able to change her husband Isaac, her efforts are doubly rewarded in the case of her son. Oliver is studying to become an educated young man, capable of changing the world and probably achieving a higher social status than his parents. In fact, the role of education in the uplift of the black race was considered very important, but this path was not open for everyone. Some critics (including Claudia Tate, 13) say that Hopkins’ choice to enable education and other public achievements for her male characters only is a sign of her acknowledging patriarchal values and a male-led world order and imply that this is what makes her less credible as a feminist writer. However, I consider the domestic values that Oliver and Venus are able to internalize as important as gaining education. Hopkins acknowledged that there was still a long way to go before society could grant the same opportunities for everyone. However, the domestic sphere was one sphere over which the black women could have control, and it was the women who primarily reigned there (Mitchell, 178). Thus, whereas it was the men who actually received the education, this would not have been possible without the domestic support that they received in the home with respect to gaining a sense of self-respect and a set of proper values to live by in the white world of politics and education.

Seen from this point of view, I argue that the domestic influence of black women on their sons becomes very important, because without it, the sons would not be able to exert any influence in the wider society when they grew up. In fact, Oliver is not only metaphorically but also materially enabled to educate himself with the help of black women, because his sister and mother work outside the home to pay for his education. Oliver, unlike his father Isaac, also shows his gratitude and love for this support: “‘Do you know, ma,’ said Oliver . . . ‘when I get through college, you shan’t do a thing but wear a black silk dress every day and fold your hands and rock. I’m sick of seeing you in the washtub and Venus running to wait on the laides [sic] fit to break her neck. I’m going to take care of you both’” (170-171). In an important way, Hopkins transforms the mammy stereotype, which entails that the black woman is meant to sacrifice everything for the well-being of the white family’s children, because she depicts Henny and Marthy as sacrificing everything for their own children and family, resulting in the children’s gratitude, good behaviour and a safe, healthy family life. This must have been difficult to achieve during slavery, and thus Hopkins celebrates the black family unity enabled by black mothers’ ability to devote themselves to their own family. Marthy’s concern over the prospect of his son becoming like his father is great and she warns him from trusting too much on his education: “‘I don’t want ter feel that a chile o’min’s too biggotty to do anything hones’ fer a livin’” (171). Moreover, Marthy still believes that Oliver is also going to need a woman to exert good influence on him in married life: “‘...yer may jes’ thank God ef you gits a ‘ooman when you git jined that’ll help you out in that business. . .’” (171).

The matriarchal quality of the Johnson family is also shown in the way the family is led by Aunt Henny and Marthy, who have stuck together since Marthy’s childhood on the Enson plantation. The aspect of members of different generations of women living together, raising their families and sharing hardships is a matriarchal one. Marthy’s dependency for Aunt

Henny's support and her love for her are seen in the way she panics when the granny is reported missing: "'O yer' po' granny, Oliver! I jes' cayn't bar up under this. O' where's my mammy! Good Lawd where's she at?'" (179). Aunt Henny has been a good support for Marthy bringing up her children, and she has also given the family money: "'Then I was able to send 'yer sister to school an' keep her nice in spite o' yer daddy's rackety ways. Yer granny's holped me powful'" (173). Thus, Aunt Henny's support has in material terms enabled the respectable upbringing of Venus, which is a precondition for her becoming a moral, well-conducted young black woman. Furthermore, Aunt Henny has been on Marthy's side against her husband, the "'ne'er-do-well, working when the notion pleased him. . . swearing, drinking and fighting'" (174) black man. Her advice has helped Marthy to cope with difficult situations: "' . . . Marthy, don't neber be a plum fool an let Ike wurrit you into raisin' money on de place, ef he gits inter scrapes let him git out as he gits in, widout any holp but de debbil'" (176).

As these relationships between Marthy, Henny and Oliver show, the theme of familial love by supporting and taking care of each other is a strong theme that characterizes the depiction of the black family in *Hagar's Daughter*. This is emphasized by the closeness and ease with which the family members react to each other: "'Now ma, don't cry,' said the boy putting his arm about his mother's neck and kissing her cheek" (170). Moreover, the family seems to be really happy around each other and the family kitchen: "'Marthy. . .was overjoyed to see her daughter; it gave her an oppportunity to pour her sorrows and griefs into sympathetic ears. . . Oliver dropped his books in honor of his sister's visit, making it a festival . . .when the meal was on the table. . . the mother's eyes shone with happiness as she watched their enjoyment'" (218). Whereas Isaac is not really part of the family, Aunt Henny truly is and she has made Isaac terrified of her. Even the children know that Aunt Henny is actually the head of the

family: “What do you expect from dad, ma? you know him. You ought to if anybody does. Granny makes him toe the mark, that’s why he dislikes her” (221).

As Hazel Carby (1987, 38) argues, the slave family was often an incomplete one and in women’s slave narratives it could be effective without the presence of a male head of household. Furthermore, it was especially the absence of a male protector that enabled and also forced women in turn to gain agency, giving rise to the stereotype of the strong, nonsubmissive black matriarch. Carby along with Sally Robinson (145) seem to argue that this stereotype was a negative one and not rooted in reality, but I see Hopkins intentionally using it in a more positive way.

Whereas both Aunt Henny and the adult Marthy might conform to the mammy stereotype in a way, because in addition to their own family, they are loyal to the white family, slightly obese and dressed in aprons and turbans to fit the domestic duties they have, Aunt Henny is closer to the powerful black matriarch type of a woman. The image of the black matriarch’s power gained through supernatural powers or hoodoo magic is also connected to Aunt Henny, because she is reported to have been “*born wif a veil*” (author’s italics, *Hagar’s Daughter*, 43) and she can predict things in advance. In addition to keeping Isaac under her rule, Aunt Henny looks after Marthy’s family and also works outside the home as a cleaning lady in General Benson’s office, the Treasury Building. In fact, her position as a cleaner also makes Aunt Henny the sole witness in the murder case that Cuthbert Sumner is entangled in. Thus Aunt Henny is granted also public agency toward the end of the novel. She is the only person that has been with the white characters throughout their lives; as a slave in the Enson plantation, she has taken care of St Clair/Benson and is the only one besides his brother Ellis Henson who knows about his evil nature. Consequently, as the detective Henson (Ellis Enson) wants to keep his true identity hidden, Aunt Henny becomes the connecting link between the antebellum and postbellum parts of the novel and her testimony is important in proving

Sumner's innocence and Benson's guilt as well as uniting Hagar with her first husband Ellis Enson. As Kristina Brooks argues (1996, 144), Aunt Henny functions as the fixed reality against which the shifting identities of the white and mixed-race characters can be mirrored. As a proof of her morality and good character, Aunt Henny has received a life-long job in the Treasury because she accidentally found a million dollars and secured it until she could return the money back to the officials. Henny is questioned about this incident at the beginning of her testimony to ensure the white courtroom about her honesty and good character, simply because she is a black person.

Aunt Henny's testimony and her appearance seem to bring forth a rather stereotypical depiction of a black woman: "a weird picture, her large eyes peering out from behind the silver-bowed glasses, her turbaned head and large, gold-hoop earrings, and a spotless white handkerchief crossed on her breast over the neat gingham dress" (255). Aunt Henny's story causes a "suppressed laugh" in the courtroom and some of the people think that her testimony is the "idiotic ramblings of an ignorant *nigger* [author's italics]" (257). Brooks (1996, 130) argues that Aunt Henny's stereotypical depiction objectifies her for the reader's gaze in order to allow for black readers the comical relief from laughing at something familiar. According to her, this relief is gained by black readers through "reading" themselves into a position of superiority in comparison with the "minstrel-like" objectified characters such as Aunt Henny, Marthy and Isaac. I agree with this to some extent, but I disagree with Brooks when she argues that for this reason, Aunt Henny must remain objectified and is therefore not able to gain agency in the same way that the mulatta characters do. To me it seems that Hopkins made Aunt Henny conscious of the image that the white people have about black women in their minds, and she takes advantage of it in her stereotypical dressing and appearance but also by referring to her own blackness several times: "He ain't Gin'ral Benson no more'n I'm a white 'ooman'" (256), "I tell you, gemmen, it takes somethin' to make a colored

woman faint, but dat's jes' wha' I did, massa jedge; when I seed dat po gal. . . an I ain't got over it yet'" (255).

Thus, Aunt Henny is not willing to give up her proud identity as a black woman to conform to the expectations of an essentially white system of the courtroom. Instead, she tells her story in her own words, calling the attorney "honey" and retaining her own style of speech. This is a resistant act indeed, and it becomes even clearer as one of the white spectators in the courtroom says it aloud: "'No nigger's word against *a white man* [my italics]! This is *a white man's* country yet!'" (257). In fact, Aunt Henny's colourful testimony proves her resistance toward the white male world that she is suddenly drawn into, and it acknowledges the viability of the knowledge gained by her "invisibility" in the white society. She has learned what she knows just because the white men have not taken her seriously enough to consider her a threat to them. In fact, St Clair himself has had to acknowledge Henny's role already before, because he has kidnapped her and kept her imprisoned so that she could not tell anyone what she saw. To the white society in general, however, Aunt Henny has been just an ignorant, unintelligent "negress", but her testimony proves it otherwise.

Whereas the fate of the Johnson family is a happy one, all of the family members being united in the end (with the exception of the father Isaac who is not actually present most of the time anyway), Venus even getting married eventually, the fate of the white Enson family is not as rosy and therein lays Hopkins' most radical message about racial family formation. In fact, I am prepared to argue that she sees black families as more successful in interpreting and implementing the domestic values than white families. Even though black families suffered many hardships during slavery and afterwards in a racist society, the inherent domestic values such as caring for and supporting each other unconditionally, have helped the Johnson family, for example, to survive. The fact that even though Venus and Oliver have Isaac Johnson as their father does not override the impact of the good upbringing given by

their mother and grandmother, thus proving that, contrary to the beliefs of eugenics and other racial sciences at the time, biology is not destiny. In addition, it proves that the matriarchal family formation is perhaps more successful than the patriarchal one.

Even though Hopkins builds up the idyllic setting for Hagar Sergeant and Ellis Enson's marriage, the failure in that family is Ellis Enson's initial (white male) prejudice and inability to love unconditionally. Hagar and Ellis are re-united at the end of the novel showing the power of true love, but the in-between hardships could have been avoided had Ellis acknowledged Hagar and fought for her in the first place instead of leaving her and the baby without his protection. Here, as well as in the case of Jewel and Sumner, the issues of miscegenation and racial prejudice come in-between lovers and prevent a happy domestic life. The problem with the Enson family does not originate in the conflict of Hagar's racial origins, however. It is already there in the relationship of Ellis, St Clair and their father, because the brothers' father had disinherited St Clair and thus created a chafe between the two brothers. Thus, the problem is originally about money and property. The issue of property has shattered familial relationships and caused family members to turn against each other. In the end, the issue of slavery is also very much connected to the same thing, because slaves were the property of their masters. The slave trader, Major Madison, is an even clearer example of a white person, whose life is all about money and wealth, scheming and taking advantage of other people (including his own daughter, Aurelia). Thus, the white characters are letting principles of economics rather than principles of the heart guide their lives, and therefore, they become unhappy or evil. The same does not apply to the black family, to whom money is an even greater matter, because of pure survival, but it still does not affect their mutual love and family unity.

The Bowen family, however, seems to be better organized according to the principles of familial love and domesticity than the original Enson family. Firstly, even though Estelle is

only a step-mother to Jewel (during the greater part of Jewel's life), the two share a very warm relationship: "From the moment the two had met and the child had held her little arms toward her . . . and had nestled her downy head in the new mother's neck with a sigh of content, almost instantly falling asleep again, with the words: 'Oh, pitty, pitty lady!'" (83) This mother-daughter relationship is one that I will discuss in the next chapter in more detail. However, Jewel is also very much attached to her father, Senator Bowen, who is later revealed to be only a step-father to her: "'No man shall part us, dad; if he takes me, he must take the whole family,' replied Jewel with a loving pat on the sallow cheek" (87).

Like in many sentimental novels, the significance of domesticity connected with consumer culture is also present in the depiction of the Bowen family bliss: "At last the mysterious bundle was unwrapped, the box opened and a pearl necklace brought to view of wonderful beauty and value. The senator's eyes were full of the glint and glister of love and pride as he watched the faces of his wife and daughter" (88). Ann Douglas, a critic very well known for her critical examination of sentimental fiction, argues that the rise of sentimentalism was connected to the rise of consumer culture in America. In Douglas's view, sentimental stories contained lessons for women to become shoppers, and that the rhetorical power that they received through consuming was meant to hide the fact that their economic position in society was actually nonexistent. Thus, women were totally dependent on the men who earned the money to be spent on consumer goods (Douglas, 62).

To me, this dependency is shown in the Bowen family, because Senator Zenas Bowen buys expensive jewellery for his wife and daughter, and thereby controls their consumption. However, it seems that the Bowen family fails precisely because as a white family, it is ultimately a patriarchal-economic construction, even though Estelle's influence on Senator Bowen in political as well as social matters is great. The inheritance laws claim that all property owned by the Bowens' belongs to the male head of household, and this enables St

Clair/Benson to take advantage of Senator Bowen, to forge a fraud testament in his name, in which Major Madison gains the fortunes of Senator Bowen and St Clair has the guardianship of Jewel until she becomes of age. Thus, in the same way as Hagar the slave became the economic property of her master, Major Madison, now Jewel becomes the “property” of St Clair with just a mere legal document. Because white women cannot work outside the home, or inherit and take care of themselves on their own, they can easily be abused by greedy men. The position of white women is thus significantly different from the black women, such as Marthy and Aunt Henny, who are able to earn their own money.

Conclusively, Hopkins wants to show that family matters should not be handled in economic terms, and this applies to both black families as well as white ones. People should not be the property of other people in any circumstances, and money should not control the familial relationships. Furthermore, the reason why the villains even get a chance to probably murder Senator Bowen is that the Senator is a great friend of society’s pleasures such as gambling, even though it is his “only vice” (132). This means that if the white family is supposed to depend on the patriarchal protection provided by the male head of household, it ultimately fails. Thus, a greater reliance on domestic values of love and caring make the black family formation in *Hagar’s Daughter* more successful and a viable model for the didactic purposes of the novel.

Claudia Tate (19) argues that Hopkins did indeed discuss black family formation, but that it was done mainly in *Contending Forces*, and that Hopkins had abandoned it by the time she wrote the magazine novels. Tate justifies this argument by stating that whereas *Contending Forces* is situated in a black community, the magazine novels are set in a white social milieu. As I have presented above, however, I disagree with Tate and think that the role of the black Williams/Johnson family in *Hagar’s Daughter* is not a minor one at all. Instead, the mere existence of black *and* white families in the same story allows Hopkins to make comparisons

between them, and successfully show the superiority of the black family formation. In fact, it is the black family that is able to better fulfil the ideal of domesticity promoted in sentimental fiction. In the next chapter I will examine further the basis of patriarchy, which is the relationships between women, especially mothers and daughters, and how these relationships are depicted in *Hagar's Daughter*.

4.3 The empowering mother-daughter relationships

Who can paint the most sacred of human emotions? Clasped in her mother's arms, and shown the proofs preserved by her adopted father of her rescue from the death designed by her distracted mother, Jewel doubted not that she was Hagar's daughter. (*Hagar's Daughter* 280)

As claimed in the previous chapters, the responsibility of the mother over the children's physical as well as moral well-being was becoming more important during the 19th century when industrialization caused increased specialization in gender roles within the family (Davidson, 125). From the 18th century onwards, there had been a socio-psychological shift in American thinking that emphasized affection in all human relationships, rather than patriarchal authority or submission (*ibid.*).³⁵ However, the economic, social and political interests of maintaining the slave system necessitated that only white women be given the right to real motherhood. During slavery, black mothers were considered to be public commodities of exchange and no value was placed on their motherhood except their economic value as breeders. Thus, black motherhood had neither the connotation of respectable womanhood connected to being True Women nor the credibility of transmitting moral, spiritual or emotional values to children, like white motherhood had (Tate, 25). There were thus two opposing definitions of motherhood, the breeder and the glorified mother (Carby, 30, see also Robinson, 140). The glorified white mother needed to be protected by

³⁵ The novel of sensibility had already in the 18th century promoted the use of emotions and feelings instead of cold reasoning and thinking.

ideological and institutional barriers, like miscegenation laws, because simultaneously, black women were needed to add more slaves to the plantation capital (Carby, 31).

According to Claudia Tate (26), the desire for a non-violated black motherhood that included the prestige of maternity, family and home, was a primary theme for the first black women's texts like those of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson. Indeed, in Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), one of the main themes is Frado's reconciliation with the fact that her own mother has abandoned her: "Frado waited for the close of day, which was to bring back her mother. Alas! it never came. It was the last time she ever saw or heard of her mother" (*Our Nig*, 16). Frado's quest for the lost mother takes her finally to reclaiming the power of motherhood by becoming a mother herself, which is, according to Tate, a way to replace the social alienation that characterizes Frado's life in oppression with a symbolic motherly love (Tate, 38). Whereas the maternal constructions in earlier black women's novels were primarily connected to the desire for emancipation and freedom, the later generation writers, such as Hopkins, wanted to show that the desire unfulfilled before, could now be realized (*ibid.*, 50).

One of the reasons why motherhood was so important to the emancipated black women was that during slavery, their servitude in white families had not allowed them to devote almost any time to their own families and homes. Thus, at the Enson plantation too, Aunt Henny "reigns supreme" in the kitchen and feels pride in having to look after the white family. Very much occupied with her duties for the white family, then, Aunt Henny tells Marthy that her primary responsibility is also toward the master: "All you got ter do now is ter take mighty good keer o' your mistis and de baby" (41). Henny does not have much time to bring up her own daughter, which leads to Marthy becoming a flirtatious, even morally loose young woman, "willing to meet him [Isaac] more than half way" (44). However, the matter is completely different for Marthy when she becomes a mother, because she is free to

have a home of her own and can bring up her daughter Venus by devoting a lot of time to installing virtuous behavior and good values in her.

Behind the issue of motherhood during slavery is of course also the issue of miscegenation and how black slave women often gave birth to biracial children conceived through acts of white rape. Because according to the law, children followed the condition of their mother, black women had to accept not only that their children were born out of rape but also the fact that by giving birth to them, they condemned the children to slavery. This trauma is discussed in Hopkins' *Contending Forces*, which tells the story of a mulatta woman, Sappho, learning to redeem and acknowledge her own son, Alphonse, who has been born because Sappho is raped by her white male relative. Many critics agree that by acknowledging and accepting Alphonse as her son, Sappho overcomes white male oppression by choosing motherly love and that this act is what purifies and sanctifies her for a domestic life as wife and mother (Ardis, 37; Carby, 143). Even though *Hagar's Daughter* does not discuss white rape as the cause of miscegenation, and concentrates more on the mixed-race offspring than on their mothers, the issue of mothering and motherhood is a strong theme in the novel. According to Barbara Christian, motherhood had a special significance for African Americans also because in most of Africa, the relationship of the mother and the child is seen as a sacred relationship that symbolizes the relationship between earth and creativity (Christian 1980, 11). By showing motherly love that does not depend on a biological relation between the mother and her daughter, Hopkins wants to emphasize that motherhood is a sacred, symbolic construct that exceeds notions of blood purity. Thus, motherhood is a social and spiritual rather than a biological thing.

Hagar herself has been mothered by a step-mother, because we are told that the Sergeants bought her from Walker, the slave trader. Here, in contradiction with the *tragic mulatta* plot, Hopkins does the unexpected when bought property becomes a cherished daughter instead of

the daughter being revealed as black, becoming a slave and this way someone's property. There is a very affectionate relationship between Hagar and Mrs. Sergeant, and Hagar is devastated when her mother dies just before her own wedding. When Hagar marries Senator Bowen, she becomes a loving step-mother to Jewel. The fact that there is actually also a biological tie between them is just a happy coincidence and does not affect their mutual love; it just makes it stronger when they finally learn about it. Jewel has also been parented by the Bowens (Senator and his first wife), who are not her biological parents, but who found her floating in the Potomac River and adopted her. Furthermore, St Clair Enson's illegitimate child, whose biological mother (the stenographer Elise Bradford) dies is adopted by Hagar and Ellis at the end of the novel. The ending shows the boy playing happily, "screaming and laughing, chasing a gorgeous butterfly" (284), symbolizing that even though he is the descendant of a wicked, villainous man, he himself can become something different, with good loving parents such as Hagar and Ellis to take care of him.

In addition to emphasizing social parenting as more important than biological ties, Hopkins uses the theme of searching for and establishing one's kin, which is a common theme in African American texts throughout the 19th century (Carby 1980, 136). Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* is based almost completely on the character's searching and finding lost family members. Happy reunions are also witnessed in abolitionist writing, such as when Cassy is united with her daughter Eliza at the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Whereas the theme is used more often by authors to discuss how emancipated slave families were often torn apart and desperately looking for restoring the family unity, Hopkins uses the theme to discuss mainly "white" families' search for kinship; whether it is Hagar's (largely unconscious) search for her lost child or Ellis's search for his wife. The black family is, on the other hand, allowed to stay together throughout the time-frame of the novel with the exception of the kidnapping of Aunt Henny.

The most important mother-daughter relationship in the novel is that between Hagar and Jewel. The importance of the relationship between Hagar and her daughter is revealed already in the title of the novel, even though the readers share Hagar's ignorance of the identity of the daughter until the very end of the novel. As noted by Suzanne Bost (75), the discovery of racial inheritance in the novel occurs simultaneously with the discovery of the matrilineal line and the fact that Jewel is revealed to have black blood is rendered insignificant compared to the happiness of a mother-daughter reunion. However, Hopkins gives hints to the eventual identity of Jewel before this, in the conversation of onlookers: "Ah! But the beautiful Mrs. Bowen is only step-mother to the lovely Jewel.' 'Is it possible? I should have thought them of one blood'" (*Hagar's Daughter*, 114). The reference made to blood makes the reader think about racial purity or blood purity, and because we already suspect that Estelle Bowen is actually Hagar, knowing about the black blood in her veins makes us wonder if Jewel could actually be her daughter. The fact that the two ladies both dress in white clothes and are depicted so much alike is further proof of their familial relations. The emotional reunion that happens eventually is satisfying for the readers, who have witnessed the warmth and love between Estelle and Jewel throughout the second part of the novel. When Jewel and Cuthbert's engagement is broken after Jewel sees Cuthbert embracing Aurelia, Estelle/Hagar feels a mother's pain for her daughter: "Oh! my dove,' murmured Mrs. Bowen to herself. . 'my gentle, proud, suffering flower, how I wish I could take the pain out of your young heart and bear it for you'" (136). Jewel is also grateful of the support she gets: "Dear mama, the sting is taken out of all the pain when I remember that no matter what comes my own darling father and mother see no fault in their dear girl'" (137).

Hopkins also reports a physical closeness and gentleness between the two, but most of all, a determined devotion on Hagar/Estelle's side to stand by Jewel in all that she does: "I shall stand with you, Jewel, if it is any comfort for you to know it. I am glad, glad, glad that you

cannot marry General Benson.’ . . . ‘My dear mamma!’ ...the two women embraced each other” (193). When General Benson confronts the Bowen women, they find support in each other: “Presently General Benson entered the room closely followed by Mrs. Bowen, who crossed the room to Jewel’s side and took her hand tenderly in hers. Together they faced General Benson, and this silent defiance filled the man with rage” (204). Thus, it seems like poetic justice that Jewel be revealed as Hagar’s daughter.

However, there is also another option for the identity of the mysterious Hagar’s daughter, and that is Aurelia Madison. The readers are left with very little information about her background, but they are led to suspect that there is something hidden in her past, because she is connected to the obvious villains of the story, Major Madison and General Benson. The difference between Jewel and Aurelia is that even though both women’s mothers have presumably died when they were very young, Jewel has experienced motherly love and guidance in her life whereas Aurelia has not. Motherlessness is thus the greatest tragedy for Aurelia. Having been brought up by a wicked and self-interested man, Major Madison, and under the influence of General Benson as well, Aurelia has become an adventuress. Hopkins wants the readers to believe that had Aurelia grown up in different circumstances, she could have become another kind of a woman. In her current life, she still longs for motherly influence when she sees the relationship between Jewel and Estelle:

‘Poor child,’ remarked Mrs. Bowen in a sympathetic voice, ‘are you very much alone? How long since you lost your mother?’ ‘I cannot recall her at all, dear Mrs. Bowen’, the girl answered, lifting a pair of dusky eyes, swimming in tears, for a moment to her face. ‘Papa is so intent on the fortunes of the mine, just at present, that he gives me very little attention. Indeed, I believe he forgets at times that he has a daughter’. (107)

Even though the readers may suspect the authenticity of Aurelia’s feelings, this much of her words seem to come from the heart. In another part of the novel, Aurelia even admits that she could be real friends with Jewel if circumstances were different: “She had taken a great fancy to Jewel Bowen, not only because the latter was very kind to her – kinder than anyone had

ever been to her in her lonely, reckless life, but because she really carried in her heart a spark of what passed for love, and which would have developed but for Sumner” (121). Thus, Aurelia really misses the kind of female sympathy and love that she has never experienced in her life. The fact that Estelle feels “distrust and dislike” (107) toward Aurelia from the start, perhaps testify against her being the lost daughter, but on the other hand, it could be that she is recognizing something about herself in the girl and wants to suppress it because she is sure about her own daughter’s death. However, the readers surely identify Aurelia as a villain incapable of bettering her habits and therefore, if she were to be revealed as Hagar’s daughter, it would be quite an anticlimax. In this way, the conventions of the sentimental novel in which good, moral characters can always be clearly identified from the villains necessitate that Aurelia is not Hagar’s daughter.

Motherlessness has not only corrupted Aurelia, but it has also corrupted Cuthbert Sumner, who is “an only child of New England ancestry” (83) and who has lost his mother while he was still very young. Sumner, with all his respect for womanhood and idolization of Jewel, fails to accept the drop of black blood in Jewel’s veins and loses his bride as the cause of this. Perhaps Sumner’s adoration of Jewel as his “white angel of purity” (103) is somehow a symptom of his search for a lost mother; an imagined, otherworldly creature that cannot exist, just like the image of the white lady depicted in True Womanhood terms could not really exist in the real world. Thus, through Sumner’s character Hopkins criticizes the image of the True Woman as an impossible ideal to fulfill. Without motherly influence, Sumner has also thrown himself in the past into an affair with Aurelia, the existence of which enables the adventuress to break off his engagement to Jewel later on. Hopkins gives plenty of proof for Sumner’s weak character that a mother has not been able to mould: “Cuthbert Sumner (blind and foolish) was not the kind of man to let the memory of his little Blossom [Jewel] prevent him from holding a beautiful, yielding form closely clasped in his arms, and returning kisses with

interest when such a rare opportunity offered” (102). Thus, Sumner is not eventually worthy of Jewel, because despite his “aristocratic” New England heritage, he has racist attitudes and is morally and spiritually below Jewel. I will discuss the unhappy ending further in the next chapter.

One further issue connected to the theme of motherhood that is so important for Hopkins in *Hagar's Daughter* is the issue of race mothering, in the sense that by writing her novel, Hopkins wanted to mould the attitudes and values of her readers in order to advance the interests of the race.³⁶ In the *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins also edited a series of biographical sketches called “Famous Women of the Negro Race” in which she celebrated the efforts and achievements of black women. In this series, Hopkins promoted a similar kind of race mothering as in her novels. Jill Bergman (95) argues that Hopkins’ portraits of exemplary race women showed them to be educated and have a high social standing, but most importantly, that they were able to mother the race by civilizing and improving the lower classes of blacks. By emphasizing the impact of black motherhood, Hopkins wanted to encourage black women to embrace their motherly role, and to function as transmitters of race pride to their children.

Thus, to summarize Hopkins’ viewpoint on the importance of domesticity and especially motherhood, I agree with Kate McCullough (40), who argues that the way Hopkins redeems these concepts for universal womanhood, instead of being restricted to white women only, is a form of empowerment for black women. In addition, the focus on mothers and daughters evidenced in *Hagar's Daughter* really puts the men in the story in a minor role and often they are either weak in character or completely evil. The fact that the evil men like St Clair Enson/General Benson and Major Madison are both unmarried accentuates the fact that a woman’s influence is central in the family, to nurture the domestic values of love and caring

³⁶ In a way, this “race mothering” continued the tradition of “other-mothering” that took place during slavery, when families were separated and black women took care of other black women’s children that were not their own biological offspring.

that would otherwise be overrun by economic and political concerns and motives. *Hagar's Daughter* is essentially a female-centered novel. By participating in the domestic upbringing of children as well as by mothering the whole race, black women could play an equal role with black men in advancing social reform and equality (Campbell, 23). This need of gender equality is also shown in the marriages portrayed by Hopkins in her novels. In the next chapter I am going to discuss how Hopkins celebrates marriage (and especially mixed-race marriage) as a medium for a mutually fulfilling future for the happy couple, as well as for America as a whole. In *Hagar's Daughter*, Hopkins seems to present to her readers two alternate scenarios for the future of America, one of which is a hopeful one and the other a doomed one. The scenarios are linked to the destinies of Hopkins' two couples: Hagar and Ellis and Jewel and Cuthbert.

5. The tragedy of the mulatta in the turn-of-the-century U.S

Cuthbert Sumner questioned wherein he had sinned and why he was so severely punished. Then it was borne in upon him: the sin is the nation's. It must be washed out. The plans of the Father are not changed in the nineteenth century; they are shown us in different forms. (*Hagar's Daughter*, 283)

The ending of *Hagar's Daughter* shows the ambiguity and uniqueness of Hopkins' perspective regarding the future of African Americans in America. Unlike the classical forms of popular fiction, such as sentimental fiction and detective fiction which influenced Hopkins' writing, *Hagar's Daughter* does not have a completely happy ending, and furthermore, there is no definite conclusion or restoring of the social order that characterizes most popular fiction and gives the reader reassurance of society's prevalent values. In *Hagar's Daughter*, one set of lovers, Hagar and Ellis, is indeed reunited and living happily ever after despite society's judgment, but the other couple, Jewel and Cuthbert, are separated by Cuthbert's racial prejudice and like many *tragic mulattas* before her, Jewel dies tragically abroad of Roman fever. By creating these two alternative destinies for her protagonists, Hopkins seems to create two alternative futures for America as well. She uses the metaphor of marriage that she calls a "holy institution" and a "sacred family relation" (284) to depict the relationship between the black and white races in turn-of-the-century America. Using the language and imagery of sentimental fiction, she thus aims at giving a didactic lesson to her readers about the impact of racial prejudice and racist practices on the society and on everyday life.

Ultimately, in Hopkins' more positive vision for the future, the significance of racial difference is diminished. Race is no longer a valid category for classifying human beings. Here, the presence of the *tragic mulatta* is essential, but she carries totally different kinds of meanings than in the previous tradition. She becomes the celebrated symbol of America at the beginning of the 20th century, embodying a truly hybrid and fluid identity, transgressing racial boundaries and therefore, breaking those boundaries down. However, this utopian vision is conditioned by the fact that American society in reality is still very hostile toward mulattas

and black people in general. Cuthbert Sumner is a warning example for those readers who still have these attitudes and prejudices. In the darker vision, the mulatta, like Jewel Bowen, becomes the tragic victim of society's mistreatment of her and she has to be sacrificed at the altar of racial segregation and racial purity.

In the next two sub-chapters, I will explore these issues further. I will start by looking at the two couples representing two different endings for the story. In the first sub-chapter there will be a discussion of Hopkins' strategy of transforming illicit mixed-race sexual relations that were connected to rape and abuse in the past to relations of marital bliss and security in the future. I am also going to analyse marriage as the key metaphor Hopkins uses to portray the relationship between the races and as a foundation for a good, moral society. In the second sub-chapter, I will concentrate on Hopkins' utopian vision for the future of America in which the no-longer-so-tragic mulatta plays a fundamental role, as well as the ambiguity Hopkins herself, on the other hand, seems to feel toward this vision. In her own way, Hopkins participates in the discourse of what being an American is, and who is allowed to call themselves American. This discussion is something that has characterized American history throughout times, because on the one hand, America has always been a country of immigrants, yet on the other hand, the white population has constantly strived to protect the purity of the white Anglo-Saxon America through policies of excluding nonwhites. In my analysis, I will make references also to Hopkins' other novels, as well as one of her short stories, "Talma Gordon" (1900) that concentrates on the question of amalgamation.

5.1 Illicit sexual liaisons turned into marital bliss

‘Hagar, . . . you love me and I love you as my very soul. How were we to know? How could we tell? Therefore, having committed a sin in innocence – if sin it be, and I do not so believe it, for things appear in a different light to me now – we will together live it down. Surely heaven cannot fix the seal of this crime on us forever.’ (*Hagar's Daughter*, 61)

‘We may make laws, but laws are but straws in the hands of Omnipotence.

. . .And no man may combat fate. Given a man, propinquity, opportunity, fascinating femininity, and there you are. Black, white, green, yellow—nothing will prevent intermarriage. Position, wealth, family, friends—all sink into insignificance before the God-implanted instinct that made Adam, awakening from a deep sleep and finding the woman beside him, accept Eve as bone of his bone; he cared not nor questioned whence she came. So it is with the sons of Adam ever since, through the law of heredity which makes us all one common family. And so it will be with us in our re-formation of this old Republic.’ (“Talma Gordon”, 2-3).

The question of intermarriage or amalgamation is an important theme in Hopkins’ works, just as it was a heated issue in the society of her time. Miscegenation and racial intermixture had been features of American life from the beginning, and the first anti-miscegenation laws were created already in 1661 (Koshy, 3). As has been argued in this thesis, black and white amalgamation was considered to be against the law, and the connotations that circulated around mixed-race relations were very negative on both sides of the color line, ranging from the rape and abuse of black women by white plantation owners to the alleged rape of white women by bestial black men that served as a motive for black lynching. The fear of increased amalgamation had also been one argument voiced by Southern whites against the emancipation of slaves, because the possible consenting unions between free black men and white women were something that most threatened the patriarchal order (Smith, 36). Thus, the anti-miscegenation laws were implemented more strictly to discourage sexual ties between white women and nonwhite men (Koshy, 4). In conclusion, if amalgamation in purely sexual or biological terms was considered a taboo, intermarriage was even more so, because it suggested voluntary relationships between members of two different races.³⁷ As I have discussed in my first chapter, the mulatta, as the offspring of these illicit relations, had to suffer a tragic fate in much of the earlier fiction precisely because of her illegal and forbidden

³⁷ According to Susan Koshy (6), white-black miscegenation during slavery differed from white-Native American and white-Mexican miscegenation, because it took place outside marriage and was denied any legal protection and privileges of matrimony. She argues that both white-Native American and white-Mexican intermarriages were at first accepted and encouraged, because they enabled white men to gain political and economic power. However, by the late nineteenth century, ideologies of social hygiene, sexual control and racial purity were firmly in place, and all kinds of white-nonwhite relations were sanctioned based on the protection of the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race. (Koshy, 5)

parentage. Her racial origins caused the mulatta to fall in-between, unable to retain her social status as a white person but also desperate enough to die rather than join the slave community.

One proof of the taboo status of intermarriage even after the abolition of slavery is a letter to the editor written by a white reader of the *Colored American Magazine* and published therein, complaining about Hopkins' interracial themes and saying that her stories will not promote themselves to white readers nor elevate colored readers because they contain mixed-race sentimental love (Wallinger, 145). Hopkins' defense to this kind of argument as well as an article called "Furnace Blasts", written under a pseudonym of Shadrach and published in the magazine in 1903, illustrate her radical perspective to the issue of intermarriage. In her defense as well as in the article, she points out that love is a stronger force than racial segregation, surpassing boundaries and negotiating differences in class and race (Wallinger, 66).³⁸ In addition, Claudia Tate argues that marriage in the post-Reconstruction black domestic novels was considered a "viable medium for developing the self, the other, and the community, a joint venture in which wives and husbands construct mutually fulfilling and productive futures" (Tate, 77). Not only Hopkins, but also Frances Harper, for example, presented marriage this way. Contrary to Hopkins, however, Harper concentrated on intraracial marriage: Iola Leroy marries a mulatto doctor Latimer instead of the white doctor Gresham, and together "[in] their desire to help the race their hearts beat in loving unison" (*Iola Leroy*, 266). Not only the fact that marriage was an important signal of civilization for the newly emancipated, for black women writers, it was also considered empowering, because through marriage, black women could be equal to black men in educating and uplifting the race from their wifely position beside their husbands.

³⁸ Ann Ardis (39) includes Hopkins's response in more detail: "My stories are definitely planned to show the obstacles persistently placed in our paths by a dominant race to subjugate us spiritually. Marriage is made illegal between the races and yet the mulattoes increase. Thus the shadow of corruption falls on the blacks and on the whites, without whose aid the mulattoes would not exist. And then the hue and cry goes abroad of the immorality of the Negro and the disgrace that the mulattoes are to this nation. Amalgamation is an institution designed by God for some wise purpose, and mixed bloods have always exercised a great influence on the progress of human affairs."

As important as marriage is for black and mulatta women, it is also important for white women in *Hagar's Daughter*: the stenographer Elise Bradford, who has been seduced by General Benson and has had his illegitimate child, sees marriage as her only salvation, even though in order to make the General marry her, she has to become his enemy: "I know enough to ruin him. I planned for it and I have succeeded. He dares not go against me now, and so he has promised marriage, and I shall once more hold my head up among honest women" (161). Thus, marriage was the only route to True Womanhood, and without it, even a white woman could not be respectable in society. Elise Bradford, however, relies too much on the institution of marriage rather than on the power of true love, and has to pay a heavy price for it: she is murdered by General Benson and Sumner is blamed for her murder.

Like Wallinger (66) argues, Hopkins' perspective to interracial marriages is quite radical, because amalgamation was often considered the greatest hindrance to a peaceful co-existence of the races. In particular, it was associated with the pollution of the pure Anglo-Saxon blood. The belief in the inferiority of the black race made miscegenation an abnormal, unnatural thing to white Americans (Christian 1980, 6). From the viewpoint of her own race, additionally, Hopkins would have been considered a traitor if she had publicly announced herself as promoting amalgamation. Interestingly, this is partly what she did and was also accused of in her novels and articles in the *Colored American Magazine*, as discussed above. Hopkins' radical perspective to intermarriage would have been considered outrageous by some, because the African American community was afraid that too much amalgamation with the whites would cause the race slowly fading into white, which would cause the loss of the black African or African American cultural and social tradition, an important theme in the construction of a collective racial destiny (Mitchell, 214). That is also the reason why Hopkins chose to promote interracial marriages only in cases of moral and intellectual

equality as well as mutual consent (Wallinger, 66). I will discuss this radical perspective, and the imagined new type of future mixed-race American further in the next sub-chapter.

Hopkins' faith in the power of true love, however, is connected to the issue of intermarriage and with the help of religious and sentimental discourse she aims at transforming the negative connotations of amalgamation or miscegenation into something positive. First of all, Hopkins wants to emphasize the fact that interracial relations are already reality, and their existence should not be denied nor held as a taboo. She lets her white characters look at the issue from both sides; firstly, the white woman Elise Bradford voices the popular opinion or horror of the whites: "...black blood is everywhere – in society and out, and in our families even; we cannot feel assured that it has not filtered into the most exclusive families. We try to stem the tide but I believe it is a hopeless task" (160). It is not a coincidence that Hopkins plays here with the notion of blood in connection with amalgamation and specifically makes a white person talk about the "most exclusive families", meaning the upper middle-class ones, being in danger of blood pollution. Susan Gillman (46) argues that blood is one of the central tropes in Hopkins' fiction, because she writes so much about racial heritage, nationalism and race purity.³⁹ As has been discussed before, the racialist sciences of the time, such as eugenics, started to reform a class-based system of inheritance by initiating a discourse of "pure blood"; blood that in itself contained intellectual and moral properties (Smith, 45). In this discourse, white blood was considered good blood, whereas

³⁹ Gillman sees Hopkins as one of the exemplary writers in her notion of the "race melodrama" written by African American and white authors during the period of 1877-1920. She argues that various white and black writers during that time period are connected by their use of the themes of ancient Egyptian and African history, secret societies and mystic symbologies, racial sciences as well as empires and imperialism. In racial melodrama, the "sheer violence and heightened polarities" of U.S race relations at the turn-of-the-century surfaced (Gillman, 5). The characteristics of racial melodrama include the doubling or repetition of racial tropes and discourses and the impossibility of a conclusion or resolution, because of the racial, national and gender conflicts that are brought forward by the excess of meaning created by the fundamental drive of melodrama to express everything (Gillman, 12). The excessive use of blood as a metaphor, then, represents the characteristics of racial melodrama in Hopkins' writing: "By proliferating an excess of meanings [literal and figurative] within the terms of racial discourse, Hopkins demonstrates their internal contradictions, their volatility, and, ultimately, their unexpected potential for oppositional uses" (Gillman, 46).

black blood was impure, meaning that just a drop of black blood could contaminate the upper middle-class, white families.

Later, however, Hopkins allows Ellis Enson, a white upper middle-class man who has accepted that the woman he loves is partly black, to repeat the same message, but with a more positive tone: “This idea of race separation is carried to an extreme point and will, in time, kill itself. Amalgamation has taken place; it will continue, and no finite power can stop it” (270). Thus, Ellis Enson believes that there is no power on earth that could influence amalgamation, but God, who is an infinite power, could do so if he wanted to. However, Ellis Enson also makes it clear to the younger and more prejudiced Sumner that God makes no distinction between black and white in terms of the sacred nature of matrimony: “You will learn one day that there is a higher law than that enacted by any earthly tribunal, and I believe you will then find your nature nobler than you know” (271). Ellis Enson is right in his prediction, but unfortunately, Sumner’s discovery happens too late, when he has already lost his chance of happiness.

While Elise Bradford, an “outsider”, may still be obsessed with the blood purity rhetoric, just like the majority of white people; Ellis Enson, on the other hand, is a member of the elite, exclusive upper middle-class, and despite the “pure blood” in his veins, he has realized that true love is more important than the color (or purity) of one’s blood. This realization has not, however, come to Ellis easily, or without effort. At the beginning of the story, as Ellis hears about Hagar’s racial origins, he declares:

‘I feel it my duty as a Southern gentleman, the representative of a proud old family, to think of others beside myself and not allow my own inclination to darken the escutcheon of a good old name. I cannot, I dare not, and the law forbids me to acknowledge as my wife a woman in whose veins courses a drop of the accursed blood of the Negro slave’. (59)

This cowardice and class pride is eventually what prevents Ellis from protecting his wife and child and leads to the tragic separation of the lovers. Ellis’ realization of the meaning of true

love and the value of the marital bond is a lesson for Hopkins' readers as well, and only after learning this lesson, Ellis and Hagar can be re-united. Claudia Tate argues that Hopkins' couples in general are heroic in the way they resist racist practices and conventions. She says, however, that the nobility of the couples prevents them from trying to change the conventions and instead, they often remove themselves and their love from the site of hostility (Tate, 14). Indeed, in *Winona*, the couple Winona and Warren travels to England, where "American caste prejudice could not touch them in their home beyond the sea" (*Winona*, 435) and in *Of One Blood*, the path of Reuel Briggs leads back to Africa.⁴⁰ The protagonists in *Contending Forces* also make their way to Europe at the end of the novel. Hagar and Ellis' family does travel to Europe for a period of time, because it is told in the novel that Jewel dies there. However, they come back to live on the Enson plantation and even adopt the illegitimate son of St Clair and Elise Bradford, showing that they actually mean to oppose racism by actively continuing the domestic life they had when they were young, despite society's judgment of their mixed-race union.

On the other hand, it is Cuthbert Sumner's inability to learn the same lesson that Ellis Enson learns that ultimately leads to an unhappy ending for Cuthbert and Jewel (even though he does learn the lesson eventually, when it is already too late and Jewel has died). Claudia Tate argues that in Hopkins' novels, the battle between social equality and oppression is mirrored in the battle for true love (Tate, 99). Thus, the symbolic quest for true love rather than dishonorable or conditional love is what decides the characters' fates. For the unhappy Jewel, both of her suitors, General Benson and Cuthbert Sumner, appear to be unworthy: General Benson because of greed and pursuit of wealth, and his lack of genuine emotion for

⁴⁰ I have not discussed Hopkins' in connection with Africanism very much in this thesis. In her third magazine novel *Of One Blood*, however, she discusses returning to Africa, because she imagines a better future for the protagonists in ancient Ethiopia. In fact, Reuel Briggs, the protagonist of the story, becomes the reborn king of Ethiopia in this novel. It would be interesting to analyze the way Hopkins sees Africa and its significance to African Americans differently in her novels, but this is out of the scope of this thesis. Some of this work has already been done by other critics. Susan Gillman (2003) discusses *Of One Blood* as an exemplary of how Hopkins uses themes of the occult, the supernatural and Ethiopianism as well as psychology in order to create a "race melodrama".

Jewel, and Sumner because of his racist attitudes. As can be argued, Jewel's suitor Sumner fails to pass the test of true love whereas Hagar's husband Ellis Enson passes it.

The test of true love, as Claudia Tate calls it, is something Hopkins' readers would have recognized, because it was based on Victorian ideology and repeated in many sentimental novels. What Hopkins does differently from the white sentimental writers, however, is that she places the hero/heroine's individual will power, integrity and depth of love against the imperatives of racist conventions (Tate, 196). Thus, while Hopkins knew that her readers, black and white alike, were likely to sympathize with the romantic fulfillment of a virtuous couple, she creates a conflict for white readers, in particular, because they must either condemn the racist practices or the power of true love between the mixed-race couple (Tate, 198). The narrator talks about first love, in particular, as true love and how every individual must go through a test in order to know its authenticity and strength: "Some say first love is 'calf love', a silly infatuation . . . Others will tell you first love is the only true passion; that it comes but once to every human being . . . The question as to whether it is the deepest love must be answered by each individual" (*Hagar's Daughter*, 143).

Cuthbert Sumner, who is Jewel's first love, seems to be a perfect young American gentleman, with fortune and talent enough for a good husband for any sentimental heroine: "Sumner was a gentleman in the office and a great favorite with all the employees; it was rare to hear an uncouth expression from the lips of this man, who honored all womanhood" (101). In addition, he believes in romance and chivalry, like a true romantic hero should:

Modern pessimists are fond of crying that love, as well as chivalry, has died out of our practical world. If this were true, then Sumner lived after this century, for his belief in higher and better things was intense. He had a desire to worship *purity* [my italics] in any shape, to champion the weak, and carve a pathway to honor that was characteristic of the chivalrous days of old". (126)

This depiction of Sumner becomes very ironic considering the events that follow later in the story, because it becomes clear to the readers that it is precisely Sumner's obsession with a

certain kind of female purity, meaning blood purity that makes him a failed romantic hero and deprives him of his true love. Even though Sumner calls Jewel his blossom and “white angel of purity” (103), he cannot totally resist Aurelia either: “Aurelia was a gorgeous tropical flower; Jewel, a fair fragrant lily. Men have such an unfortunate weakness for tropical blooms, they cannot pass them by carelessly, even though a lily lies above their hearts” (103). Thus, the narrator gives little hints to the readers about Cuthbert Sumner’s weak will power already when there is no notion of racial intermixture involved in the relationship between him and Jewel: “After all she [Aurelia] was a woman, and a beautiful one: Why should he try to mar her favorable reception among the élite” (122). In his private discussion with Aurelia, however, Cuthbert remarks that his love for Jewel is strong: “‘*Happen what may* [my italics], Jewel must always be my first thought.’ ‘Aye, your best and truest love,’ she [Aurelia] said through her teeth” (123). In the light of the fore coming events, Sumner’s declaration turns out to be void, because he abandons Jewel when he hears about her racial origins.

Hopkins refers to Sumner’s chivalrous and honorable nature many times in the novel, making thus more explicit the way his racism contradicts his otherwise good values and principles. In a way, Sumner also falls from the pedestal of whiteness, like Hagar and Jewel do, but in another sense. He is incapable of actually living according to white values. Sumner’s reaction to hearing about Aurelia’s black blood from the stenographer Elise Bradford, is an emphasized shock:

‘My God!’ exclaimed Sumner as he wiped the perspiration from his face,’ ‘a negress! this is too horrible.’ Repeated shocks had unnerved him and he felt weak and bewildered. . . ‘But a white man may be betrayed into marrying her. I certainly came near to it myself.’ ‘Very true; and if she had been a different woman, she would have succeeded, you would have been proud of your handsome wife because of your ignorance of her origin.’ (160)

The irony of this passage becomes clear only if the reader already suspects that also Jewel is partly black, because of the high esteem and adoration that Sumner feels for her contradict his racist attitudes completely. In fact, the idea of Jewel luring Sumner to marry her, a black

woman, is certainly false, and yet, Sumner has fallen in love with her. Later, when confronted by the desperate Aurelia who tries once more to win him over, Sumner equates black blood with impurity: “Let us end this scene and all relations that have ever existed, - if you were as pure as snow, and I loved you as my other self, I would never wed with one of colored blood, an octaroon!” (238). In Sumner’s opinion, even though he might feel true love toward a mixed-race woman, he would never marry one. In conclusion, true love is not the strongest ideal for Sumner, because his racist attitude overrides his feelings. Keeping in mind how Sumner has emphasized Jewel’s white, angelic purity throughout the novel, it is not a surprise for the readers to hear that he abandons her later on.

Furthermore, Sumner’s determination to separate a mother and daughter (Hagar and Jewel) from each other after the revelation of Hagar’s racial status is on its own, a terrible sin, because of the emphasis and value placed on mother-daughter relationships, and especially this one, in the novel. After Estelle has been revealed as Hagar, Sumner thinks to himself that “...it was impossible for Jewel to be longer associated with her [Hagar] in so close a relationship as that of mother and daughter” (265). Sumner’s attitude is incomprehensible to Hagar, who has stood by Sumner, a murder suspect and convict, even though Sumner’s status could have possibly harmed her and her family’s reputation in the social circles: “The tender-hearted woman [Hagar] who had been his champion and friend throughout dark days of suspicion and despair could not understand his antipathy to her” (274). While Hagar has had faith in the innocence of Sumner, Sumner still believes he needs to separate himself and his wife from someone with black blood. For Sumner, fear of society’s judgment is far more significant than family ties.

Contrary to Jewel, who instantly believes in the innocence of her lover who is charged with murder, Cuthbert condemns his fiancée for something she does not even have any power over: her racial origins! Consequently, the one who fails to pass the test of true love is

certainly Cuthbert Sumner and not Jewel, who earlier in the novel hurries back to her lover's side as soon as she hears about his imprisonment; forgiving the fact that Sumner betrayed her trust with Aurelia: "In an instant the reserve and coldness of weeks was swept away. He [Sumner] was again her [Jewel's] lover. His deadly peril gripped her very heart-strings, and filled her whole being anew with all the strength and passion of a woman's noblest love, that, at once, . . . throws aside all but honor itself for the being who is her world" (180). It can be argued that Hopkins makes a statement here by depicting a woman's love stronger than a man's. The same principle concerns Hagar and Ellis, because it takes time for Ellis to pass the test of true love, and still Hagar forgives him instantly, even though most of the difficulties in life would not have happened without Ellis' abandonment of her early on in her life. The same kind of disappointment considering the strength of a man's love happens to the heroine in "Talma Gordon", when her first suitor hears that she is a mulatta:

I looked at Edward as I finished. He sat, his face covered with his hands. Finally he looked up with a glance of haggard despair: 'God! Doctor, but this is too much. I could stand the stigma of murder, but add to that the pollution of Negro blood! No man is brave enough to face such a situation.' 'It is as I thought it would be,' said Talma sadly, while the tears poured over her white face. 'I do not blame you, Edward.' ("Talma Gordon", 19)

Thus, the "pollution of the Negro blood" overrides the virtues of the heroine as well as the strength of a man's feelings toward her in Talma Gordon's case too. Considering the value placed on true love in sentimental literature, Hopkins almost forces the readers to see the serious contradiction between the ideal of true love and the racism that negates it. It becomes a test for the reader as well: whether to sympathize with the heroine and feel disappointment or to identify with the attitudes of the white men and deny the power of true love.

The discussion between Sumner and Ellis after Estelle is revealed as Hagar is the last chance for Sumner to pass the test of true love, because Ellis shows him a good example of how he has grown to appreciate the power of true love and not to care about society's judgment or prejudice. However, Sumner fails here too: "I honor you for your resolution,

Enson, but indeed I have not your strength of character. I could never solve the social problem in that high-handed manner” (270). As can be seen, even Sumner himself acknowledges that he is weak compared to Ellis Enson. He continues to voice a very racist opinion: “. . . such a – well – terrible action as a wholesale union between whites and blacks? Think of it, my dear man! Think of our refinement and intelligence linked to such black bestiality. . .” (270), and later, “The mere thought of the grinning, toothless, black hag that was her foreparent would forever rise between us” (271). As Ellis Enson notices, Sumner’s New England philanthropist upbringing is not enough, when it comes to the “commonest personal liberty which is the fundamental principle of the holy family tie” (271). In this way, Hopkins wants to emphasize that no matter how equal status blacks are granted in society, politics and education, a more important thing would be to accept their right to marry whom they love. The institution of marriage and especially intermarriage between the races based on true love becomes thus the ultimate test, goal and ideal for American society. Only when American people are willing to accept interracial unions based on true love, can there be total equality between the races.⁴¹

Compared to Frances Harper, I argue that Hopkins’ position concerning intermarriage is more radical, because Harper’s heroine Iola marries a black man and refuses the marriage proposal of a white man, based on the public opinion: “. . . what right has public opinion to interfere with our marriage relations? Why should we yield to its behests? ‘Because it is stronger than we are, and we cannot run counter to it without suffering its penalties’” (*Iola Leroy*, 233). Iola Leroy bases her choice of marriage partner on her ambition to uplift the race: “. . . Doctor. . . I feel that our paths must diverge. My life-work is planned. I intend spending my future among the colored people of the South” (234). While it can be claimed that it is precisely Iola’s refusal to marry a white man, and her decided dedication to “her own

⁴¹ The last anti-miscegenation laws in America were finally deemed unconstitutional and overturned in 1967, several decades after Hopkins’ plead for the acceptance of interracial marriages in her fiction.

people” that makes Harper’s novel valuable from the point of view of black criticism, Hopkins’ imagined interracial domestic harmony goes even further. She seems to believe that while the races are separated in terms of strictly intraracial family relationships, there can be no social or political equality between the races either.

5.2 A brighter future: mixed-race America in the 20th century

‘Sumner,’ he [Ellis Enson] said, with impressive solemnity, ‘race prejudice is all right in theory, but when a man tries to practice it against the laws which govern human life and action, there’s a weary journey ahead of him, and he’s not got to die to realize the tortures of the damned. This idea of race separation is carried to an extreme point and will, in time, kill itself. Amalgamation has taken place; it will continue, and no finite power can stop it.’ (*Hagar’s Daughter*, 270)

‘But what became of Talma Gordon?’ questioned the president. ‘Did she die?’ ‘Gentlemen,’ said the Doctor, rising to his feet and sweeping the faces of the company with his eagle gaze, ‘gentlemen, if you will follow me to the drawing room, I shall have much pleasure in introducing you to my wife— née Talma Gordon.’ (“Talma Gordon”, 21)

The plot climaxes in both *Hagar’s Daughter* as well as “Talma Gordon” seem to be connected to the test of true love and whether the male protagonists of the stories pass it based on their abandoning the racist attitudes. In “Talma Gordon”, the story ends in the revelation that the white upper middle-class doctor has indeed married a mixed-race woman, and presents her proudly to his peers. One similar turning point in the plot of *Hagar’s Daughter* is the courtroom scene at the end of which Hagar and Ellis find each other again, despite all the odds. The other could be the ending of *Hagar’s Daughter* that shows a failed hero who has lost his true love because of his failure to pass the test. As argued in the previous sub-chapter, Hopkins’ opinion on intermarriage was unique because she promoted amalgamation as the ultimate solution to the race problem or the problem of social inequality in America. Furthermore, this perspective explains the importance of the *tragic mulatta* trope in Hopkins’ fiction. The mulatta, now less tragic than ever, is a symbolic representative of Hopkins’ vision and she represents the ideal future of America, in which people can no longer be classified

according to their skin color. Ann Ardis (43) is one of the critics who recognize that the subjectivity of Hopkins' mulattas, for example, blends, rather than doubles racialized selves, providing them a new racial consciousness that is not only black and white combined, but something more.

Like Ardis, other previous Hopkins critics have also seen the value of her mulatta protagonists in the way they destabilize identity categories and make constructions such as gender and race fluid (e.g. Bost, 5). However, in my opinion, the critics do not go far enough to see the potential in Hopkins' imaginary race-less future. Instead, many critics follow the tradition born during the Black Arts and Black Pride movements (see Lauret, 80), and declare that Hopkins' novels are a tribute to whiteness and that her near-white characters undermine the value of genuine black African American culture. Barbara Christian, for one, argues that both Hopkins and Harper promote a black middle class lead by mulattoes, whose faith in the white culture and values allows them to be conservative, Christian and moral, and thus, show the way to "the ignorant, the loudmouthed, the coarse, but essentially good-natured blacks" (Christian 1980, 29).⁴² While modern readers have considered mulattoes racially ambivalent characters who idealize white bourgeois values and abandon genuine Africanism, Hopkins saw them as "the racial stock of a new people" (Tate, 146).⁴³ It must also be noticed that the African American experience cannot and should not be equated with just Africanism, because the social and cultural history of African Americans has been formed and moulded by the experience of slavery and Reconstruction periods (Lauret, 93). Therefore, it is essential to analyze the meaning of being American for African Americans and for Hopkins.

⁴² Even though there are now more positive views on Hopkins since the late 1990's, some contemporary critics still see no particular value in her fiction. See e.g. Lewis (1998) or Nickel (2000) for repeated critiques of Hopkins' use of near-white characters and her alleged lack of race pride.

⁴³ Hopkins' perspective was to a great extent shared by one of her peers, Charles Chesnutt, an African American author himself. In his series of articles called "The Future American" and published in the *Boston Evening Transcript* (1900), he predicted that the future race would be a mixture of the various races and that this would result in the issue of racial purity becoming a myth: "Any dream of a pure white race, of the Anglo-Saxon type, for the United States, may as well be abandoned as impossible, even if desirable." (Chesnutt, 1900; article extract taken from the Literature Network's website)

I am prepared to argue that the need of belonging to America, the need to share American citizenship, was a strong motivation for Hopkins and her contemporaries. Hopkins was not disinterested in the future of America, but on the contrary, she wished for an alternative, more equal and less discriminating future for her home country. In this future, the role of mulattoes was significant. Thus, the mulatta is essentially a medium for Hopkins to discuss questions of national exclusion and belonging (Raimon, 12). Considering the impact of increased immigration and national expansion that affected not only black-and-white racial relations, but also all white/non-white relations in America during the latter half of the 19th century, the question of who is allowed to be American is a central issue in the turn-of-the century America, and Hopkins participates in this general discussion from her point of view.

The discourse of nationalism, as argued by Pickering (105), operates in order to establish who belongs and who does not belong, seeing national identity as static and durable rather than dependent on historical circumstances. Thus, national discourse has a similar effect as stereotyping. In the antebellum part of the novel, Hopkins gives a detailed depiction of a Southern proslavery meeting in which there is much talk about nationhood and what it is to be patriotic in America. In the words of Southern politicians, patriotism is first and foremost about opposing any change and restricting the access of nonwhites to American citizenship: “My language may appear strong, but it is mild when we consider the attempt being made to wrest from us the exclusive power of making laws for our own community. The repose of our homes, the honor of our color, and the prosperity of the South demand that we resist innovation” (*Hagar’s Daughter*, 15). Even though the principle of slavery no longer reigned at the time of writing of the novel, Hopkins shows that this attitude about excluding nonwhites from being American is still in place at the turn of the century. The atmosphere may have been the most violent ever experienced in black and white relations especially in the South, because of the Jim Crow laws and enforced racial segregation. Though proslavery

Southern politicians justified their cause by declaring that they were only defending the interests of the original [white] inhabitants of America, one consistent feature in American history has been immigration and therefore, the issue has been at the heart of American nationalism. In other words, America as a nation was invented by the first European settlers, who did not find a mythical virgin land, but a populated one (Bradbury & Temperley, 4). In effect, these first settlers were as much immigrants and “aliens” as the nonwhite minorities, such as blacks, Hispanics or Asians that the later generations of whites tried to push away. However, as America was built on European values, ideologies and technologies, the understanding of America became European, even though the country was inhabited by a multiplicity of ethnicities and nationalities from the beginning.

The issue of immigration was very important at the turn-of-the-century America and not only were black and white relations in scrutiny, but America was being populated by increasing amounts of non-whites, which raised discourses of blood purity and national belonging that had an effect on the development of the nation throughout the 20th century. Ali Behdad (xiii) argues that the myth of immigrant America has been created through the mechanism of historical amnesia. According to Behdad, the triumphant discourse of the democratic founding of America denies and suppresses (i.e. forgets) the fact that nationhood has been achieved largely through the violent conquest of Native Americans, exploitation and enslavement of Africans as well as colonization of Mexican and French territories. Thus, America has produced a pseudo-historical consciousness of its history as an open-door nation full of equal opportunities when actually immigration was entwined with a colonialist desire for power and a capitalist need for economic expansion (Behdad, 3). Toward the end of the 19th century, America was building a capitalist empire based on imperialist expansion that on the one hand required the influx of immigrants from Asia to work as a surplus labor but on the other hand, entailed a more heterogeneous and increasingly non-white citizenry, that fueled

fears of pollution and caused an upsurge of immigrant regulation and legislation (Li, 2; Behdad, 8). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, followed by the Immigration Act of 1891 through which an administrative machinery to regulate and control immigration was established, as well as other legislative action around the turn-of-the-century signal that the American state has constantly imposed normative and prescriptive laws to regulate immigrants' daily lives and to delimit the boundaries of citizenship (Behdad, 15). As Behdad argues (12), the immigrant has been needed to be present as the "Other" through whom citizenship and cultural belonging can be restated, as well as to boost the narrative of America as a nation of hospitality, liberty and democracy, yet at the same time the immigrant always remains an "alien" that needs to be regulated in order for him or her to be eligible as a citizen. The xenophobic quality in American culture and society is even present today, with the legislation created after 9/11 that allows for anyone (especially non-white persons) to be interrogated and suspected of terrorism by the state authorities.

Like Behdad (6) argues, the systematic forgetting of America's violent race relations is often accomplished through invoking imagery of "the Founding Fathers" with a dream of a democratic nation and suppressing the issues, such as slavery or immigration policies, that do not fit this ideal. It has been argued by critics that the black experience provides a valuable viewpoint for looking at American culture and society as a whole (Graham, 38). By looking at American history from the point of view of a minority, forgetting and dismissing reality is not very straightforward. The shadow of slavery, for example, did not disappear with emancipation, but on the contrary, it continued to have an effect on the personal as well as social and cultural realities decades later. The value that is most often seen in postbellum African American authors' texts is the fact that they reinterpret the past and create connections between the past and the present. Hopkins especially does this in dividing her novel *Hagar's Daughter* into antebellum and postbellum times. Furthermore, as Maryemma

Graham argues (39), her mulattas emerge as living symbols of the interconnectedness of races. In addition to re-interpreting the past in connection with the present, I argue that Hopkins in fact connects the past and present to the future. Thus, the value of her novels is not just in bringing the legacy of slavery into daylight, but in trying to forge a future based on learning a lesson about the past. In doing this, Hopkins is able to show the centrality of the “race problem” to American society and culture throughout American history as well as an imagined solution to the problem. A later generation African American female novelist Toni Morrison discusses the centrality of the race problem and argues that the African American people have served in the white American society as a medium through which white people can feel their own freedom in a more enforced way, serving as a mirror that shows the white person how they are free and the “Other” is not (Morrison, 70). In this way, the presence of the “Other” reinforces and reinstates the principles of democracy and freedom that are conditioned by race.

I argue that the two alternative future scenarios played in the two alternative destinies for the couples are central to the lesson that Hopkins wants the readers to learn. Consequently, I do not agree with Claudia Tate when she says that *Hagar's Daughter* reflects the failure of racial optimism, because Jewel dies (Tate, 198). Rather, Jewel's death and Cuthbert's realization of his loss serve as a reflection of what happens if the society continues to classify people according to race and if white Americans continue to harbor racist attitudes concerning personal matters such as true love. Even though Cuthbert's change of opinion is not very thoroughly depicted in the novel, his devastation upon seeing Jewel's grave makes Hopkins' point clear: “In the light of his recent experiences Cuthbert Sumner views life and eternity with different eyes and thoughts from what he did before he knew that he had wedded Hagar's daughter” (284). Thus, whereas it is too late for Cuthbert Sumner, it might not be too late for the readers to change their opinion. Like Janet Gabler-Hover (154) argues, the death

of Jewel expresses Hopkins' "psychic rage at America for not trying to live up to the conditions of citizenship it promises in law and in spirit".

The death of Jewel is in this way also connected to the failure of American society to live up to its own ideals. Whereas America as a nation was initially created by European settlers to become "the City Upon a Hill, the Land of the New Start",⁴⁴ based on principles of democracy, freedom, opportunity and liberty, there has always been a discrepancy between the ideals and the reality that Americans encountered in their everyday lives (Bradbury & Temperley, 2). As argued above, this discrepancy has always been noticeable for minorities and immigrants, which also explains Hopkins' criticism toward Cuthbert Sumner's character, for example. It is mentioned several times in the novel that Sumner has had a white New England background and upbringing. New England was the area in which the first European settlers landed and therefore, the ideals for America, the New World, were born there. Whereas New England was active in the emancipation of slaves, the racist attitudes did not completely disappear with emancipation, and though New England whites may have championed for the basic rights of black people, sometimes their attitudes were hypocritical because they would not allow the white genetic stock to be polluted by black blood.

While critics like Claudia Tate (198) and Hazel Carby (152) ignore Hagar and Ellis' happiness in saying that there is no happy ending to the story, to me it seems that there are two endings. The happiness of Hagar and Ellis, to me, is a reflection of the possibility of a more equal society based on domestic values: a society in which race loses its significance and in which the true American values of freedom and equality can become reality. The narrator reminds the readers of Ellis's wisdom at the very end of the novel: "Truly had Ellis Enson spoken. . . 'A boy's will is the wind's will, And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts'" (284). I interpret this passage as directed to America as a whole, because Cuthbert

⁴⁴ A reference to John Winthrop's "Modell of Christian Charity" (1630).

Sumner is used as a metaphor: Hopkins believes that America as a nation is like a young boy and that the racist attitudes of the society have been a feature of the nation's infantile and perhaps also patriarchal past. However, now it is time for America to realize that it needs to take another direction and learn to think differently: to accept racial intermixture and the feminine ideals of true love and domestic principles as guidance for the whole nation's future. St Clair Enson's son playing happily at the lawn of the old plantation, with a happy future ahead of him despite the crimes of his biological father is a symbol of the possibility of a new beginning for America. In Sumner's character, on the other hand, Hopkins criticizes the white Americans who seem to have a superficially positive attitude toward black people in theory, but do not fully grant them citizenship or claim to humanity in reality:

Cuthbert Sumner was born with a noble nature; his faults were those caused by environment and tradition . . . born and bred in an atmosphere which approved of freedom and qualified equality for the Negro, he had never considered for one moment the remote contingency of actual social contact with this unfortunate people. He had heard the Negro question discussed in all its phases . . . and had even contributed a paper to a local weekly in which he had warmly championed the cause, but so had he championed the cause of the dumb and helpless creatures in the animal world about him . . . Horses, dogs, cats, and Negroes were classed together in his mind... (265-66)

Thus, Hopkins' writing is not just a passive testimony of black presence in American history, like Hazel Carby argues (162), because in *Hagar's Daughter*, she seems to give two very actionable futures for America: one that will lead to the tragic separation of lovers with the continuation of racist attitudes in society; the other that will lead to personal fulfillment in marriage and eventually race-less society, because through intermarriage, distinguishing one's race becomes ultimately impossible. The fact that Hopkins' mulatto/a characters seem to be more intelligent, spiritual and physiognomically beautiful than either "purely" black or white characters testify to her vision and counter the prevailing view of mulattoes being a degenerate species (Patterson, 52). On the contrary, mixed-race people represent the best of

both races and are the people of the future.⁴⁵ Hopkins' thinking, as well as the thoughts of Charles Chesnutt at the same time period, and Jean Toomer a few decades later, were largely influenced by the discourse of evolutionary theory that had a revolutionary effect on Western culture and thinking at the beginning of the 20th century. Rooted in Darwinism, Francis Galton with his theory of eugenics as well as the social philosopher Herbert Spencer popularized the principles of evolutionary theory in a racialized way, so that it was commonly thought that the colored races were intellectually, physically and morally inferior to the Anglo Saxon race (Hawkins, 154-155). Hereby the scientific theories of the time justified racism and the organization of society based on racial hierarchies.⁴⁶ However, Hopkins, like Chesnutt and Toomer, took the principle of blending heredity, in which off-spring were considered to be the synthesis of both parents in their own use, and transformed it. In their hands, the principle of "only the fittest will survive" was turned into a celebration of those who they saw as strongest, meaning the mixed-race people, the new people of America (Hawkins, 158). However, whereas the evolutionary theory was decidedly atheist, Hopkins' vision contains a certain kind of Christian aspect to it, because of the domestic and Christian principles that she promotes in connection to racial intermixture.

Based on her pluralism, the mulatta, a mixed-race woman, is an emblem of this new race and she might actually be a more realistic symbol for America, a country that has been called the "melting pot" precisely because of the multiplicity of races and ethnicities of its citizens.

⁴⁵ Hopkins's ideal of the "New American" who could not be distinguished by his or her race, was picked up during the Harlem Renaissance by the author and poet Jean Toomer, who developed the idea in his poem initially called "The First American" but which was finally titled "The Meridian" and published in an anthology called *New American Caravan* (1936). Best known for his novel *Cane* (1923) Toomer himself was a mulatto, who passed for white for some parts of his life, championing for African American concerns at others, and finally, in "The Meridian", promoting a hybrid American identity. The meridian in the poem consisted of the white, black and red American races that in combination transcended racial boundaries and formed a true new American identity. The poem, however, has been largely ignored by the critical tradition, which has traditionally required the author to be identified with either "black" or "white" politics (Hawkins, 150).

⁴⁶ The literary movement of naturalism was influenced by these theories that transformed both the intellectual as well as the physical life of America. Peter Conn (290) argues that the scientific theories appealed to America's "utilitarian temper" making Americans believe that it would be possible to "apply the models of science to the realms of society and politics" (*ibid.*).

It is, however, easy to see the controversy of Hopkins' perspective from the point of view of later critics influenced by the 1960's Black Arts and Black Power movements, who championed for a distinct, even aggressive black identity for African Americans.⁴⁷

This last argument of mixed-race people being the people of the future connects this thesis to our times, as well. Whereas scientists today generally agree that there is no such thing as race and that it is impossible to describe the characteristics of one "race" (Bost, 42), we still classify people according to their race or ethnicity. The way Hopkins plays with the performativity of racial and gendered identities was radical at a time when white Americans were trying to build immovable and rigid boundaries to what being an American meant by excluding and alienating non-whites (Zackodnik, 41). In her novel, Hopkins arrives at a fluid understanding of identity that still is quite utopian in the 21st century.

It has been argued that the American society has built hierarchies based on race for centuries, and these hierarchies have had very real effects. What will surely be remembered about President Barack Obama, for instance, is that he was the first black president of the U.S. This shows that the significance of race is still very much alive as a category, even though it can be said that his presidency is advancement for race equality in America. A mulatto with roots in Kenya as well as in America, with a multicultural background, President Obama is truly representing America in all its multiplicity. Still, the discourse of race was very much present throughout the presidential elections. Consequently, even a century later, Hopkins' perspective seems radical, because racial classifications are still in place in the society of the 21st century. The tragedy of the mulatta in *Hagar's Daughter* is thus reminiscent of the tragedy of the American nation as it ignores the fact that racial intermixture is actually an

⁴⁷ The inability and unwillingness of the critical tradition born during these movements to see any value in an identity that is both "black" and "white" at the same is, according to Hawkins, one of the reasons why Jean Toomer's poem "The Blue Meridian" has been dismissed and forgotten, even though his novel *Cane* is celebrated in the African American literary canon (Hawkins, 150). I am convinced that Hopkins was dismissed by 20th -century critics for the same reason, even though she did champion for a fluid, mixed-race identity a couple of decades before Toomer and as one of the first female African American activists in American history. Furthermore, while Toomer thought himself one of the first members of the new American race, Hopkins had portrayed her *female* mulatta protagonists in this role already in 1900.

integral part of its history, present and future. In the novel, Hopkins tells a story about America and for America. *Hagar's Daughter* was written to show America that the co-existence of the races is possible and that racial intermixture is actually richness rather than an anomaly or a crime.

6. Conclusion

Pauline Hopkins was one of the first African American novelists to publish her fiction in America, and despite her merit, she had been neglected in literary criticism until the end of the 20th century. Hopkins' literary as well as political career cannot be underestimated, when the historical and socio-political context in which she lived and worked is taken into account. This context was the turn-of-the-century America, torn between an imperialist need of both economic and geographical expansion on the one hand, and an almost hysterical, hyperbolic xenophobia and fear of racial intermixture and blood pollution on the other hand. In addition, both the feminist movement as well as the African American collective thought were taking their first steps at the threshold of the 20th century. Hopkins, as an African American woman, was right in the middle of intertwined and conflicting discourses about race, class and gender.

My thesis is part of the revived recognition of Hopkins that especially African American and feminist critics initiated during the late 1980's. Since that time, the number of books and articles discussing Hopkins has increased dramatically, and the criticism written in the 2000's already partly recognizes the value in Hopkins' radical revision of race relations in America. My thesis builds upon the work of renown feminist critics such as Claudia Tate, Hazel Carby and Barbara Christian as well as the more recent contributions of Kristina Brooks, Janet Gabler-Hover, Teresa Zackodnik and others to examine Hopkins' novel *Hagar's Daughter* that is simultaneously a sentimental story of finding true love, as well as a successful re-interpretation of the *tragic mulatta* character and storyline. The novel also visualizes two imaginary futures for America that erupt from Hopkins' socio-political thinking about race and racial relations and are symbolized in the three mulatta characters of the story.

I began answering my research question about the role of the *tragic mulatta* in Hopkins' novel by tracing the trope of the *tragic mulatta* back to abolitionist white writers' fiction, examining the socio-political context in which the trope was born as well as how different

writers used it in their work. Resisting and transforming stereotypes of black women and black people in general was considered to be one of the main aims of first black writers and activists. For Hopkins, literature was a vehicle of political influence, which is also the reason why this thesis explored and examined the socio-political and literary contexts in a fairly extensive manner, in order for me to truly be able to understand and interpret her work. The way the mulatta is unavoidably white and black at the same time was a starting point for many writers, because she transgressed and contested rigid colour lines simply through her mixed-race body. The mulatta most often featured in sentimental novels, which connected the character to the ideals of True Womanhood, and the distinct stereotypes inherited from the time of slavery regarding what being a white woman (a wife and a mother) versus being a black woman (a whore and a breeder) meant in the society of the time. The various writers, beginning from Lydia Maria Child and continuing to Hopkins' peers like Frances Harper, gradually developed the mulatta from a passive victim of circumstance into a self-determined, active and able young woman, who could employ herself as a missionary for the whole black race, like Iola Leroy does in Frances Harper's novel.

The next chapter of my thesis started the analysis of *Hagar's Daughter* with the viewpoint of passing for white. The characteristic near-white skin of the mulatta often deceives even herself in the narrative, because she is usually passing-for-white unconsciously, and experiences a great shock when she hears about the black blood in her veins. This is what also happens to one of the protagonists in *Hagar's Daughter*, but Hopkins transforms the narrative so that Hagar's destiny is actually not so tragic in the end. I conclude that passing and hidden, unstable identities are a strong theme in Hopkins' novel, because passing for white is just one part of it. By emphasizing the whiteness of her mulattas, I argue that Hopkins wants not just to invert stereotypes but also to show their unreliability. It seems that she engages in a Signifyin(g) kind of play where the literal and the figurative are in constant flux. By making

her mixed-race protagonists perform a True Womanhood ideal that is thoroughly white, Hopkins shows that identity markers such as race are not stable and fixed, but they can be, and are, performed constructions.

In the second analysis chapter of my thesis, I examined the *tragic mulatta* as a character of the sentimental novel. I discussed the reasons why Hopkins might have chosen this genre at a time when white women had already abandoned it and were promoting more a modern, independent and less family-oriented ideal of womanhood. For the newly-emancipated black women, being able to run a household of one's own as well as to be able to mother one's own children were newly acquired privileges, and it was generally thought among black intellectuals that black women could influence the future of the whole race through their new, domestic roles. I analyzed *Hagar's Daughter* from the viewpoint of Nina Baym's idea of the sentimental heroine's journey to become a moral and virtuous woman, who can influence the world through her own example and the domestic influence she exerts in those around her. I also discussed the way Hopkins portrays the white and black families differently in her novel, signalling that the matriarchal black family is better equipped with principles of domestic love and caring for each other rather than the patriarchal white families whose lives are often infiltrated by economic concerns. Finally, I took a look at the significant theme of motherhood in the novel and analyzed the impact of being motherless to the characters in the story, as well as how Hopkins makes motherhood more a social than a biological issue. The prestige of motherhood and symbolic race mothering were also considered in this chapter.

In the final chapter, I attempted to bring together the ideas from the previous chapters and show how they contribute to Hopkins' vision of America's future. Through analyzing the two couples of the story, I presented two scenarios that Hopkins imagines and that symbolize race relations in America. In one of them, the tragedy of the mulatta becomes a triumph, because she is an emblem of a new, race-less society in which racial intermixture is celebrated and

people are guided by domestic principles of true love rather than racial prejudice or pursuit of wealth. In the other scenario, America fails to let go of these prejudices and like the unfortunate Cuthbert Sumner, misses its one chance for true happiness. Here, I connected the issue of racial intermixture with the phenomena of increased immigration at the turn-of-the-century, as well as the circulation of ideological and scientific thoughts like evolutionary theory. By doing this, I showed how race, a concept that is in every way only an artificial construct, has always been at the heart of American identity and history as well as social policy. Finally, I concluded that the impact of racial classification is still seen in today's America, showing the importance of studying an author like Hopkins, who knew its impact already a hundred years earlier.

In this thesis, I chose to focus on the *tragic mulatta* character in Hopkins' novel to examine the ideological tendencies and socio-political themes in her work. Another interesting viewpoint from which to analyze Hopkins would be to conduct an analysis of the novels as popular fiction and analyze all the generic conventions that she uses. I consider Hopkins as a pioneer in the field of American popular fiction as well. As has been shown by Stephen Soitos, Hopkins was one of the first African American writers to use the conventions of detective fiction to present African American social and political viewpoints (Soitos, 60). By signifying on the classical conventions through the use of especially black tropes like double-conscious detection, Hopkins transformed the genre into her own use. Situating Hopkins in the tradition of American popular culture with the conventions of not just detective fiction, but also perhaps the generic conventions of the romance/melodrama or adventure/Western would have fallen outside the scope of this thesis, but it is a very viable direction for future studies. So are the themes of Africanism and the occult or the supernatural in Hopkins' writing. These have already partly been discussed by Susan Gillman. However, Gillman concentrates more on *Of One Blood*. Analyzing the changes in Hopkins' vision

throughout her literary career might be an interesting path to take. This would enable the critic to grasp even a bigger perspective on the future that Hopkins presents for (African) Americans in *Hagar's Daughter* on the one hand and how, or whether, it connects to a future presented for them in Africa as seen in *Of One Blood*, on the other.

The contribution of my thesis to Hopkins' criticism is the way it connects issues and themes perceived by previous critics into an overall complete interpretation of Hopkins. Even though my thesis only discusses one novel, which may be considered its weakness, I believe that the relevant themes are still well represented in *Hagar's Daughter*. Thus, I feel that my primary material gave more than enough to work with, even though I could imagine that a more ambitious and extensive project would include all of the magazine novels, to arrive at even richer analysis of Hopkins' literary material. Hopkins' main themes like passing for white, transforming the stereotypes of black women, using the generic conventions of sentimental literature and glorifying black motherhood have been explored by various critics during the 1990's and 2000's. This thesis does not deny the importance of those themes, but instead tries to build upon them. The key element in my interpretation is the character of the *tragic mulatta* who becomes a symbol for the new American person in the 20th century. I see Hopkins as being very much ahead of her time, and also as somewhat a political radical for promoting an understanding of race relations that encourages and celebrates true hybridity, something that both the white and the black communities in America have somewhat aggressively resisted in the history of the country.

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LEPPÄLÄ, ELINA: Imagining Mixed-Race Futures for America: The Tragic Mulatta in Pauline Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter*

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Pro gradu – tutkielmani analysoi traagisen mulatan hahmoa Pauline Hopkinsin romaanissa *Hagar's Daughter* (1901-1902). Traaginen mulatta on hahmo, joka esiintyi amerikkalaisessa kirjallisuudessa erityisesti 1900-luvulla sekä valkoisten että mustien kirjailijoiden teoksissa. Hahmon tarina perustui alun perin valkoisten orjuutta vastustavien naiskirjailijoiden romaaneissa siihen, että valkoiselta näyttävä nainen, jolla kuitenkin virtasi mustaa verta suonissaan, joutui varoittamatta luopumaan sosiaalisesta valkoisen ylemmän keskiluokan asemastaan, kun hänen todellinen syntyperänsä tuli ilmi. Tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, miksi traagisen mulatan hahmo on niin keskeinen Hopkinsin romaanissa, mitä merkityksiä kirjailija pyrki sen avulla tuomaan esiin, sekä miten Hopkins muutti traagisen mulatan perinteistä narratiivia.

Hopkins on suomalaisesta kirjallisuudentutkimuksen näkökulmasta melko tuntematon kirjailija, ja amerikkalaisessakin tutkimuksessa feministiset ja afrikkalaisamerikkalaiset kriitikot nostivat hänet esiin vasta 1980-luvun lopulla. Hopkinsia kohtaan on esitetty kritiikkiä mm. siksi, että hänen on katsottu ihannoivan valkoisuutta ja siten aliarvioivan afrikkalaisamerikkalaista perinnettä. Viimeisimmät kriitikot ovat kuitenkin nähneet Hopkinsin radikaalina ajattelijana, jonka romaanit ravistelevat käsitystä identiteetistä (rodusta ja sukupuolesta) stabiilina ja muuttumattomana. Pyrin tutkielmassani rakentamaan kokonaisnäkemyksiä Hopkinsista tuoden esiin traagisen mulatan keskeistä roolia.

Tutkielmani syventyy aluksi siihen kontekstiin, jossa Hopkins kirjoitti romaaninsa. Tämä konteksti on 1900-luvun vaihteen ristiriitainen Amerikka, jota yhtäältä kuvaavat hyvin imperialismi, taloudellinen kasvu ja teknologian sekä tieteen kehitys, toisaalta lisääntynyt siirtolaisuus ja sen myötä pelko valkoisuuden tahraantumisesta, muukalaisviha, Jim Crow -lakien myötä vahvistunut rotuerottelu ja –syrjintä, sekä sosiaalipoliittisten liikkeiden, kuten feminismin ja afrikkalaisamerikkalaisen liikkeen synty.

Tutkielmani varsinaisissa analyysikappaleissa tarkastelen *Hagar's Daughter* –romaanin ja traagista mulattaa kolmen eri teeman kautta. Ensimmäinen niistä on ns. valkoisena esiintyminen (passing for white), toinen on traagisen mulatan yhteys domestiseen kirjallisuuteen ja ajan naiseushanteisiin, kolmas puolestaan keskittyy siihen, miten traaginen mulatta symbolisoi Hopkinsin unelmaa tulevaisuuden Amerikasta. Päädyn pohtimaan Hopkinsin käsitystä roduttomasta yhteiskunnasta, jossa mulatta ei ole enää traaginen hahmo, vaan symbolisoi visiota uudesta, tasa-arvoisesta yhteiskunnasta.

Asiasanat: Hopkins, traaginen mulatta, feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus, afrikkalaisamerikkalainen kirjallisuudentutkimus, Amerikka, amerikkalaisuus, sentimentaalinen kirjallisuus, valkoisuus, 1900-luvun vaihe.