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# Rethinking The Mulatto Character And National Identity: 1865 And Beyond In African American And Brazilian Literature

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**RETHINKING THE MULATTO CHARACTER AND NATIONAL  
IDENTITY: 1865 AND BEYOND IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND BRAZILIAN  
LITERATURE**

by

**THERESA LINDSEY**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2016

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved By:

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Advisor

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## DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Abria Marie Lindsey, and Lee Mills.

For Yetunde, my beloved daughter and greatest joy, who continues to be a force in the universe; and for my sisters, Angela, Denise, and Joyce, my living truth.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The foundation for this project was initially conceived in an independent study with one of my committee members, Dr. Renatta Wasserman. With her guidance and support I discovered a passion for nineteenth-century Brazilian literature and wanted to link the literary works of African-American authors and Brazilian authors. And while I was introduced to a variety of interesting works by Brazilian authors, due to time, space, and life, I decided to only highlight my two favorite Brazilian authors, Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (Lima Barreto) and Aluísio Tancredo Belo Gonçalves de Azevedo (Aluísio Azevedo). Adding further to my intrigue with the connection in Brazilian and African American literature, Dr. Melba Boyd, my dissertation Chair, introduced me to *Minnie's Sacrifice* and suggested I take a critical look at the recovered novel by Frances Harper. These two instances are the impetus for this final project.

The completion of this project is nothing short of a miracle. I am eternally grateful for my village of supporters and cannot list all of them here. At an early age, my father taught me the value of hard work and commitment. I am beyond grateful to have an extremely supportive and knowledgeable dissertation committee that provided me with their critical insights, expertise, guidance, and life experiences: Dr. Melba Boyd, Dr. Renatta Wasserman, Dr. Ollie Johnson, and Dr. Emanuelle Oliveri. I owe eternal thanks and gratitude to Dr. Kenneth Williams for his encouragement and support. I appreciate the support of Dr. Caroline Maun. I owe many thanks to Will, Jane, Justus, Ali, Misha, Ayat, Mehrnoosh, Nadia, my SI Leaders, and my students for all the kind

words spoken and the curiosity about my project. I extend infinite gratitude to Dr. Montilus for his probing questions and being a great mentor throughout my academic and professional career. I am blessed to have Dr. Abigail Heineger as a dear friend and a sound-board to bounce ideas and to talk about race openly without feeling the need to be censored. I sincerely appreciate Dr. Terri Davis and her remarkable intellect. The unwavering love and support of Dr. Robert Thomas carried me through, and his ability to navigate the intricate formatting required for the submission of this project. The love, prayers and support of Ms. Ruthie Flowers have been paramount for this journey and beyond. Without Estelle Jones (Jonesie), none of this would be possible because she provided reliable care and transportation for my daughter throughout the entire process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is two-fold. First, it interrogates the construction of national identities as they relate to racial identity in the mulatto character and the question of racial and social passing. Second and more specifically, I look at how the mulatto character has been positioned as a device in literature produced in 1865 -1930 in both Brazil and the United States, post-emancipation to deconstruct not only black identity but national identity as well. I conclude that the mulatto character was far more complex than earlier scholars theorized and the novels about passing are not sentimental tales where the mulatto is trapped within two conflicting identities. Arguably black, mulatto, and other identities were constructed around white identity; with slavery as the foundation which race was entrenched. The economies of both Brazil and the United States depended on racial slavery, and in which a large part of the population descends from slaves brought from Africa. Upon the abolition of slavery, both Brazil and the United States had to reestablish their national presence, and in turn had to reconstruct their national identities, post-slavery in order to negotiate racial differences. Literature is one of the sites where such identity-construction takes place. In that literature, the figure of the mulatto, a character that straddles racial divides, is used by many authors to re-imagine the nation post-abolition. Thus, the following discussion will look at such literary works as they take their task to be not simply a nation-centered process, but insofar as it happens in both North and South American, and insofar as it draws also on material rooted on the other side of the Atlantic, a pan-Atlantic and diasporic process. This work proposes a new theoretical pan-Atlantic model that builds on the work of Paul



Gilroy and Joselyn Almeida. I will explore through the writings of Brazilian novelists, Aluísio Azevedo, Lima Barreto, and American authors, Charles Chesnutt, Jesse Fauset, and Frances Harper; whose treatment of the mulatto character differs from mainstream writers like Stowe and Mark Twain. The tragic mulatto was a stock character that was especially popular in novels and drams in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Aluísio Azevedo, Lima Barreto, and American authors, Charles Chesnutt, Jesse Fauset, and Frances Harper challenge the stereotype of the tragic mulatto and use this character to test the limits of the artificial social hierarchy created with race in the Americas.

This history of the mulatto in America makes that a particularly pan-Atlantic figure in the cultural imagination in both hemispheres. The period following emancipation for the once enslaved African, particularly in the United States and Brazil, provided the landscape for the ex-slave to be ‘experimentally’ re-crafted into the national fabric of both Brazil and the U.S. through treatment in the literary landscape of both nations. Considering these circumstances, this dissertation aims to construct a Pan-Atlantic reading of that literature, by examining the treatment of mulatto characters in the works of Chesnutt, Harper, Fauset, Azevedo, and Barreto. The discursive relations established by Almeida make this comparison especially meaningful because the figure of the mulatto in diasporic literature demands the fluidity and instability that Almeida’s theoretical framework recognizes and helps conceptualize. As characterized in the literature for this dissertation, this figure of the mulatto embodies a desire to cross-cultural (and literary) boundaries. It simultaneously destabilizes and reaffirms racial boundaries. In effect, the literary and cultural construction of the mulatto between 1865

and 1929, in both the U.S. and Brazil, I argue, is part of a “pan-Atlantic” cultural exchange. It does not fit into the monolingual transatlantic consciousness produced in the NATO area and reproduced in critical dialogues since the 1980s, and invites the establishment of a new theoretical model that is more comprehensible and inclusive. Current models continue to cling to the North Atlantic Paradigm that has shackled transatlanticism for nearly half a century (emancipation in Brazil took place at the end of the century, so Diaspora writing does not begin until much later).

This project aims to extend conversations about all of these artists as individuals and examines the transnational discourse about race and national identity that evolved in American fiction during the gradual emancipation of slaves in the Americas. This project examines how these artists foster a dialogue in the Americas that connect and create a conversation between the selected authors through their treatment of a single theme—mulatto.

Gilroy, in *Black Atlantic* (1993) argues for a transnational history of the African Diaspora that is more complex than the one previously acknowledged. He constructs a paradigm for Black identity based upon an ongoing process of travel and exchange across the Atlantic. Yet, although Gilroy recognizes the narrow nationalistic perspectives that have confined trans-Atlantic theories, his own work is confined to English-speaking writers. Similarly, Joseph Roach and Paul Giles have called for a broader understanding of the Atlantic (or circum-Atlantic world). Although Giles’ call for a transnational network inspired Almeida’s *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780-1890* (2011) but their work “reproduces a monolingual transatlanticism” (Almeida 5) because they do not

adequately integrate works outside the category of literature in English. In fact, most current theoretical frameworks still “reinforce nationalist narratives that privilege English”(5). These rigid frameworks do not recognize the fluid cultural dynamics that prevailed in the Americas throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Still, Almeida’s work is based on that of Gilroy and his call for a transnational network. Almeida uses the term pan-Atlantic to explore the “South-North spatialities of ... Atlantic crossing[s]” (Almeida 2). Her term *pan-Atlantic* is particularly useful for this project in that it denotes “cultural, material, and geopolitical relations across a vertical dimensionality” (Almeida 2). Within this pan-Atlantic space, Almeida explores the discursive relations between Britain, Africa, and the Americas. The term “discursive” is borrowed from Michel Foucault and refers to a set of relationships that “enable [the object] to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference” (Foucault 45). Thus, Almeida explores “the Americas” as an “object” that appears in the discursive relations of the pan-Atlantic space. Building on Almeida’s analysis, this dissertation explores discursive relations around the figure of the mulatto in the pan-Atlantic space that connects and separates the United States and Brazil on one side, Africa and Europe on the other. Almeida justifies the “need to theorize a different approach to a North-South Atlantic rather than employing available constructs” (2). Current cultural and literary frameworks of the Atlantic world reproduce the “‘military and ideological’ alliances of countries belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization” (Almeida 3). That is, current trans-Atlantic theories privilege the alliances around the Northern Atlantic, and neglect the cultural exchanges that existed on a South-

North axis, that Almeida terms “vertical,” prior to the 1950s.

Though Almeida’s work is based on that of Gilroy and his call for a transnational network, it seeks to bridge a gap in Gilroy’s work. While Gilroy recognizes the narrow nationalist perspectives that had confined trans-Atlantic theories, his own work in *Black Atlantic* is still limited to English-speaking writers. The term “pan-Atlantic” works well with the diasporic focus of this dissertation because of its relationship to terms such as Pan-Africanism, using the prefix “pan” to denote alliances that exceeded the limits of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-states. Almeida states: “Their (the ‘pan-’ movements’) extension of nationalist paradigms and, in the case of Pan-Africanism, the theorization of diaspora as a central experience, serve as a point of departure in examining a transnational space of multiple points of contact such as the Atlantic” (6). But Almeida’s term also distinguishes itself from those used for earlier movements as she calls attention to the fact that the ocean corresponds to no nation (or to all nations). For Almeida, the term pan-Atlantic: “assumes the ocean’s destabilizing force as constitutive of the memory of crossings between North and South” (7). Her theory attempts to reconstruct that fluidity between the northern and southern hemispheres in the Americas, undermining rigid assumptions about the development of culture and national identity in different parts of the Americas.

Both Gilroy and Almeida expand discourses on the transatlantic slave trade beyond the United States and the Caribbean and into the southern hemisphere, enabling the analysis at the center of this project. However, neither explores the multifaceted connection (i.e. racial slavery, construction of national identity, post slavery) between

Brazilian and U.S. literature in their treatment of the mulatto character. This dissertation examines how the mulatto character functioned as a political instrument to challenge the definition of the emerging nation-state in the writings of Brazilian and U.S. authors between 1865 and 1930. Using the preliminary framework established by Gilroy and Almeida, the question that drives this discussion is how an American identity is constructed through the positioning of the mulatto character.

The initial construction of an American identity did not include the enslaved Africans. As recently as in his second Presidential Inaugural Address (2013), President Obama reminded his audience that "...what binds this nation together is not the *colors* of our *skin* or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional – what makes us American – is our allegiance to an idea, articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago:..."<sup>1</sup>In contrast to that, in *Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer, Letter III: What is an American?* (1782), the author identifies the quintessential American as "a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen." (68) Absent from this definition of Americans by ancestry are Native Americans and Africans and their descendants. Crevecoeur does not include the enslaved Africans or displaced Native Americans by name in his definition of an American, yet his work is considered a very early voice in the articulation of the national consciousness. He does, however, allude to the fact that the inhabitants of these newly cultivated lands are a "promiscuous

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<sup>1</sup> President Barack Obama's 2013 inaugural address. Emphasis mine.

breed.”Crevecoeur sees the farmer migrating to America to “take refuge here.” (66) According to his account, the immigration to America, the journey, forges a new individual through “...new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they become men...” (69).

On the one hand, for Crevecoeur, the process of migration is transformative, empowering, freeing; but this transformation is limited to the populations that migrated voluntarily, and his notion of what it is to be an American and President Obama’s do not express the same sentiments, exactly. On the other hand, further examination of the language used by both shows that they are not so far apart in the foundations of their understanding of what it means to be an American, since Crevecoeur does note that Americans are not characterized by a common ancestry, but by a common idea, and are using new terms and characteristics to redefine what constitutes a national identity. Crevecoeur does not seem entirely convinced that this mixture of origins is a good thing. Of the eastern provinces he says that they “must indeed be excepted as being the unmixed descendants of Englishmen” and adds: “I have heard many wish that they had been more intermixed also; for my part, I am no wisher and think it much better as it has happened.” (68) Again, we hear the echoes of a definition of the American as a mixture. Even though he does not include Native Americans and African Americans, his vision of Americans is not as a people belonging to one ethnic strain. Nevertheless, not only are the Native American and African excluded from the definition of American, they are also eliminated from the category of farmer, whom he sees as a kind of bedrock of nationality—a further exclusion. Crevecoeur’s definition, in the end, fails to make the connection directly with

the notion of the “melting pot” even though he alludes to it in his terminology. Although the process by which the farmer achieves a national claim to citizenship initially leads to the degradation of the enslaved African, ironically, it is by this process or against this process, that the enslaved African will eventually forge an identity to gain emancipation. Yet, it would not be until nearly three centuries later that the African captive would begin to even be considered as participating in this American identity that Crèvecoeur outlines.

Indeed an analysis of cultural and literary connections between the northern and southern hemispheres of America does not ignore the east-west aspects of the pan-Atlantic world. The construction of the Americas as a New World is dependent upon the identification of Europe as the Old World, and this international framework is an important part of nation-building and identity construction in the Americas. For example, Crèvecoeur extends the connotations of “the New World” to the renewal of the individuals coming to it: “Everything has tended to regenerate them: new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they become men: in Europe they were as so many, useless plants...” (69) For him, it is as if, once an individual becomes an American, he or she is renewed. Yet, while this renewal process may work for the European immigrant, it does not do so for the African American farmers, for whom the established laws, modes of living, and social systems led to degradation rather than regeneration. In fact, for the most part, the Africans’ work was not celebrated but exploited. The diligence of the plantation owner and his ability to work his slaves to produce was acknowledged, and the slave was merely seen as an instrument. It would be nearly three centuries before the African transplant was allowed to enter into the

discussion about his/her identity and about how to weave that fabric of identity into the American identity that Crevecoeur imagines.

For the imported Africans, New World slavery informed the definition and naming of the physical body in both Brazil and in the Americas. The notion of the body will be significant in the following discussion because the African was not considered fully human and was reduced, as property, to his or her physical body. Slavery not only marked African bodies, it also pre-determined their position and role in the development of the New World, by excluding the African slaves from the category of citizen in shaping a national identity globally. Throughout the course of slavery in the Americas<sup>2</sup>, numerous descendants of slaves and colonists attempted to draw attention to the brutality of slavery, to its treatment of the physical body and of the slaves as if each were simply a physical body, and to call for its end. It was only with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, on January 31, 1865, ratified by the states on December 6, 1865 – that, with the official ending of slavery in the United States, there began the process of changing this definition, with the following language:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Seemingly with the stroke of a pen slavery had ended, but the abolition of slavery presented a series of questions involving the ex-slave, and the more than three centuries of physical suppression and oppression of the descendants of Africans ended only as a

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<sup>2</sup>In this context, I am using the term Americas to describe the Northern and Southern region of the Western Atlantic world, particularly, the United States and Brazil, unless otherwise noted.



result of a long- fought and costly war. Abolition is at times treated as if it had solved the problems of slavery. And while physical slavery was legally ended, the law did not prevent new systems of brutality that ex-slaves would encounter again, supported by law. While the end of the Civil War brought closure to slavery, it exposed the differences in social, economic, and political ideologies between the northern and southern states of the United States. These differences in ideologies would resurface during the rebuilding and unification of the nation, especially as it pertained to citizenship and national identity.

Two decades after the abolition of slavery in the U.S., on May 13, 1888, the Brazilian parliament passed the *Lei Áurea*, or Golden Law, signed into law by Princess Isabel, acting for her father, Emperor Pedro II of Brazil. Prior to the signing of the Golden Law, Pedro II thought slavery evil and had taken several measures<sup>3</sup> to bring it to an end, in spite of its significance to the economy of Brazil. In 1850 the importation of slaves was banned, and from 1864-70, Brazil fought a war with Paraguay: the War of the Triple Alliance. This war was significant in that, as in the Civil War fought in the United States, blacks (individuals of African descent) were called to arms and allowed to fight in the military and participate in establishing a claim in the discussion on national identity. Although the process of doing away with forced labor in Brazil was slow, the *Lei Áurea* provided for the total abolition of slavery in the country and was the final major action

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<sup>3</sup>“...the Brazilian government regulated abolition with three legislative measures. An 1871 law declared free all children henceforth born of slave mothers (but subjected them to a form of tutelage by their mother’s owner) and instituted limited measures to ameliorate slaves’ condition. An 1885 law freed the slaves who had survived to the age of sixty-five, in effect mandating the retirement (but not support) of a lucky few. Finally, on 13 May 1888, the Brazilian government decreed the definitive, uncompensated abolition of slavery.” *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s*. 10.

taken in Pedro II's reign. Not many landowners and members of the elite shared Pedro II's sentiments about abolishing slavery, and thus his desire to end slavery was met with opposition. Similarly, to that of the U.S., the Brazilian economy relied heavily on its slave labor, though the southern part of the country was more reliant on industry and had begun earlier to replace slave labor with immigrant labor. With the royal signature of D. Pedro's daughter, the institution of slavery that had ruled and permeated the nations of the New World for nearly four centuries was no more, Brazil being the last to abolish it in the Americas. Brazil had been a major destination of the Atlantic Slave Trade, and had by then the largest slave population in the world, slave trade and slave labor having been for a long time the foundation of its economy.

Slavery in the United States was marked by numerous documented slave revolts, uprisings, and a civil war; Brazil, though it likes to think of its own as differing from that, shares a similar history.<sup>4</sup> It is a misconception in the genealogy of New World slavery that slavery was not met with resistance in Brazil. There is by now a historiography of documented Brazilian slave uprisings<sup>5</sup>, yet there is still much undocumented and suppressed history about slavery not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America. The silence on slave revolts and racial inequality may be part of a larger cultural amnesia.

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<sup>4</sup>For a detailed account of slavery in Brazil please see Thomas Ewbanks' *Life in Brazil: Or, a Land of the Cocoa and the Palm* (1856). Ewbank records his observations of daily life in the country. He makes note of the ill-treatment of slaves, and non-white people in Brazil. He also makes particular mention of the treatment for non-white Brazilians who are not enslaved.

<sup>5</sup> The "quilombo" society was forged by runaway slaves and slavery sympathizers. See Tomas Flory's article, "Fugitive Slaves and Free Society: The Case of Brazil; and R.K. Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil". Quilombos were fugitive settlements or African refugee settlements that were the representation of resistance. Zumbi was the best-known leader of such settlements, at the Quilombo dos Palmares.

Historically, in Brazil, there has been what T. L. Smith refers to as the “veritable cult of racial equality” (66) in *Brazilian People and Institutions* (1954). Smith enumerates the most significant aspects of this trend in Brazilian culture: “the cult includes... the principal intellectuals of the country, whose unwritten creed has two tenets – (1) never admit that racial discrimination exists in Brazil, and (2) any act of racial discrimination is un-Brazilian” (66). This cult was reinforced by American scholarship on Brazilian culture. Intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre, Frank Tannenbaum, Stanley Elkins, and Carl Degler all promoted the notion of racial democracy in Brazil, contrasting it with racism in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Though the battle to abolish slavery was won in both Brazil and the United States, the debate about race did not end and remained a perpetual war in literature. For the descendants of slaves, while both the United States and Brazil struggled to establish a national identity, there was the additional task of integrating into these societies, which meant that at the same time they would need to recover an identity rooted in racial categorization that had been distorted during the course of slavery. Hendrik Kraay notes in his introduction to *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s* (1998), “[e]thnic distinctions overlaid the division between slave and free...slave dealers and owners sometimes arbitrarily bestowed new ethnic labels on them.” (12) The abolition of slavery was the catalyst for the dialogue about how the Negro<sup>7</sup> would be positioned in the discussion on forging a national identity. Before, the answer to this question was simple –

<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore. “Fact and Myth: Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil”.

<sup>7</sup> This comparative analysis shifts between the terms “Negro,” “Black,” and “African American” to reflect the fluidity of race perception in its historic context. Use of the term Negro signifies the historic nineteenth-century context.

the Negro was property, and therefore, had no place in the dialogue about national identity, even though there is evidence of a silent resistance to the imposition of a label. Kraay also cites the observations of Maria Inês Côrtes de Oliveira: “Africans redefined ethnicities in Bahia and built individual and collective solidarities around broad identities such as Nagô or Gege that often had little direct relationship to African ethnic groups.” (12) Technically, one can make the argument that the slave narrative itself is an effort towards forging a new black identity. In any case, with the legal end of slavery, the once enslaved Negro was determined to be a part of the discussion of a national identity as well as a cultural identity.

Notions of race and national identity are ideas being formed in the late-nineteenth century as nations are being established, and they are formed together. In the cultural imagination (as expressed in the literature of the time), stepping outside the established boundaries of race and nation leads to destruction. In these relatively new and heterogeneous societies as they were being established in the Americas, national identity is constructed upon the idea of race as there is no established history to build national identity upon.<sup>8</sup> And logically since racial slavery proved profitable it seems only natural to forge a national identity based upon race; because after all, it was the intellect and vision of the whites that created a lucrative economy.

While a binary system of race was the determining factor for who was a slave (non-

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<sup>8</sup>The Americas are largely nations of immigrants because indigenous populations were wiped out or excluded.

white<sup>9</sup>) and who was a master (white), the end result of slavery itself set the foundation that would completely disrupt the binary concept of racial categorization. Although Degler asserts in *Neither Black Nor White* (1971) that the mulatto is “not a negro” (xii, emphasis mine) in Brazil, there is evidence in both Azevedo’s and Barreto’s work that the mulatto is reduced to the racial equivalent of a negro in certain regions of the country (and under certain circumstances). In fact, in Azevedo’s *O Mulato* (1881), the protagonist Raimundo is paralyzed by the term “mulatto”: “One word alone floated to the surface of this thoughts ‘mulatto.’ ... A parasitic idea, it was strangling all his other thoughts.” (204) The term mulatto originated in Spanish and Portuguese, derived from *mula*, meaning mule.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a term once used to describe an animal bred of two distinct species turned into one denoting an individual’s interracial heritage: one white and one black parent. The implication is that the mulatto is unnatural, a freak of nature. The figure of the mulatto appeared in American Literature during the nineteenth century, as a third, interracial group, that disrupted the initial racial dichotomy in the Americas,<sup>11</sup> a dichotomy that became increasingly important as the social construction of a binary system used to enforce the institution of slavery became, paradoxically, even more important with the abolition of slavery.

This dissertation is not about racial slavery nor the cruelty slaves suffered. However, it is necessary to query the conditions to which the descendants of African slaves were

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<sup>9</sup>In the United States and in Brazil, this would include Blacks and Native Americans. According to Wasserman, in Brazil the massive expeditions that opened up the Western territories started out as Indian-catching ventures. Later expeditions went in search of gold and precious stones.

<sup>10</sup>The *OED Online* traces the etymology of the English term ‘mulatto’ to its Iberian roots.

<sup>11</sup>In this context, the Americas is inclusive of all the territories in the New World.

subject and to glimpse the lens through which they viewed themselves, as well as how they were viewed by the colonizer and the descendants of the colonizer. It is also important to examine the environment that conditioned or fostered the identity of African-born slaves and American-born slaves. While racial categories are created for slaves in both the U.S. and Brazil, none of these categories link the African descendants to an ethnicity, which in turn would connect the descendants to a homeland. For example, slaves born in Brazil were identified as Crioulos,<sup>12</sup> African slaves were classified as black, and slaves born of mixed blood fell into multiple categories in both Brazil and the U.S. The researcher's focus is on how the narrative of the black experience (1865-1930) is woven into the national narrative and the strategies writers from both nations, the United States and Brazil use to explicate the mulatto character to acknowledge, ignore, suppress, the African element in these identities and in the shaping of the national identity. This period is particularly crucial because, at that moment, there is an increase in black readership, an emergence of black-centered journals, publishing houses, activism, and notably and concomitantly, the development of theories on the inferiority of blacks. It has been argued by some critics that post-slavery fiction positioned its argument for a white audience, but more recent scholarship like that of Claudia Tate and Frances Smith Foster questions these traditional critical assumptions.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, this researcher is interested in how select writers from the United States and Brazil use the mulatto

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<sup>12</sup>From the Portuguese language, a person of African ancestry. I have chosen this spelling and use of the term instead of the word Creole in the Spanish colonies, which meant, in colonial time, a white person born in the colonies; in places it also can have more of a negative connotation, similar to the U.S. use of the term nigger.

<sup>13</sup> Fabi.

figure to challenge and disrupt the idea of a fixed universal black identity and how the mulatto character was further racially marginalized. The mulatto figure is ideal for this argument because the mulatto character could be presented as able to camouflage his or her racial identity and shift between both racial lines, challenging the limits of racially charged law.

Laws attempted to enforce the marginal position of mulattos and prevent their upward mobility throughout American slave societies. For example, as Robin Blackburn<sup>14</sup> points out, the French *Code Noir* governing French colonies in the Americas was amended in the eighteenth century to “outlaw marriage between whites and mulatres” (291). Such a law creates a racial binary: white and non-white. It positions whiteness as both exclusive and pure. Biracial individuals cannot access their white heritage under this legal system because they are classified as non-white. Thus, the development of a binary racial system in the Americas was in some ways a deliberate strategy to generate and enforce a system of division and oppression.

The political manipulation of the mulatto character in transatlantic literature begins with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s landmark novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). As she was a staunch abolitionist, the political motivation behind Stowe’s novel was very often part of the earliest discussions of this text.<sup>15</sup> It was eventually credited with igniting the Civil War

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<sup>14</sup>*The Making of New World Slavery.*

<sup>15</sup>Discussions about the combined literary and social power of Stowe’s texts are myriad, and they begin with reviews of the novel in 1852. William Wilson reviewed the novel for Frederick Douglass’ Paper. He noted both the sentimental power and the immense popularity of the text, particularly in New York City: “‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin!*’ ‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’ is all the topic here, aside from the vulgar theme of politics.” Moreover, this review demonstrates the circulation of the text among both white and African-

in the United States.<sup>16</sup>In this novel, Stowe perpetuates the construction of a U.S. racial dichotomy that positions mulattos as a politically problematic part of a non-white racial group.

Stowe recognizes the distinctive role of mulatto slaves on the plantation. For example, Simon Legree's mulatto slave, Cassy, only works in the field as punishment; she is normally employed in Legree's house (312-22).<sup>17</sup>Moreover, Stowe recognizes the potential for this racial figure to occupy a liminal place in American society somewhere between the two essentialist racial categories she constructs. This becomes apparent her discussion of mulatto characters like George Harris. The tensions surrounding George are attributed to his conflicting racial associations. Stowe describes the rising tension between George and his master, Mr. Harris, in her second chapter; it serves as one of the

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American audiences. George Sand's review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared in one of the three French journals that were pirating and publishing the novel in serial form in Continental Europe. Her response demonstrates that Stowe's international success was just as pervasive and immediate as it was in the U.S. and states: "To review a book, the very morrow after its appearance, in the very journal where it has just been published, is doubtless contrary to usage, but in this case it is the most disinterested homage that can be rendered, since the immense success attained by this work at its publication does not need to be set forth."The power of this text was further magnified by the theatrical productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that circulated around the Atlantic world. Mary Henderson documents and analyzes these "Tom-Shows" in *Theater in America* (1986). Henderson states: "Not only did [Tom-shows] travel like wildfire throughout the United States (with, of course, the exception of the South), it jumped the ocean and became, if imaginable even more popular in England and Europe.... *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played on and was revived in the postwar years to become a national institution and a theatrical industry called Tomming." In 1900 there were five hundred troupes performing it on the road..." (490-91).

<sup>16</sup>Whether or not Stowe's novel actually did influence that conflict, it is credited with doing that cultural work. See Will Kaufman's *The Civil War in American Culture* (2006) (18).

<sup>17</sup>Cassy's sexual slavery on Legree's plantation links Stowe's portrayal of mulatto women with Sansay's description of the sexual exploitation mulatto women



many triggers for the plot in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

[Mr. Harris] was waited upon over the factory, shown the machinery by George, who, in high spirits, talked so fluently, held himself so erect, looked so handsome and manly, that his master began to feel an uneasy consciousness of inferiority. What business had his slave to be marching around the country, inventing machines, and holding up his head among gentlemen? He'd soon put a stop to it. He'd take him back, and put him to hoeing and digging, and "see if he'd step about so smart." Accordingly, the manufacturer and all hands concerned were astounded when he suddenly demanded George's wages, and announced his intention of taking him home. (11)

As a mulatto, George is a threat to the white men around him, beginning with his master.<sup>18</sup> Stowe further argues that this conflict is exacerbated by the "high, indomitable spirit" (98) that George had inherited from his white father, along with "fine European features" (98). Thus, Stowe's racial essentialism exaggerates the social tension of the mulatto in her text. It is also noteworthy that, with all her abolitionists' sympathies, Stowe still declares that George's virtues are inherited from his white father.

These social and racial tensions inevitably become political when George vehemently rejects his connection with the United States and the authority of the federal government (97-105). George's condemnation of the U.S. government underlines the social and political threat of the mulatto character in Stowe's nationalistic racial binary. George's "fine European features" (98) allow him to visually pass as a Creole or a Spanish man and his education allow him to compete in the capitalistic marketplace with white men. Although only George's morally reprehensible master is actively threatened by George's

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<sup>18</sup>It is significant that George Harris' master, Mr. Harris, is also his biological father (Stowe11).

mobility and power, Stowe still feels the need to eliminate this character from the national body she constructs in her novel. By arguing that George does not want to be a U.S. citizen, Stowe neutralizes the threat he poses to her racially segregated representation of national identity.

George's mobility is echoed by all the mulatto characters in this novel, including his wife Eliza and her mother Cassy. These characters travel through the United States, but they also travel within white society by their ability to pass. However, this mulatto's physical mobility and transitory relationship to the nation is problematized by the transitory relationship of the mulatto character with Christian values, which Stowe presents as essential to national identity. George's decision to run away from the Harris plantation is coupled with a disavowal of Christian beliefs that frightens his wife (13-17). Similarly, Cassy is depicted as a repentant fallen woman who engages in a myriad of questionable activities, even as she escapes from slavery. She is not the good, domestic mother that Stowe argues is essential for the development of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

Even more disruptive than the mulatto's challenge to Christian virtues is the mulatto's challenge of white manifest destiny in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). George reminds the American citizen of the transgressive nature of the presence of whites in America: "I wonder, Mr. Wilson, if the Indian should come and take you a prisoner away from your wife and children, and want to keep you all your life hoeing corn for them, if you think it your duty to abide in the condition in which you were called" (Stowe 99). George's

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<sup>19</sup>In "Charity Begins at Home: Stowe's Antislavery Novels and the Forms of Benevolent Citizenship" (2000), Susan Ryan identifies the nationalistic use of motherhood in Stowe's sentimental novel.

argument leaves his audience speechless; Stowe states “nothing could be said” (99). The articulate and well-educated George will continue to be a verbal reminder of national transgression. Thus, Stowe casts the mulatto as a disruptive mouthpiece against oppression, but the finality and inescapability of George’s argument make it impossible for Stowe to imagine this character as a citizen. The mulatto undermines her construction of a national identity that is only, and purely white.

In the conclusion of the novel, Stowe again confronts the political threat of the mulatto character to her construction of a fixed, static national identity. She deliberately works to “darken” her mulatto characters like George, who articulates his desire to be “two shades darker, rather than one lighter” (374). George later states: “I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them” (393). In the context of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, George recognizes that he cannot have a national identity without passing as a white man. This notion, which Stowe places in George’s mouth, continues to haunt mulatto characters in fiction after emancipation throughout the Americas, including Brazil. Eventually, George’s entire family emigrates to Africa, cementing the mulattos’ associations with blackness and reinforcing a racial dichotomy essential to Stowe’s construction of the U.S. She denies the escaped mulatto slave a place in her imaginary antebellum society. There is no community within the U.S. where mulattos can settle; they can only “pass” through while they are in transit from slavery to freedom elsewhere.

Stowe’s inability to imagine a place within the U.S. for mulattos demonstrates the anxiety this character raised for a society determined to enforce a racial dichotomy.

Despite her unequivocal “darkening” of her mulatto characters, Stowe is still uncomfortable with leaving them within U.S. borders. It is as if the undefined racial identity of these characters and their potential to break the racial binary, is a perpetual threat to the nation, even in fiction. Stowe’s was the second most widely published book in America and her representation of the mulatto and the mulatto’s political significance was extremely influential for transatlantic writers.<sup>20</sup> According to David Reynolds’ *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America* (2011), Stowe’s novel was translated into French, German, Russian, and Spanish within a few years of its publication and it circulated around the Atlantic. Not only did this novel circulate, it was credited with inspiring revolutions abroad. It was banned in Russia until 1857 because of its “incendiary content” (Reynolds 173), but that did not prevent influential Russian thinkers from reading French and German versions of the text and using it to further the movement to free Russian serfs (Reynolds 173-75).<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Reynolds establishes the importance of this text for abolitionists in both North and South America; Reynolds states:

There’s evidence that a Portuguese translation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published in Paris and distributed by booksellers in Brazil fanned anti-slavery feelings. “Down in Brazil,” as one commentator notes, “The emancipation of slaves was mainly due to an editor who kept his paper

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<sup>20</sup>Influential women writers in Great Britain, including Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell, were discussing the literary importance of Stowe’s novel in 1853, just one year after its publication. *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857) (436-44). Both women recognize Stowe’s work as paramount work of sentimental fiction and they position their own texts in relationship with hers.

<sup>21</sup>By 1905, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was translated into Chinese and used as propaganda for the Communist Party there (Reynolds 176). This demonstrates that the potential influence of this text was not limited to the Western world.

red hot with abolition arguments. He did not have much success until he printed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.” (176)

Reynolds concludes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) functioned as a “basic text of liberation for the Western hemisphere” (176). Thus, it may be argued that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* defined the political potential of the mulatto character for American authors, both in the United States and Brazil. This dissertation explores the ways that later nineteenth and early-twentieth-century writers Aluísio Azevedo, Lima Barreto, Charles Chesnutt, Jesse Fauset, and Frances Harper, (directly or indirectly) respond to Stowe and renegotiate the mulatto as a political figure in their novels.

Chesnutt, Harper, Fauset, Azevedo, and Barreto are all able to demonstrate how the lines of racial identity are blurred and how the mulatto is able to cross the borders of race. Their novels capitalize on the way that this racially mobile character may also be disruptive. In *Mulatto America* (2003), Stephan Talty notes: “[f]or whites, then, black men and women in chains were as much a part of the southern landscape as magnolia trees or livestock. But lighter-skinned captives stood out; they could disrupt slave auctions and unnerve an entire town” (6-7). The implication here is that the mulatto slave resembled white slave holders and that resemblance disrupted the system of slavery, which depended upon a belief in a racial dichotomy. Mulatto slaves visually undermine that dichotomy with their mixed racial heritage and thus undermine social confidence in the racial binary justifying American slavery. The discomfort of plantation owner Mr. Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) hints at this political and social tension; George is a threat because his appearance undermines the racial dichotomy that enables Harris's position as a slaveholder.

Just as the question of the mulatto complicates the question of race in the U.S. mainly because the American model of racialization is based on a bi-racial formulation (i.e., either you are white or black); the mulatto also complicates the question in Brazil largely because Brazilians can claim their heritage to three races – African, Indian, and European. Essentially, the Brazilian model is predicated on a multi-racial formulation of *preto*, *pardo*, and *branco*.<sup>22</sup> This formulation is seemingly flexible and acknowledges the various racial mixtures, hence creating the illusion that there is an absence of discrimination. Notably, in spite of the spectrum of racial mixtures, the black category is always on the bottom. Although it appears that Brazilian society historically tolerated race mixing and did not attempt to regulate racial relations with the implementation of laws and codes, the literature of Brazilian authors such as Lima Barreto and others, does not fully support this claim. In spite of Brazil’s racialized history and its prolongation of slavery, it has been positioned in the historical and global literary imagination as being racially harmonious. For decades, the claim of racial harmony and lack of racism in Brazil was accepted. In the United States, Brazil was positioned as a racial utopia – a place where racism did not exist. George Andrews summarizes this American paradox in *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo Brazil: 1888-1988*(1991):

“...despite the fact that it enslaved more Africans than any other American nation,...between 1900 and 1950 Brazil successfully cultivated an image of itself as the world’s first ‘racial democracy, a land in which blacks and whites

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<sup>22</sup>“The question of accurate color terminology is especially difficult when discussing Brazil. The terms used in the Brazilian census-*preto*, *pardo*, and *branco*-translate as “black,” “brown,” and “white.”...The increasingly common term used in Brazil (in the mass media, for example) for nonwhite is Negro, but the English equivalent is archaic for an English-speaking audience.” (3 Skidmore).

lived together in harmony under conditions of almost complete equality” (3).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Brazil was able to market tolerance as equality.

In part, the confusion and complications of the polemic surrounding race in Brazil comes from how the Brazilian racial model is formulated. While the U.S. model of racialization is based on a bi-racial formulation (i.e., either you are white or black); the Brazilian model is predicated on a multi-racial formulation of black, brown, white, and shades in-between. This expansive racial paradigm in Brazil becomes particularly attractive when compared with the exclusive binary construction in the U.S. Brazilian racial identity appears to be flexible and this flexibility promotes an illusion of racial tolerance. And for various reasons, this notion of racial democracy went long unchallenged, except by a handful of sociologists and late nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers such as Lima Barreto in his posthumous novel *Clara dos Anjos* (1923-24), Aluísio Azevedo in *O Mulato* (1881), and later, in Carolina Maria De Jesus’s, *Quarto de despejo*; meaning “storeroom”, published in the U.S. as *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*<sup>24</sup> (1960). In *Central at the Margin: Five Brazilian Women Writers* (2007), Renatta Wasserman notes that Jesus’s text is “widely seen ... as a

<sup>23</sup>George Reid Andrews, in *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo Brazil: 1888-1988*, “...the concept of racial democracy asserts that Brazil is a land entirely free of legal and institutional impediments to racial equality, and largely (particularly in comparison to countries like the United States) free of informal racial prejudice and discrimination as well”. (12, 3)

<sup>24</sup>Literal translation, Dr. Wasserman. In the diary, Carolina de Jesus, who lived in abject poverty in the slums of Brazil, called favelas, with her three children, chronicles her life and offers her view on the economic, social, racial and political issues in Brazil.

documentary that makes it possible for sympathetic readers to learn from someone who has been there, that tells what it is like to be poor and belong to the class of those who are not served by the structures governing and protecting the propertied classes” (140). Additionally, Jesus lends voice to the voiceless and disrupts the utopian image of race in Brazil.

Barreto, Azevedo, and Jesus all use the figure of the mulatto to examine questions of racial and national identity in Brazil. Barreto’s and Azevedo’s novels examine the presence of racism within Brazil’s more complex racial hierarchy. Their novels also suggest that the differences between Brazilian and U.S. racial constructions are not as significant as previously assumed. The letters and diaries of these authors further indicate that their fictional treatment of race was based on lived experiences. For example, Jesus’s diary entries demonstrate that she struggled to integrate national claims of racial inclusivity and racial harmony with her own observations of inequality. On May 13, 1958, Jesus records:

At dawn it was raining. Today is a nice day for me, it’s the anniversary of the Abolition. The day we celebrate the freeing of the slaves. In the jails the Negroes were the scapegoats. But now the whites are more educated and don’t treat us any more with contempt. May God enlighten the whites so that the Negroes may have a happier life. (23)

The fictional and auto-biographical writings of these three well-known Brazilian authors contribute to the discourse of a transnational deconstruction of the notion of racial equality. The system purports to be more inclusive through comparison with the racial dichotomy of the United States, but these claims seem to be in tension with both lived and imagined experiences.



African-descended writers in both Brazil and the U.S. raised questions about the type of legacies and philosophical impressions that slavery inscribed on the descendants of the once- enslaved Africans and their perceptions of black identity, particularly as represented in the mixed –race individual. While each of the writers examined here tackles the question of identity differently, all would agree that this question was especially complicated for the mulatto, subject to the limitations and constraints of a racial system that privileges white exclusivity despite appearances of tolerance.

Barreto particularly attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the ideology of racial harmony in Brazil through his fictions and through his newspaper, *Crônicas* (essays on current affairs) Barreto’s work exposes the myth of racial democracy in Brazil and evokes a more general admission and acknowledgement of racial hierarchy in the country. In Barreto’s observations and lived experiences, racial harmony existed only in political rhetoric and works of fiction, and not in what he saw around him. Barreto excavates the embedded racial inequalities in Brazil, stemming from slavery and exposes the hypocrisy of a system that is predicated on maintaining class, gender, and racial distinctions while denying them. Barreto’s fictions foster a dialogue and continue to challenge the picturesque model of race with which Brazil has mesmerized outsiders. His fictions provide a looking glass that allows for close examination of race in Brazil, further highlighting Brazil’s racial fears. As a mulatto, Barreto provides a lens from one who has experienced the treatment extended to mulattos in Brazil.

The fear of racial passing haunts both Brazilian and U.S. imagination landscapes, despite differences in how either culture constructs race and national identity. In the

United States, citizenship was synonymous with whiteness and that whiteness was legislated. By contrast, Brazil considered legitimate whiteness exclusive to Europe/Portugal, allowing for racial lines to be blurred as long as family histories were suppressed. Brazilian citizenship was extended to individuals who would fall outside the exclusive white citizenship definition of the U.S. However, the construction of racial identity was intertwined with the construction of national identity in both new nations. Brazil was willing to embrace the mulatto as a citizen, but this racial tolerance was part of a larger social attempt to whiten society. By including the mulatto in the national body, Brazilians hoped to nurture its whiter members and create a “more-white” nation. Thus, both Brazilian culture and Brazilian national identity were still predicated on a belief in white superiority and the importance of whiteness to national identity.<sup>25</sup>The United States, on the other hand, wanted to “undo” racial mixing by clearly defining racial lines and making legal distinctions between who was white and who was not. Thus, both nations confront the problem of reconstructing society after slavery through their treatment of mulattos, who straddle racial divides. The way in which they approach the question suggests that the black body would forever bear a visible mark of past slavery in the sometimes more, sometimes less pigmentation coming from the original slave body. In “Afro-Brazilian Literature: Spaces Conquered, Spaces In-Between” (2007) Heloisa Gomes paraphrases Muniz Sodré, an Afro-Brazilian thinker, who argues that “slaves and blacks were traditionally perceived, in practice, as being one and the same

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<sup>25</sup>Thomas E. Skidmore notes in “Fact and Myth: Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil”, “...despite the lack of a clear ‘color line’, Brazilian society was based on an explicit belief in white superiority, although not white supremacy.” (5) Whitening ideology appears to be the foundation for nation building and national identity.

thing”(153).By contrast, the privileges of citizenship are associated with the superiority of whiteness.

These similarities between the U.S. and Brazilian racial and national construction are obscured in legal discourses because Brazilian attitudes seem to promote racial tolerance. The Brazilian racial system has worked well in its ability to mask racism within the society. This comparative analysis cannot ignore the whispers of Brazilian writers and how the similar treatment of mulatto characters in the works of Afro-descendant writers in the U.S. points to similar tensions inherent in American constructions of national identity after slavery. This tension operates across gender lines since the exploitation of the slave’s labor is compounded for African females in the New World. As property, a woman’s body, as well as her labor, were appropriated by her master, and it was the offspring of these often forced encounters that resulted in the introduction of that new racial category, the mulatto. However, this exploitative act of generation was not figured as renewal in the American cultural imagination. Instead, renewal remained the exclusive property of the white American, strengthened in the New World at the *expense* of the African slave and her non-white offspring.

The chapters that follow examine the function of the mulatto character in literature and how that figure not only disrupted the taxonomy and hierarchy of race, in which blacks were placed at the bottom; they also examine how the universal definition of black identity took on the character of a myth. In the first chapter, the cultural context that produced the racial category of mulatto, in both Brazil and the U.S. will be interrogated. In the following chapter, a close look at Frances Harper’s, *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1994) and

Azevedo's *O Mulato* (1881) will expose the literary and cultural landscape in which to explore negotiating an identity from the absence of memory. Chapter three looks at the function of mobility in Chesnutt's *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos* (1923-24) and it explores the ways that the ease of relocating connects or disconnects history and identity. It analyzes the significance of mobility in establishing an identity foundation. Chapter four raises the question of the dialogue established between blacks in the U.S. and in Brazil by looking at Jesse Fauset's *Plum Bum* (1928). Mobility seems to have the potential to allow the individual to escape assigned racial identities (and pass), but it is never ultimately successful. Fauset's novel provides the bridge for this discussion in that she unites two mulatto characters – one from the U.S. and one from Brazil. Based on their fiction, it seems that Chesnutt, Barreto, Harper and Azevedo cannot imagine a place where the mulatto can survive and thrive in the Americas (transatlantic world). The mulatto breaks the racial limits and boundaries that are (imagined as) essential to national identity in American societies. However, these authors still see the mixed-race individual as an integral part of life in the Americas. In order to restore the balance, death must occur. Chesnutt, Barreto, and Harper all keep **SOME** interracial individuals alive (and even thriving) in the Americas. Fauset on the other hand returns to Stowe's original concept, and uproots the mulatto to Europe (a place often constructed as the epitome of civilization in these texts). The final chapter further examines the notion of singular black identity while considering misplaced identities, memory and identity, and transnational passing. This comparative analysis is particularly interested in how the construction of the mulatto in Brazilian fiction enables a more

nuanced understanding of race and nation in the United States.

## CHAPTER 1 “MISPLACED IDENTITIES IN FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER’S MINNIE’S SACRIFICE AND ALUÍSIO AZEVEDO 'S *O MULATO*”

The use of the mulatto characters as an instrument of propaganda is not a new concept or form of exploration in nineteenth-century literature. The mulatto, as a character, has been recovered, revised, and revisited seemingly since its first inclusion into the fabric of New World creations – literary creations in the case of this study. In her essay, “Further Liftings of the Veil: Gender, Class, and Labor in Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*” (1994), Carla L. Peterson points out that

“traditional interpretations have argued that as a ‘nearly white’ character the tragic mulatta figure functioned as a socially acceptable literary device that enabled antebellum white women to speak openly and sympathetically about the black female and perhaps even identify with her.” (99)

In this project, I examine the cultural leveling<sup>26</sup> of the mulatto character in the Americas from 1869 to 1930 primarily using the literary works of Harper, Azevedo, Chesnut, Barreto and Fauset. By cultural leveling, I am referring to the way in which the mulatto character is stabilized in the literary imagination so that he or she is no longer labeled tragic or relegated to a meaningless death and exile. Instead, the mulatto is positioned as a revolutionary--a hero of sorts--whose literary characterization is used to explore the concept of race and national identity across the Americas. Thus, through the examination of various authors, literary texts, and commentaries; this section introduces a framework centered on the acts of intimacy and citizenship whereby the mulatto’s formation of

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<sup>26</sup>By cultural leveling, I am referring to the way in which the mulatto character is seen or has been presented in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature. The mulatto is active in redefining his position in the national and cultural landscape.

national identity in the two new American nations is realized via interpersonal relationships as well as membership in society.

### ***The Shaping of the Literary Mulatto/a***

Harriet Beecher Stowe's antebellum novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which achieved unprecedented international acclaim, sets the stage for this study. In it, though mulatto characters crack the exclusive racial categories in Stowe's (imagined) nation, they must be excised and exported to restore national balance at the conclusion of the novel. Despite Stowe's objections to slavery and even racism, she cannot imagine a stable nation where citizenship and privilege are not reinforced with exclusive clear and visible racial categories.

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a lens through which one can examine how the mulatto was used to win sympathy for the fight against slavery. Recall the dramatic escape of Eliza as she challenges the sturdiness of the ice pond in her desperation to protect her son and save him from the slave catchers. Readers were certain to identify with the desperation and fears of the angelic and almost white Eliza. This is one of many lenses through which the mulatto was presented in literature. Just as the white woman was consistently portrayed as virtuous and pure, there were formulaic characteristics that constantly shaped the mulatto character, (i.e., young, beautiful, delicate, afraid, tormented, violated, etc.). However, the narrative of the mulatta neither belonged to the mulatto nor to the African American community because it was told and retold primarily by white men and women. In the introduction to *The Curse of Caste, Or, The Slave*

*Bride: A Rediscovered African American Novel* (2006), William L. Andrews and Mitch

Kachun note:

“What is remarkable though not always acknowledged in discussions of the mulatto in nineteenth-century American fiction is the fact that the majority of beautiful mulattas in American novels before 1865, most of which were authored by whites, do not end up fulfilled.” (xlili)

In *The Transatlantic Stowe* (2009) Denise Kohn documents the translation and circulation of this novel around the world - including a Portuguese translation sold in Brazil - and traces one of the (unintentional) consequences of Stowe’s international popularity, the exportation of U.S. racial exclusivity around the globe. African American activist, writer, poet, lecturer, and educator Frances Watkins Harper, however, whose work did not achieve the popularity of Stowe’s, adds depth to the kinds of characters shaped and introduced by Stowe, in her serialized novel, *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869). Harper was not only aware of Stowe’s work; she explicitly used it as a catalyst for her own. Her corpus of poetry includes three poems to Stowe’s characters: Uncle Tom, Eliza, and Little Eva.

*Minnie’s Sacrifice* is particularly important in the discussion of the mulatto character and the discussion of national identity in the nineteenth century in the New World. It was serialized<sup>27</sup> at a time when not many novels by African American women were being published<sup>28</sup>. This in many regards establishes Harper as a trail blazer in a controversial

<sup>27</sup> *Minnie’s Sacrifice* was serialized from - March 20, 1869, to September 25, 1869, according to Melba Joyce Boyd in *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics In The Life Of Frances E.W. Harper, 1825-1911*.

<sup>28</sup> “As African American literature, the importance of these texts is even more striking, for there are only four or five novels known to have been published before *Minnie’s*



and ongoing discussion about race, gender, and national identity. Melba Boyd notes that “[w]hat distinguishes Harper’s poetic voice is her capacity to demonstrate how racism, sexism, and classism are intricately intertwined in American culture.” (14) Harper inserts the concerns of not only the newly freed slave community, but the ex-slave woman in *Minnie’s Sacrifice*, further demonstrating the relation amongst racism, sexism, and classism.

The recently recovered works by Francis Smith Foster, situate *Minnie’s Sacrifice* at the cusp of the discourse about early transnational identities and in many ways positions her in dialog with Stowe and Azevedo. In *O Mulato* (1881) Azevedo articulates his political views about the church, racism, and the residents of Maranhão and their nostalgia and resistance to change. He particularly notes their desires to cling to their Portuguese identity rather than claiming a Brazilian one. His portrait of (provincial), Maranhão society angered the local community and was met with hostility and harsh criticism. However, Azevedo’s *O Mulato* found praise and a positive critical reception in Rio de Janeiro, then capital and cultural center of the country. *O Mulato* was positioned as a “...pioneering book--one of the first and certainly the most famous of Brazil’s early naturalist novels...” (9, Azevedo).

This particular text is critical in establishing a transnational dialog about shaping a black regional identity within the parameters of a national identity. In many ways, Harper and Azevedo are in conversation with each other about national identity and the mulatto.

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*Sacrifice* (1869) and most bibliographies list fewer than two dozen novels written by African Americans before the twentieth century.”(xii), according to Frances Smith Foster in "Minnie's Sacrifice, Sowing And Reaping, Trial And Triumph: Three Rediscovered Novels By Frances W. Harper."

For instance, both nations initially embraced or gave the mulatto special privileges. However, with the collapse or seeming collapse of slavery in both, the mulatto was quickly relegated to the category of ‘other’ (i.e., black). Harper and Azevedo contend with the issues surrounding race and utilize the mulatto character to complicate the discussion of race recovery at the close of slavery. Azevedo’s text, in particular, changes the focus on the discussion of race, cultural, regional, and national identity. It uses the trope of the mulatto as a literary device, much like what is done in the works of prominent American writers in the early and even late nineteenth century, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, William Wells Brown, Mark Twain, and Frank J. Webb.

Although Azevedo is a white middle-class Brazilian, he is able to capture the discrimination and hostility that mulattos encountered when attempting to claim their place in Brazilian society. However, Azevedo’s protagonist’s response to discovering he is a mulatto speaks deeply to the internal racial bigotry not only in Maranhão but Brazil as well. The way in which his main character conceptualizes the origin of a mulatto allows the reader to strip back the layers of the term to the undertone of rape and subjugation. Azevedo also exposes the role of the church in and beyond slavery. For Azevedo, the cunning and manipulative behavior of Canon Diogo is representative of the church. Yet, Diogo is credited with being all that is “right” in the church, by the residents of Maranhão. Still, Azevedo’s and Harper’s treatment of the discovery of family is quite different. Minnie frets over the thought of being ‘colored,’ and states: “...I do think it is a dreadful thing to be a colored person in this country; how I should suffer if I

knew that I was hated and despised for what I couldn't help. Oh, it must be dreadful to be colored.”(46) However, once she is confronted with the reality of her race, with the introduction of her mother, she does not unravel like Azevedo's Raimundo.

“One word alone floated to the surface of his thoughts: ‘mulatto’... That simple word revealed all he had desired to know until then, and at the same time denied him everything; that cursed word swept away his doubts and cleared up his past, but also robbed him of any hope for happiness...”Your mother, remember it well, was a slave! And so were you!”(204, 205)

Minnie, on the other hand, aligns herself for the most part with the term “colored”. She does not feel it will diminish her accomplishments, or thwart her future desires. Raimundo, however, equates being a mulatto to being a slave. And for him, being a mulatto (colored) is likened to a death sentence, which is corroborated by the narrative at the end. In this moment in the narrative, Azevedo makes one of his strongest criticisms of the institution, and its residual impact. It seems that the label ‘mulatto’ is just as detrimental as the label ‘slave’. Mulatto is not equated with a race, but with an institution. What is telling for both narratives is that the moment when it seemed that the mulatto would merge with someone outside of his or her race, the urgency to reveal their heritage becomes imperative. In *Minnie's Sacrifice*(1869), had Ellen not approached Minnie in the streets, Minnie's adoptive parents were going to reveal her race to her because they did not want her to start a relationship with Louis (unaware of his heritage) and marry. A crucial point that both Harper and Azevedo magnify in their narrative is that the actual threat or possibility of sex for the mulatto character with a white character immediately causes a crisis within the fictional nation. The sexual union of the mulatto

character with a white character definitely poses a threat to white privilege. Harper and Azevedo show that while the mulatto might be positioned as able to penetrate borders, any attempt to access exclusive white privilege, for example, marriage to whites, sex, or citizenship results in destruction. Not only is race a dichotomy, but the foundation of the nation is built upon the principle of privilege and its absence – or denial of access to it. Harper expands the discourse to include gender. Not only is Minnie excluded from white privilege because she is black, she is further excluded because of her gender.

Harper and Azevedo borrow elements from biblical stories to dislodge and trace identity and gender roles in the Americas. Both *Minnie's Sacrifice* and *O Mulato* (1881) incorporate the early story of Moses from the Old Testament. Harper and Azevedo construct a narrative in which the protagonist is unaware of his racial origin. This technique detaches the construct of race from the dominant model of race projected by pre-conceived ideas about it. Both authors utilize the trope of the mulatto to further disrupt racial categories and the dominant model.

*Minnie's Sacrifice* was published in 1869, but set on the eve of the Civil War a decade earlier. And *O Mulato* was written in 1881, seven years before Brazilian emancipation. Thus, both address the status of afro-descendants before the laws permitting their enslavement were changed. *Minnie's Sacrifice* was serialized in 17 installments in the *Christian Reader*<sup>29</sup>, whose readership was predominately black. While for the most parts, *Minnie's Sacrifice* mimics elements from the sentimental novel form, Harper

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<sup>29</sup>The *Christian Recorder* was published weekly by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Mitch Kachun notes: “The *Christian Recorder* remained the most consistently published and widely distributed African American newspaper of the nineteenth century.”

expands this format to include her political agenda. Borrowing from Stowe's mulatto character base, Harper veils her narrative in a well-known biblical tale and her characters relate to the story of Moses. Minnie and Louis are situated within a white environment, and their identities have been reconfigured, much like Moses's. Upon learning of their true racial identities, they become advocates/revolutionaries for their race, and they attempt to empower their racial community by sharing the formula for inclusion (i.e., voting, education, establishing a political voice). Initially, this is how Harper chooses to introduce the deception of race. However, she abandons this storyline to craft a different story about the formation of race.

*Minnie's Sacrifice* raises the question of how racial, cultural, and national identities are forged within a society that has been shaped by racial slavery. Harper helps set the tone for nineteenth-century women's literature where the stereotype of the mulatto and the black woman is challenged. Harper includes gender and race as part of the political discourse. The recent recovery and examination of her other novels help to substantiate this claim. Elizabeth Petrino notes: "Harper and her contemporaries were writing, they recognized the incompatibility of slavery's racist female stereotypes with the rise of black middle-class women and men, and they often contrasted the conventions of white middle-class gentility with the facts of African-American lives to question the basis of their sexual and socio-economic oppression." (138) *Minnie's Sacrifice* was one of a small sprinkling of texts published by African American authors during this time. Foster writes, "...Harper can now claim her place as a prolific and innovative prose pioneer as well. Coming as they do between Harper's short story, "The Two Offers" (1859), and

her novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892), these three texts offer an unprecedented opportunity to witness the development of a nineteenth-century African American writer's concerns and style over a forty-year period.”<sup>30</sup>

The idea that the stain of slavery sullied the nation was not new. In many respect, this was the platform from which Stowe argued. Indeed, as slavery came to be looked upon as inhumane, its legacy cast an even deeper shame upon the nations where it existed. The mulatto is the constant reminder that racial, sexual, class, and ethical boundaries were crossed, which in some ways raises the question of how much the institution of slavery damaged and cost the nation. Thus, positioning the mulatto in the literary imagination as a threat was seen as necessary in order to push the argument against slavery forward. In the anti-slavery texts, the two arguments were inseparable. The argument against slavery was based in part on the claim that slavery was bad for the nation. And in order to make a strong nation, slavery needed to be abolished. However, it was clear on both sides of the argument that in order for countries to build a strong national identity, the racial dichotomy had to be maintained. It was necessary to distinguish a citizen from a non-citizen, and the best way to do this was to clearly define what constituted a particular national identity. Harper and Azevedo reconfigure the threat of the mulatto; however, Stowe empowers her mulatto women through silence, while Harper empowers her women with a voice and an agenda.

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<sup>30</sup>Harper, Frances E.W. *Three Rediscovered Novels by Frances E.W. Harper*. Frances Smith Foster, ed.

The mulatto not only defied, but challenged the rules of whiteness and claimed the privileges that whiteness allowed. As the mulatto population grew and had to be constantly re-categorized, for instance, as Octoroon or Quadroon, these needs forced scientific discussions about what was “true” whiteness. In “White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction”, Nancy Bentley writes, “while U.S. law denied their existence in legal terms Mulattoes were identical with blacks white anxiety came from knowing what law and the social order would not recognize: that blood relations bound Africans and Europeans and subverted the idea of a natural boundary between black and white” (Davidson ).

Further complicating the definition of national identity was the belief that Blacks were soulless and thus non-human. In *The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*, Eve Allegra Raimon notes:

“..., the implications of racial intermixture became inseparable at midcentury from debates over the future of slavery...the 1850 compromise and its component Fugitive Slave Act, suggests the degree to which confusion over the delineation and disposition of a new mixed-race American subject embodied national anxieties and sectional tensions about the fundamental racial composition of the burgeoning republic” (91).

Clearly, there were major concerns about the future of how the nation would define itself with the increasing blurred lines of racial identity.

Harper addresses many of these issues, which Stowe tends to ignore. For example, Harper calls for communal support beyond the family for blacks. She also compresses the mulatto into the black race. She is clear about where the mulatto should belong and understands the position of the mulatto not only in the fictional landscape but the actual

landscape as well. She is not seduced by the lure of possibilities for the mulatto. Furthermore, she does not feel the need to hide the stain of the nation. In fact, she highlights it in an attempt to rebuild the nation. Harper stresses the importance of history in order to build and sustain an acceptable cultural and racial identity as shown in a conversation between Josiah and Thomas:

“The Jews have a common ancestry and grand traditions, that have left alive their pride of race...But I do not think the negro can trace with certainty his origin back to any of the older civilizations, and here for more than two hundred years his history has been a record of blood and tears, or ignorance, degradation, and slavery.”(30)

This same type of argument is absorbed by Raimundo in *O Mulato* (1881) when he is confronted with his authentic identity. Once Raimundo discovers that his mother, Domingas, was a slave, he reduces his legacy to her contributions. He discounts all of his successes and allows for his existence to be defined by his mother's. His mother being a slave overshadows everything else (i.e., the fact that his father was an adulterer). In his own eyes, he is not more than a slave. Bluntly stated by Maria Barbara, Manuel's mother-in-law, screeches, he is "[a]nigger!...a mulatto full of boastful airs...Nowadays they're all like that! A gang of thugs!...nigger". (117)

There tends to be a tendency to collapse the history of blacks into slavery in both novels. In spite of the things Raimundo had accomplished, the residents of São Luiz could not get past the fact that he was born a slave, not even Raimundo himself. This is a strong contrast to the mulatto characters in Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869). Harper stated on many occasions that the purpose of writing is to instruct, to inform, and to



teach. At the close of her novel on the last page, Harper issues a call to action to black people. She calls for:

”... the indulgence of my readers...The greatest want of our people, if I understand our wants right, is not simply wealth, nor genius, nor mere intelligence, but live men, and earnest, lovely women, whose lives shall represent not a ‘stagnant mass, but a living force.’... I would say to some who are about to graduate this year, do not feel that your education is finished, when the diploma of your institution is in your hands. Look upon the knowledge you have gained only as a stepping stone to a future, which you are determined shall grandly contrast with the past...”(90)

Harper insists that writers stop portraying the mulatto as abandoning the race, and that he should be seen as helping to uplift the race from within, by connecting the histories of the mulatto to the culture of black people. The commitment to remove the mulatto from his hybrid state and fold him into the national definition of blackness transcends the boundaries of the United States and is critiqued in Brazil by Aluísio Azevedo’s *O Mulato* (1881).

While both Harper’s and Azevedo’s mulatto protagonists have similar fates, the authors’ treatment of the discovery of racial identity is handled quite differently. The difference of the treatments suggests that Harper and Azevedo are configuring cultural, regional, and national identity differently. For example, when Raimundo discovers that he is the son of a demented slave woman, he comes completely unraveled. Raimundo’s identity is revealed to him by Manuel as he explains to Raimundo how he came to deny him his daughter’s hand in marriage:

“I denied you my daughter’s hand because you are...you are the son of a slave woman...You’re a colored

man!...You can't imagine how deep the prejudice against mulattoes is around here!"(203,204)

Raimundo replies, – “I was born a slave?”(204). This is perhaps is the most critical argument in the novel. Raimundo is unable to imagine himself beyond his slave birth even though he had enjoyed all the privileges of wealth and social prominence- for instance, by studying abroad, and using his degree to work successfully in the Brazilian capital – as a white person. He attributes his entire cultural inheritance to slavery; and therefore, feels he is denied the privilege of citizenship, which he equates with whiteness, which includes marrying Ana Rosa. This particular privilege is reserved for “authentic” citizens. This same revelation appears in Harper’s *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869) when it appears to Minnie’s foster parents that she is becoming infatuated with Louis. This potentially budding romance fuels the urgency to make Minnie aware of her racial identity. Anytime there seems to be a threat of a sexual connection between the races, there arises the threat of a severe penalty for such an offense such as torture or even death.

Unlike Harper who does not focus on the absolute violence of slavery when womanhood is threatened, Azevedo does not shy away from relating the violence. Azevedo directs the gaze of the reader to the cruelty and brutality of slavery throughout the text. Domingas is a representative object of all the harsh realities of slavery. She is driven to madness as a result of the abuse of Dona Quitéria Inocência de Freitas Santiago, described as a “...rich Brazilian widow who was very religious and scrupulous in regard to blood lines and social status. To her, a slave was not a person and not being white in itself constituted a crime”. (62) Or, as Azevedo sums it up: “She was a beast!”(62) Once

Dona Quitéria noticed that Jose (her husband), treated Domingas's son in a special way, she vowed to unleash her rage and vengeance. She shares her intentions with Jose:

“You nigger lover!...you think I'd permit you to bring up in my home those children you begot from the Negresses! I'm the one who'll do the getting rid of – that black boy!  
(62)

Soon after this proclamation, Dona Quitéria tortures Domingas:

“Stretched out on the ground with her feet in the stocks, head shaved and hands tied behind her lay Domingas, completely naked and with her genital parts burned by a hot iron...Domingas half dead, lay groaning and writhing in pain on the ground. The incoherence in her speech and her uncoordinated gestures already denoted symptoms of insanity.” (63)

After this incident, Jose takes Raimundo to live with his brother, Manuel, assuming that Domingas has lost all sense of reality, and she is not aware of her son's new home. She probably thinks that Raimundo is dead. There is no indication in the text that Jose has communicated his intentions to Domingas at all. Also, absent from the narrative is any indication other than Raimundo that that Jose and Domingas are intimate with one another. The only sign of affection for Jose is shown in the narrative when he is killed. Azevedo writes: “It was Domingas who discovered him, and, in a frenzy, threw herself on the body, kissing his hands and cheeks. “Master! My beloved! My love!” she cried out, wailing convulsively.” (73, 74) Troubling, this is the only time that Domingas is granted an audible voice in the text. She is allowed to profess her genuine love for her “Master!” as she initially identifies her beloved Jose. The underlying context here suggests that the romantic love between a so-called Negress and a Portuguese man cannot

and should not be made public. However, the reality of Raimundo (the mulatto) serves as evidence that a relationship did exist.

Azevedo's Maranhão operates like the south evoked in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Harper's fictional Louisiana (south) in *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869). All of these fictional spaces resist the change in the nation and cling to nostalgically imagined slavetocracy communities before the discussion of national identity is initiated. The brutal killings of Minnie and Raimundo call attention to a resistance to the idea of a unified national identity. Harper and Azevedo acknowledge that the focus for the emancipated needs to be on claiming and building a cultural identity separate from slavery.

Stowe is content with a nation that denies blacks democratic access; and yet she presents the mulatto character in opposition to her position. Again, the mulatto served as the constant reminder that there was no real difference between the supposed white and black races. Race was merely created as a platform to justify the existence of slavery, and would later be used to deny citizenship. George and Eliza Harris are the central mulatto couple in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>31</sup> Once slavery threatens to divide the family, George and Eliza flee to the North with their son, Harry. Since the Fugitive Slave Act makes the return to slavery an ever-present threat, the family finally escapes to Canada. Their escape involves assumptions about both gender and race. Eliza, the fairer-skinned individual, cuts off her hair and passes for a man traveling with his son while George acts as their slave. The fact that Harry looks white solidifies Eliza's position as a white

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<sup>31</sup>All other interracial characters are related back to this couple in the conclusion of the novel.

woman, allowing her to occupy a new space within the narrative (and antebellum society). Stowe uses this moment in the text to confuse expectations about both gender and racial identity. While Eliza's passing is important for the plot of Stowe's novel, it also threatens the ideological construction of race and citizenship. Eliza's temporary assumption of white privilege demonstrates the permeability and vulnerability of the racial hierarchy in the United States. In the conclusion of the novel, Eliza and George reject their white heritage and "return" to Africa as missionaries. Their ultimate exodus from the United States suggests that both abolitionists (represented by Stowe herself) and pro-slavery factions were invested in maintaining a racial dichotomy in the United States, which would distinguish a citizen from a non-citizen.

***Harper and Azevedo – The 'Other' Mulatto Reconfiguring the Mulatto Question***

Unfortunately, Harper has been largely excluded from the ongoing conversations about race and gender, and how these identities relate to the concept of national identity, even though from her poetry and what was once thought to be her only novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892), she explores these issues. Looking at the body of her work, prior to the recovery of *Minnie's Sacrifice*, one can argue that one reason why Harper was excluded is evidence of the systematic exclusion of African American voices from the discussion of identity. According to Boyd, a Harper biographer, "The recent recovery of these works by Harper alters foregone conclusions about the development of the Afroamerican novel and Harper's role in that history" (Boyd 2). Further, this also establishes Harper as one

of the pioneers in the development of the novel in America, along with Julia C. Collins<sup>32</sup>. Harper biographer, Smith Foster notes: “‘The Two Offers’ and ‘The Triumph of Freedom – A Dream’ (1860) mark the beginnings of Harper’s published fiction. They are stylistically similar to the popular romantic fiction by such writers as Charlotte Brontë and Edgar Allan Poe and...Harriet Beecher Stowe whose fiction was featured in abolitionist periodicals.” (Smith Foster 105)

For the most part, Harper has been undervalued in the establishment of the canon of African American literature, and thus in many ways the significance of her contribution lacks the critical analysis necessary to situate Harper in the canon properly. At the time of the publication of *Minnie’s Sacrifice*, very few novels had been written at all by African American women. In fact, Collins’s, *Curse of the Caste* (1865) and Harper’s *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869) were both serialized in the *Christian Recorder*, four years apart. Both novels seem to have a political focus, but Harper’s strayed from the rhetoric of the sentimental novel. Jane Tompkins argues that the sentimental novel is “complex and significant in ways other than those that characterize the established masterpieces” and that it is “a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time.” (Tompkins 126) Boyd contends that the discovery of *Minnie’s Sacrifice* is further evidence that Harper’s writing was directed towards “a larger black reading audience” (2), the *Christian Recorder* being a publication that catered to a predominately African American readership. However, as Michael

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<sup>32</sup>After a recent recovery by William L. Andrews and Mitch Katchun, Julia C. Collins is now credited with being the first African American novelist with her *Curse of the Caste*. At this point in African American literature, given the archival work that is being conducted, I am cautious to identify any one author as the ‘first’.

Stancliff notes, “Twentieth-century editors and scholars, who subsequently took as their mission the formation of an African-American literary canon, tended to judge Harper by her poetry alone, applying criteria that largely overlooked or rejected the nation-building function of her rhetorical pedagogy.”<sup>33</sup> The continued minimizing of Harper’s efforts can be attributed to race and gender,<sup>34</sup> but it is also the case that her visionary and literary strategies were not recognized as “high” literature. Instead, she was judged to be a ‘hard-working’ activist who had made some contributions. Foster has suggested that critics should consider how or establish the protocol for examining ‘popular’ work. Stowe herself would benefit as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) in many ways was dismissed because of its popularity. Archival research by select scholars such as Frances Smith Foster, Henry Louis Gates, William L. Andrews and Mitch Kachun reveal that during this point in history, the African American woman’s literary tradition was blossoming. Mitch Kachun posits: “...Hannah Craft’s *The Bondswoman’s Narrative* , a previously unpublished 1850’s manuscript putatively written by a female former slave, frames a wealth of scholarship that attests to the importance of the ongoing reconstruction of understanding early African American women and their writing.” (649 Kachun)

Harper experienced the liminal nature of racial identity in nineteenth-century America. She was born and raised in a free community in Baltimore, Maryland, where she

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<sup>33</sup>Stancliff, Michael. *Frances Ellen Watkins Harper [Electronic Resource] : African American Reform Rhetoric And The Rise Of A Modern Nation State*. n.p.: Hoboken : Taylor & Francis, 2010.

<sup>34</sup>I would also argue that with the introduction of the concept of the ‘New Negro’, the uses of the mulatto trope had become misappropriated. The focus on revising the ‘tragic mulatto’ clouded the function of the mulatto as a literary device to critique national, regional, and cultural identity.

witnessed the brutality of slavery as a free black woman. These early experiences help inform Harper's position on slavery and cement her racial identity. It was clear to Harper that slavery was an unjust system and needed to be abolished. In many regards, she considered this her sole purpose and she dedicated her life to lend voice against the unjust nature of slavery. Although Harper was a formidable lecturer, she did note that her identity and gender were under constant scrutiny and that audiences were never quite sure how to label or describe her. She writes in a letter to her close friend, William Still: "I don't know but that you would laugh if you were to hear some of the remarks which my lecture calls forth: 'She is a man,' again 'She is not colored, she is painted.' Both white and colored come out to hear me, and I have very fine meetings; ...Still I am standing with my race on the threshold of a new era..." (127) It appears that much like that of her mulatto characters, Harper's mere presence complicated the question not only of racial but of gender identity as well, making her life an example of the embodiment of the complications of identity and gender.

Harper was born to free parents in 1824 and orphaned at the age of three. She never knew her father and was not aware of his identity. Some scholars speculate that he was white, but his information about him has yet to be recovered. Complicating the situation, even more, neither of her parents' names are listed on Harper's birth certificate. As a small child she was sent to live with an unnamed aunt until she reached school age when she was sent to live with her uncle, Reverend William Watkins Sr. and his wife in a free black community in Baltimore. Because the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 altered conditions for free Blacks in the state of Maryland, the Watkins family fled Baltimore.



Her uncle was very active in the abolitionist movement and committed to anti-slavery causes, cultivating a sense of activism in Harper. She was well prepared for the direction in which her life would lead her. Initially, she tried teaching because she believed, as she once stated in a speech, that one should “educate to elevate”. However, in her role as teacher, Harper did not feel she was doing enough. In a letter to a friend, she writes:

What would you do if you were in my place? Would you give up and go back and work at your trade (dress-making)? There are no people that need all the benefits resulting from a well-directed education more than we do. The condition of our people, the wants of our children, the welfare of our race demand the aid of every helping hand, the God-speed of every Christian heart. It is a work of time, a labor of patience, to become an effective school teacher; it should be a work of love in which they who engage should not abate heart or hope until it is done...I have written a lecture on education, and I am also writing a small book.<sup>35</sup>

The flood of stories of individuals being forced back into slavery after securing “freedom” really affected Harper and re-affirmed her commitment to the anti-slavery cause. In 1854 when the fugitive slave law prevented her from returning to her home state of Maryland as a free woman, she writes “Bury Me in a Free Land”, one of her most anthologized poems:

MAKE me a grave where'er you will,  
In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill;  
...But not in a land where men are slaves.  
I could not rest if around my grave  
I heard the steps of a trembling slave;  
...All that my yearning spirit craves,  
Is bury me not in a land of slaves.

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<sup>35</sup>Still, 757.

Harper mourns slavery and how it disrupts families and contaminates the nation; as long as it exists, there is no peace, even in the afterlife. This is particularly revolutionary given that Harper was a devout Christian. In this moment, she is challenging the tendentious interpretation of the Bible and preaching to the slaves that suffering was the ticket for a life of ease in heaven. This poem in many ways can serve as Harper's mantra, as she dedicated her life to ensure that slavery would be abolished.

Her *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854) was extremely popular and had twenty editions. However, it was thought that *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) was her only novel, and despite her impressive body of writing, her work is often disregarded in American Literature courses, probably in part because it has been difficult and sometimes impossible for scholars to even locate her work in its entirety. In fact, *Minnie's Sacrifice* would be absent from the literary canon had it not been for Foster<sup>36</sup>, who recovering it and another two of Harper's serially-published novels. Still, some installments are missing from the novel that was published in 1869.

According to Foster, a huge problem in trying to chronicle Harper's work stems in part from the fact that she left few personal papers, and there is no evidence of a journal or even a diary. In addition, her books were published over a half-century with various publishing houses and "[a]ccording to Maxwell Whiteman, the firm, Ferguson Brothers, with which Harper probably had the most extensive dealings was sold in the early 1950s

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<sup>36</sup>Boyd, Melba Joyce. "Time Warp: A Historical Perspective On Two Novels By Frances E. W. Harper." *The Black Scholar* 3/4 (1993): 2. *JSTOR Arts & Sciences XI*. Pg 2.

and destroyed its Harper files then”(Smith Foster. 35). In his eulogy of Harper, W.E.B

DuBois states:

“She was associated with all the great leaders of the abolition cause and has lectured to hundreds of audiences throughout the land. It is, however, for her attempts to forward literature among colored people that Frances Harper deserves most to be remembered. She was not a great singer, but she had some sense of song; she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere. She took her writing soberly and earnestly; she gave her life to it, and it gave her fair support. She was a worthy member of that dynasty, beginning with dark Phyllis in 1773 and coming on down past David Walker, Wells Brown, Nell, Whitman and Williams, down to Dunbar, Chesnutt and Braithwaite of our day. To the young colored American Frances Harper leaves a lesson.”<sup>37</sup>

That DuBois offered Harper’s eulogy demonstrates both her influence and connection (in the African-American community), as well as her subsequent marginalization. While DuBois seems to be gracious in his comments about Harper, his faint praise fails to note Harper’s role in initiating varied dialogues on national, regional and cultural identity. He seems to miss the significance of Harper’s voice in this discourse.

Similarly to *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869), Aluizio Azevedo’s *O Mulato* (1881), critiques the racism of the late nineteenth century society of the Brazilian city of São Luiz in the Northern state of Maranhão, through the story of a young man, Raimundo, who is unaware that he is the son of Domingas, a slave.

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<sup>37</sup>The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races, Vol. 1, No. 6: Easter Number. Du Bois, W. E. Burghardt (editor) New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1911-04.

Aluísio Tancredo Gonçalves de Azevedo was born in São Luís, Maranhão in 1857 to unmarried Portuguese parents. He wrote *O Mulato* in 1881, 7 years prior to the full abolition of slavery in Brazil<sup>38</sup>. It was his second novel, written while he was living in Maranhão; the primary setting of his narrative. Prior to becoming a writer he had studied painting in Rio de Janeiro. Artur, his older brother, a playwright, poet, and journalist, inspired him to become a writer. Because of his politics and his anti-clericalism, he was not granted financial support from the Maranhão Provincial Assembly to further his development as a painter. This denial of support did not deter Azevedo from his criticism of the church, and it seemed to fuel his desire to further expose the hypocrisy of the clergy.

Azevedo carefully sets the stage for his narrative before he introduces the reader to the focus of the novel. He paints a detailed portrait of São Luis and its residents before exposing the immediate fears of Maranhão. At the very center of Azevedo's exposé is the deceitful priest, Canon Diego. This launches Azevedo's critique of the clergy and Maranhão's Portuguese identity. Chapter Two opens with Canon Diego anxious to speak with Manuel (Raimundo's uncle) in private. After going through the formalities, Canon Diego asks: "Do you know who is about to arrive here?...Raimundo!"(45) Initially, Manuel seems to have suffered a short spell of amnesia, because he has to be reminded by the Canon that Raimundo is his nephew, the one with undesirable origins.

### **Reconfiguring the Mulatto Question**

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<sup>38</sup>The abolition of slavery was a gradual process in Brazil. There were 3 acts that preceded the full abolition of slavery.

Frances W. Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869) and also the Brazilian author, Aluzio Azevedo's *O Mulato* (1881) complicate the discussion surrounding the mulatto character because they borrow strategies from the slave narrative, sentimental novel, and in Azevedo's case, literary naturalism. This strategic approach allows for the mulatto character to be three-dimensional. These two texts complement each other in that both protagonists initially have no hand in establishing or crafting their own racial identity. Harper and Azevedo are able to show the gray, or beige, if you will, about the preferential treatment of the mulatto character as presented in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both Harper's and Azevedo's mulatto protagonists struggle with the question: "who or what am I? And where do I belong in this new landscape?" In effect, their mulatto characters address the question that the New World is facing after the abolition of slavery. Harper's and Azevedo's texts give voice to the 'other' and raise questions about national and racial identity.

Furthermore, Harper and Azevedo are able to show that fears about the mulatto are similar in the U.S. and in Brazil. White privilege is to be protected. The death of the mulatto protagonist in their novels is structurally kin to the construction of the fictional mulatto in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* (1852). Although both Harper and Azevedo critique the racist treatment of the mulatto in American societies, like Stowe, neither author imagined an American nation where interracial characters would be allowed to prosper: for they threaten a construction of white privilege and citizenship based on racial exclusion. Stowe's racial essentialism is especially significant when considered together with Harper's and Azevedo's fictions, both written about settings that either

resembled (or attempted to emulate) Stowe's antebellum world. Like Stowe, Azevedo criticizes racism in his society. However, Azevedo also confirms, whether or not he has read her novel, Stowe's concept of citizenship as racially exclusive, an ideal that is in direct opposition to Brazilian claims of "racial democracy". Both texts critique and reproduce the failure of the cultural imagination to conceptualize a diverse citizenship.

*Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869) relates the stories of displaced identities of Minnie Le Grange, and Louis Le Croix. Both Minnie's and Louis's identities are reconfigured by well-meaning whites to assign them into white society. *Minnie's Sacrifice* opens with Miriam, a slave, mourning the death of her daughter, "Agnes, fair, young and beautiful,...she had fallen victim to the wiles and power of her master;"(3) Agnes's shame was evident in "...a beautiful babe, whose golden hair, bright blue eyes and fair complexion showed no trace or the outcast blood in his veins." (4) When Camilla, the mistress of the house, discovers the baby, Agnes professes defiantly, "Well, I think it is a shame for him to be a slave, "when he is just as white as anybody." (4) At this point, Camilla determines that she will raise the baby as white and "...never let him know that he is colored." (5) Camilla's desires outweigh her respect for the law and it is in obedience to her own desires that she declares Agnes's baby white.

As later seen, Minnie experiences a transformation similar to Louis's racial and class metamorphosis. However, Minnie's transformation comes about also from desire, greed, and the wish for control, and further cements the question of racial identity. We are introduced to Minnie as Mrs. Le Grange: the mistress of Le Grange's plantation declares: "This child shan't stay here; and if she does, she shall never again be taken for

mine...When Mrs. Le Fevre,...alighted from the carriage, she noticed the child, and calling the attention of the whole party to her, said, ‘Oh, how beautiful she is! The very image of her father.’”(16,17) In contrast to Camilla, who dresses Louis in the finest clothing and washes his hair to give him a more ‘polished’ and acceptable appearance (white), Mrs. Le Grange attempts to veil Minnie’s beauty and magnify her blackness by stripping her of her clothing and “...cutting off the curls from the head...” “You see what I have begun to do. I am going to have all this curling business broken up, and I am going to have her dressed in domestic, like the other little niggers. I’ll let Ellen know that I am mistress here,…” (15, 16) It is at this junction in the narrative that Le Grange assumes the role of Jochebed, the mother of Moses, and crafts a plan to send Minnie to the North under the veil of whiteness. While Harper makes use of the thematic of the Moses narrative, she reverses gender roles in the telling of the narrative. For example, in the case of Camilla and Louis, she empowers Camilla to change/alter Louis’s identity, and in the case of Minnie, she empowers Mr. Le Grange. Harper also underlines that even though Camilla and St. Pierre are undoubtedly interested in protecting Louis and Minnie, neither is concerned about preserving their familial connections. Personal needs and finances dictate how they will develop their plan of race manipulation. Camilla would not allow Miriam to leave with Louis because she could not bear to manage without her, and St. Pierre was in need of the monies, Ellen, Minnie’s mother generated. In other words, financial stability outweighed the desire to do what was right in terms of family loyalty.

What should not be ignored is that both Le Croix and Le Grange are hybrids of French and Spanish origin; they are white, but, by implication, not trustworthy in the matter of honoring the principles of race as dictated in the American south. Harper writes about Le Croix: “And being a member of two nations having a Latin basis, he did not feel the same pride of race and contempt and compulsion for weaker races which characterizes the proud and imperious Anglo-Saxon.”(11) Harper’s comment here reaches beyond the borders of the Americas and generalizes the conversation about racial and national identity. She seems to be making a distinction between the French and Spanish on one hand and the Anglo-Saxons on the other. Perhaps for Harper, if there are ‘shades’ of black, then there must be ‘shades’ of white, and these gradations also pertain to the discussion of race. At the same time, Harper is also guilty of racializing when she attributes the behavior of her characters to their “racial” make-up; that is, Harper herself is not immune to the more general cultural attitude toward “race” and can herself be blind to its slipperiness.

Nevertheless, throughout the narrative, the impulse is towards pushing an agenda of unity, as Harper seems to be urging people of African descent to band together and establish a united foundation. Most importantly, she is providing instructions in how to achieve citizenship. It is significant then, that the discussion with Thomas Josiah centers on the lack of land ownership and familial legacy after the end of slavery. Harper touches on the question that had been raised by many advocates for slavery: “What significant history can the Negro claim and why the Negro unlike other oppressed groups,



i.e. the Jews, has not been able to obtain stability.” This is a critical point and unlike Stowe, Harper continues to pose this question to the reader.

Harper uses a number of scenarios to position this query concerning the historical significance and stability of the Negro. For example, Harper complicates her mulatto characters as well as the other black characters by making them bold and courageous without impending doom as the catalyst. This boldness adds dimension to Harper’s characters and fills them with a spirit that is lacking in the development of Stowe’s characters, perhaps, with the exception of George. For instance, again, I recall the scene in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) when Eliza braves the frozen pond to escape and guarantee the safety of her son. Without the fear of losing her child, there is no evidence that Eliza would ever have attempted or even considered running away. Richard Yarborough writes, in “Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel,” (1986) that “...it is only this motherly devotion that leads to her frenzied, desperate flight from slavery, for her sheltered life and religious upbringing have taught her to accept her lot. Stowe characterizes Eliza as a ‘petted’ and ‘indulged favorite’. Similarly, George’s desire to run away is prompted by his mistreatment by his master, Mr. Harris. Stowe writes:

“He was waited upon over the factory, shown the machinery by George, who, in high spirits, talked so fluently, held himself so erect, looked so handsome and manly, that his master began to feel an uneasy consciousness of inferiority. What business has his slave to be marching around the country, inventing machines, and holding his head among gentlemen?”(11)

It is true that Stowe's black characters (and this includes the mulattoes) are moved to act for self-serving and/or personal reasons; however, she also allows her mulattos to use their ability to pass as a weapon of deception in order to escape the suppression of slavery.

The plot involving the mulatto George Harris could easily have functioned as the central theme of Stowe's anti-slavery novel. However, this strategy would have established George as a hero and his narrative would not only be a central argument for the abolition of slavery but also suggest that abolition might bring equity. George cannot be seen as a hero, and especially not an American hero because to cast him in such a light would suggest including blacks in the shaping of the national identity. Also, casting George in such an important role would muffle the impact of Stowe's argument against slavery, in that it might be seen as confirming and perhaps encouraging support for the status of the mulatto. Instead, Stowe's treatment of George in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* echoes the sentiment of the nation at the time—remove the slave (in this case, especially the mulatto/a) from the landscape of the Americas, to ensure a “pure” national identity. Thus Stowe, structures the movement of all mulattos and mulattas by displacing them through the narrative, thus disarming them as threats. In other words, it would be more effective to argue against slavery while also arguing for the relocation and exile of mulattos - that further evidence of the ills of slavery.

In the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, there was cultural work done in Brazil and the United States to shape a national identity, a part of which would be a definitive determination to clearly distinguish whites from non-whites. If

slavery ceases to exist, then what will become of the ex-slave? This question, central to the contemporary discussion was dramatized, romanticized, and mythologized in the landscape of the literary imagination in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as well as, much earlier in Cuban writer, Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). Almost necessarily, however, many of these narratives catered to stereotypes and the projected fears that some white people had of black people and tended to end with "solutions" like blacks' self-imposed exile, their death, or deportation back to Africa. The common thread of fear for the nation in these texts always seemed to lead to the mulatto. Stowe's narrative suggests that the common black slave, (i.e., Tom) can easily be contained. However, mulattos pose the greatest threat because of their ability to blend into the landscape of whiteness and because of their intellectual abilities - again, catering to the belief that the mulatto although black, was far superior to his or her black counterpart, due to the admixture of white "blood", which in turn, also showed the mulatto as living proof that despite all the propaganda, whites can be attracted to blacks, a notion that appears in the stories about seductive black women and, even worse, attractive black men, the latter implying that the virgin white woman can be the seductress – or equally disturbing, can be attracted to him<sup>39</sup>. This fear is magnified in *O Mulato* and in the case of Raimundo and Ana Rosa, realized, when she convinces Raimundo that the way for them to be married is by having sex before marriage. It is particularly represented in the town gossip, as one of the inhabitant's comments:

"Talent! I tell you, that mixed race is the craftiest in all Brazil! Pity the whites if these types pilfer a little book

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<sup>39</sup>This was a new role for the white woman.

learning and go out and raise hell! That's when everything will come crashing down! Thank goodness they're not given much of a chance!" (221)

And yet, Harper's mulatto characters choose not to pass once they learn of their authentic heritage and commit to racial uplift and unification. Seeming to follow suit, once Azevedo's Raimundo is made aware of his racial identity, he seems to accept his role in society, and yet when he is confronted by Ana Rosa, he violates the primary racial code by consummating his denied love for her – a white woman. Much as in Harper's handling of her mulatto characters, Azevedo chooses to endow Raimundo with a boldness that allows him to challenge the restrictions placed on him by local racist ideologies.

Ellen boldly establishes herself as Minnie's birth mother when she identifies her in town, in *Minnie's Sacrifice*. "As soon as her eyes fell on Minnie, she raised her hands in sudden wonder, and clasping her in her arms, exclaimed: 'Heaven is merciful! I have found you, at last, my dear, darling, long-lost child. Minnie, is this you, and have I found you at last?'"(50) Even when questioned by Anna about why she chose to claim Minnie in the presence of witnesses, Ellen replies: "I'spect it would, 'Mam...but when I saw her...I forgot everything but that this was my long-lost child. I am sorry if I did any harm, but I was so glad I could not help it. My heart was so hungry for my child."<sup>40</sup> (52) Another example of the boldness of Harper's characters can be seen when Minnie decides that she will move to the South to support Louis in his voter registration efforts.

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<sup>40</sup>In this response, Harper aligns Ellen with Camilla and Mrs. Le Grange in terms of 'desire'.

Unlike Stowe, who seems to contain her mulattos within designated boundaries, Harper gives her mulattos the ability to move without restrictions.

Harper insists on racial pride. Prior to Louis's discovery that he was black, he was eager to align himself with the confederate soldiers, but once he was made aware of his ethnic make-up, he immediately vowed to support the cause of the North, further rejecting his white identity. Here, Harper plants seeds about national identity and the fundamental principles involved in cultural values. At this juncture in the novel, the Civil War is in its early stages. Ultimately the war challenges the financial infrastructure upon which the Americas were founded: slavery. Again, absent from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) is the aftermath of the war and the rupture and division that installed itself in the newly constructed American ideology. Harper is particularly crafty in showing that while the North and South were no longer on the battlefield, the question of what to do with the emancipated Negro remained unresolved and critical. It is raised in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Stowe's solution is either to 'beat them to death', as in the case of Tom; or send them into exile as in the case of George. Unfortunately, while Harper offers different approaches to and treatments of the Negro character, her endings bow to the patriarchal structures in place, which ultimately result in the killing of the Negro as an answer to the problem.

It seems that even for Harper and Azevedo, it is difficult to imagine a place where the Negro can survive, particularly if the Negro looks for what is labeled and defended as 'white privilege'. It seems then that Harper must allow the killing of Minnie as a necessary evil. This plot turn stands out starkly if one considers that its tragic ending

removes her novel from the tradition of the sentimental novel into which it had seemed to fit so easily. For the American Negro, there can never be a fairytale ending until this concept of race is overcome.

In short, the reality of the mulatto complicated the nation's efforts to fashion a language in which to establish democratic structures while restricting a national identity to whiteness. The emergence of the mulatto made it difficult to form a coherent national democratic identity, while showing its deference to notions of race and trying to limit racial categories to a stark choice of white or black to which its history gave the lie. The mulatto did not fit perfectly into either category and thus presented a problem for a racially pure national identity. As it grappled with the problem, the only way fiction found to deal with the problem of the mulatto was to relocate, confine, destroy, or eliminate him.

**CHAPTER 2 AMERICAN DREAMS AND REALITIES IN LIMA BARRETO'S  
*CLARA DOS ANJOS* AND CHARLES CHESNUTT'S *HOUSE BEHIND THE  
CEDARS***

Charles Chesnutt and Lima Barreto are two of the most important writers of the early twentieth century. Both construct narratives that explore race and more specifically, the mulatto woman and her awareness or lack of awareness of her place and romantic options in society. As realists, and as mulattoes themselves, both Chesnutt and Barreto mirror what they identify as the barriers to race. They are also keenly aware of the presence of discrimination and write from their experiences of prejudice and social injustice. Using controlled literary strategies, Chesnutt and Barreto are able to centralize the reader's focus and show the limited options presented to the mulatto: to disappear or die. While this approach is not exclusive to Chesnutt and Barreto, it is their ability to masterfully manage or infiltrate other factors into the plot that optimizes their narrative techniques without the feel of didacticism.

My very first introduction to the writings of the Brazilian author, Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (1881-1922) was in an independent study survey course on Brazilian literature. I was both excited and curious about his life and experience as a mulatto writer in Brazil. More specifically, I was interested in his commitment to present an authentic narrative about race relations in Brazil opposing a common view that Brazil was a "racial democracy," and how his narrative positioning the mulatto in literature resembled U.S. writers representations, in particular, that of Charles Chesnutt. Like Chesnutt, Barreto was clear that being identified as a mulatto was the same as being identified as black. (Nunes 2) Most of what I read about Barreto was more of a

commentary on his personal life than a scholarly critique of his work. As a realist, his work was not evaluated in separate terms from his life. Barreto was collapsed into a crazy, angry alcoholic, who remained in the shadows of the more popular and highly respected writer Machado de Assis. Barreto did not appreciate, in what he saw as his unwillingness to ‘keep it real’ about race (3).

Sadly, Barreto’s life reads more like that of a fictional tragic mulatto, with Barreto creating his own unhappy ending. He was born to poor mulatto parents. His mother died when he was a very young boy, and eventually, his father suffered a mental break-down and Barreto, whose education was paid for by his godfather, was forced to quit school at one of the most prestigious schools in Brazil to care for his father. Even at school, Barreto felt more or less an interloper and was isolated in this predominantly white environment. As a dark mulatto, Barreto witnessed first-hand the slow effect of abolition and the resistance to share social status and resources with former slaves. As a young man, he was drawn to activism and seemed inspired by the call to action for racial, social, and class equality.

Early on Barreto used his writings to convey his frustrations about the injustices toward non-white people in Brazil and as an outlet to express his frustrations with the government and the racial prejudice he experienced in Brazil. In her essay, “A Brazilian Pan-Africanist at the Turn of the Century: Lima Barreto and the Denunciation of Racial Prejudice in Brazil and the United States”, Emanuelle Oliveira-Monte notes that:

[h]is practice as an independent journalist granted Lima Barreto a unique position, to be in immediate and close contact with current national and international events of the time and, at the same time, to emerge as the spokesman of



the marginalized.” (Aidoo 86)

In both his journalism and his fiction, Barreto wrote to counter the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, long before it was a topic of discussion within the nation, and he systematically exposes the hypocrisy of the discourse of racial harmony in Brazil, especially in his fiction, through his mulatto characters. For Lima Barreto, based on his lived experiences and observations, racial harmony exists only in political rhetoric and certain works of fiction, not in real life. Barreto offered a narrative laced with examples of racism, exploitation, and prejudice against the Brazilian context, that targeted the mulatto and any Brazilian generally excluded (eliminated from)<sup>41</sup> in the discussion of race in Brazil. Barreto’s position on race in Brazil is summarized by Lamonte Aidoo:

“As a self-identified person of color, Barreto has much to tell us regarding historical narratives of miscegenation that pervade numerous forms of post-colonial identities across Latin America, in addition to formulating a poignant retort to the writing of Portuguese imperial history in the vein of Freyre<sup>42</sup>.” (4).

Because he tended to address social issues in his writings and portray the simple ‘invisible’ folk of Brazil in his narratives, Barreto received harsh criticisms. He was committed to showing the visible in the invisible. (Nunes) Barreto intentionally wrote simply in order to reach the people he sympathized with, and as a way of rejecting the

<sup>41</sup>The violent death of Marramaque is an indication of what happens to people (meaning the ‘other’) who attempt to interfere with the so-called order of things in Brazilian society, even in fiction.

<sup>42</sup>Gilberto Freyre, a Brazilian socio-anthropologist. See *Casa Grande e Senzala* [*The Master and Slaves*] (1933).

purist literary establishment tradition. (Nunes) But identifying his work as simplistic was a way to dismiss him and exclude him from conversations about race. Excluding him would discredit his work and prevent him from being taken seriously. In other words, his work would die and disappear. As noted in *Lima Barreto: New Critical Perspectives* (2014), “Barreto’s posthumous existence was very much limited to a footnote until the late 1940s when previously unpublished short stories began to emerge in print” (3), thus, minimizing Barreto for a time, did cause his work to be overlooked and discarded.

Barreto does paint a picturesque view of a simple life in Brazil, however, there is nothing simplistic about his work. It is an attempt to show and give voice to the voiceless. His commentary on the lives of non-white people in Brazil was his way of documenting injustices. Seeing how the focus of criticism was misdirected towards Barreto, and that folding the analysis of his work into the commentary on his personal life did injustice to him, and further inspired me to examine his writings carefully and juxtapose him to one of the early pioneers of African American literature, Charles Chesnutt, whose works tend to be reduced to novels about passing.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Chesnutt dominated the African American literary terrain. In *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, critic and Chesnutt biographer, William L. Andrews concludes that Chesnutt is “...a pioneering realist whose treatment of racial issues was far in advance of his time”. (2) As that of a visionary, Chesnutt’s work allows us a looking glass for the culture of race relations and attitudes in the U.S. Born Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932), to free African American parents in Cleveland, Ohio, he was a fair-skinned mulatto who could easily pass for white. Following the Civil War, his

parents moved back to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where they operated a grocery store. After holding several positions in the school system, Chesnutt relocated to Cleveland with his family in 1883, due to the racism in the south. He ran a stenography business while writing essays and short stories. *The House Behind the Cedars* was serialized in August 1900, in *Self-Culture Magazine*; and was later published as a novel in October 1900 by Houghton Mifflin. As a realist, Chesnutt uses episodes from history in the novel to examine race in America and calls attention to the oppressive effects of racism for both blacks and whites.

Charles Chesnutt's *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) predates Lima Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos* (1923-24) by a couple of decades and yet both texts share similar techniques and responses to the problem of race, class, and forbidden love. In each case, as a result of the varying racial perspectives due to the limited options of the mulatto, the end result is death and disappearance. Barreto complicates the dialogue as he also shows the high cost of trying to protect a woman of color, with the death of Marramaque, the godfather of, the title character. Barreto presents the horrors of racism and freely shows the absolute violence associated with racism and power. Unlike Chesnutt, he completely ignores any pre-established rules associated with telling the mulatto narrative.

While Harper and Azevedo focus primarily on uncovering hierarchies of race, class, and gender; Chesnutt and Barreto explore the boundaries of the very concept of race and the consequences of the desire to ignore these societal boundaries. The romantic plot is used to challenge the societal restrictions placed on otherness. As stated earlier, Chesnutt and Barreto create mulatto heroines that are isolated within their own communities and

believe that love has the power to erase long-standing cultural attitudes about race. And while the two heroines are constructed differently in appearance, psychologically they share similar ideas about race and love. Not only do Barreto and Chesnutt confront the problematics of forbidden love, but they encase their examination of class and race within the narrative of what appears to be a love story. Seemingly, one could conclude that the story of race is a love story with a complicated ending. Nonetheless, it is a story that is worth examining from various narrative perspectives, and Chesnutt and Barreto convey those. For the purpose of this discussion, I will limit my scope to Charles Chesnutt's *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and Lima Barreto's, *Clara dos Anjos* (1923-24).

Barreto's insight into race is nowhere more evident than in *Clara dos Anjos*. The way in which he positions or manipulates the narrative of the mulatto protagonist, Clara, is similar to the way in which Harriet Beecher Stowe positions her mulatto characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). No doubt Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is used as a platform to argue against slavery; but the scope of the narrative confronts questions of race and class, the imminent fear of the mulatto, and above all, the lingering question for the nation namely: what to do with the massive population of ex-slaves. These questions did not dissolve with the abolition of slavery, but seemed to be over-emphasized and plagued both nations continuously. The privilege of whiteness and the abuse of that privilege is prevalent in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and present in Barreto's Brazilian landscape. If you recall the brutal killing of Tom by a white man, a similar brutality is displayed in Barreto's narrative as well. Certainly, the seduction and abuse of the mulatto woman that is presented in Stowe's text are magnified in Barreto's. Similarly, Barreto uses his text as

a platform to showcase invisible discrimination<sup>43</sup> within Brazil. An analysis of *Clara dos Anjos* shows that unlike Stowe who emphasizes the whiteness of her mulattoes and attributes their virtue to the dominance of their 'white' blood, Barreto elevates his mulatta through class. More in step with Chesnutt's manipulation of the mulatto plot and situating it to create conversations surrounding race, citizenship, and privilege; his protagonist, Clara, resembles not only Chesnutt's Rena in *House Behind the Cedars* (1900), but also confronts similar racial, social, and gender issues.

Stowe's novel was transported throughout the world and a Portuguese translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was sold by bookstores in Brazil that supported abolition. The international popularity of Stowe's text could make her stereotypes pervasive in international abolitionist movements. However, both Chesnutt and Barreto demonstrate the limits of Stowe's power. In contrast to Stowe, Chesnutt and Barreto present the mulatto woman as unrealistic and somewhat simple-minded. They present the mulatto woman as a romantic. This treatment of the mulatto woman causes her to appear 'invisible'<sup>44</sup> even within the text, because often her voice is crowded out by the males within her environment. This invisibility coupled with her simplicity further reduces her to the role of the mulatto victim, so often portrayed in slavery accounts. Stowe presents

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<sup>43</sup>In referring to 'invisible discrimination', I am talking about discrimination that is not enforced by law, but through cultural and societal environments and behaviors. In Brazil, there were many things understood about race, it was not necessary to create a law for something that predates emancipation. In her documented memoirs, Carolina, de Jesus highlights many of the unspoken truths about race in Brazil.

<sup>44</sup>Invisible in this context refers to the implicit suggestion that the mulatto woman needs to be protected. Often, the mulatto woman was presented as a sexual token of slavery in the post-emancipation period - and her narrative always demanded a rescue of some sorts. Arguably, Chesnutt's - John Walden presents his sister Rena in many respects as a valuable object, in anticipation of a generous and wealthy admirer.

the mulatto in a privileged position and celebrates the superiority of mixed blood characters. However, Stowe also shows the mulatto as able to blend into the racial landscape when danger presents itself. Chesnutt and Barreto make a convincing argument for the complications of being positioned in the middle of the racial debate. Thus, although Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1862) was written to make an argument against slavery, the novel continued to promote racist stereotypes and attitudes about blacks and the mulatto.

The shifts in the presentation of the mulatto in literature and vacillations about the "value" of the mulatto reflect the fears and attitude of the nation after the collapse of slavery. Early in the history of American slavery, the mulatto is presented as a better, improved version of the black slave. In many regions, particularly Louisiana, a female mulatto could bring a handsome sum. You could garner as much for a mulatto woman as you could for a buck, if not more. Once slavery is over, however, the mulatto tends to lose his or her value, particularly the mulatto woman. At this point, she seems to be an expendable commodity. Minnie's murder in *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869) and Rena's death in *House Behind The Cedars* (1900) embodies this notion. The trope of the tragic mulatto proliferated in American fiction, but none of these examples were as powerful as Stowe's work. Stowe elevates the mulatto in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (1852) while Barreto and Chesnutt peel back the layers of the so-called prestige of the mulatto and show that the mulatto is consistently buffeted by the changing values of the society where he/she is inserted.

Lima Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos*, (1923-24) asks: who is Clara? Clara, for the most

part is buried in a narrative that silences her and makes her invisible. This rhetorical strategy of burying Clara within the narrative further draws attention to the absence of the mulatto's voice in shaping national identity in Brazil, particularly mulatto women voices<sup>45</sup>. While the novel is entitled *Clara dos Anjos*, it is not until the very end of the novel when Clara finds herself abandoned by the womanizing Cassi - that the reader is presented with the opportunity to not only see Clara but finally, hear her . In a summary, *Clara dos Anjos* is a narrative about a sheltered mulatta who lives with her parents, Joaquim and Engracia in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, and is seduced by a descendant of a British Lord, Cassi Jones. Cassi impregnates Clara and disappears. With a Barreto twist, the disappearance of Cassi makes Clara more visible, as she hopelessly declares, "We're nothing in this life..."(227) Suppressing Clara's voice until the end is significant in that it is not until she is violated, or seduced from her status of virtuous woman that she can be seen and heard by the reader, suggesting the mulatto woman can only be thought of as a victim of some sort.

With this story, Barreto brings to the fore the embedded racial inequalities in Brazil, stemming from slavery and exposes the hypocrisy of a nation that claims and promotes racial harmony. More specifically, in this posthumous novel, Barreto displays the impact of isolation, silence<sup>46</sup>, and power on the non-white community and sets the readers' gaze

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<sup>45</sup>And while it can be argued that the mulatto is very present in popular music and culture, in literature, in government, the fact remains that the mulatto voice is not included in forging a national identity. And while mulatto women are objects of desire, they are not legitimate objects of desire, and therefore do not warrant the same treatment of legitimate ones.

<sup>46</sup>Silence in this environment equates invisibility. The voiceless become disempowered; thus invisible.

upon Clara, a sheltered mulatta who is disconnected from her environment by her parents who shield her from the reality of racism that exists within the society, blindly preserving the myth of racial democracy through avoidance. Clara is visually absent in Barreto's novel. He presents her as a daydreamer who is boxed off from reality. She is discussed in fragmented narratives similar to the convoluted history of the mulatto. In other words, the reader never gets to see Clara from her own perspective. She is presented through the eyes of her parents, godfather, and Cassi, for the most part. This technique forces the reader to look for Clara. The initial introduction to Clara comes after Barreto paints a very detailed account of Joaquim dos Anjos, Clara's father, and how he came to live in Rio. Clara is simply described as: "...the couple's second child, ...nearing her seventeenth year." (112) In a striking contrast to his treatment of Clara, Barreto overwhelms the reader with the obvious villain, Cassi Jones, whom he characterizes under the header – "Who was Cassi Jones?"(117) He is "...a young man just under thirty, light skinned and freckled, an unimposing person in physiognomy and build"(117) At this point in the text, no physical description of Clara has been presented. Clara's identity is bundled up in her parents because it is irrelevant, and there is no physical description provided other than the fact that she is a mulatta. The question of complexion does not arise because he does not deal with any mulatto that could "pass."

The mulatto character continues to serve different purposes throughout the nineteenth century in literature. Clearly, Harper, Azevedo, Chesnutt, Barreto, and even Stowe, shroud the question of race in that of crafting a national identity, in what appears on the surface to be a romance or sentimental novels. This surface appearance points to



the illusiveness of race, or it could also posit a core belief of democratic nations. However, what it does is to mystify the notion of citizenship while coupling the basis for citizenship with race, and in this case, whiteness. Harper, Azevedo, Barreto, and Chesnutt, all query the very principles in which Brazil and the US formulate their model for citizenship while deconstructing the concept of race via the mulatto.

The racism uncovered by Barreto in *Clara dos Anjos* can easily be identified also within the fictions as well as the environment in the United States in the countless occurrences of discrimination and racism confronted by American blacks. This racism resides in the private thoughts of Dona Salustiana, Cassi's mother:

Cassi's mother listened to his confession but she did not believe it. Since she did have aristocratic pretensions, however it was repugnant for her to imagine her son married to some black-skinned servant girl, a poor mulatto seamstress, or an illiterate but white washerwoman" (118 Barreto).

There can be no mistaking Dona Salustiana's feelings about race and class mixing. She is completely against her son being forced to compromise his and her social standing by tainting their "aristocratic" status. While she does not attempt to correct or question her son's moral values, she does not hesitate to reject the idea of marriage across racial and class lines. In many ways, Dona Salustiana gives her son license to manipulate and take advantage of black, brown, and poor women. This is the Brazil that Barreto suggests has not been examined.

One of the more violent episodes in the novel is the killing of Marramaque, Clara's godfather. Barreto writes: "Cassi...laid the plan for Marramaque's murder...he spoke to Arnaldo...'We're going to give him a real beating'." (196) Arnaldo inquired why, and

Cassi asserted: “Because this old man is abusing his condition...He deserves a whipping.”(196) Cassi’s response implies that Marramaque is a servant and thus should be subservient. Marramaque is an elder and Cassi speaks of him as if he were a child. Cassi assumes a role of authority, and since Marramaque offends his authority, he will need to be handled. This position of privilege spills over into all aspects of his life and routinely:

“Cassi had been able to count upon the secret benevolence of certain judges and police officials who intimately believed that a marriage between Cassi and any one of his victims would be absurd because of the differences in upbringing, birth, skin color and education.” (169)

Cassi’s position of privilege allows him to operate outside the law; he has elevated status as a wealthy white man. Barreto is able to link Cassi’s treatment of individuals who do have connections with an established pattern of abuse and mistreatment of non-wealthy and non-white people in Brazil that exist pre- and post-slavery. In his fiction, he writes against the invisible borders and boundaries that allow for discrimination to occur. Captured by Stowe and echoed by Barreto, the penalty for protecting the mulatto is death, as shown in both novels. Reinforcing that fear is a technique used to control and silence conversations about race and discrimination. Cassi and his two upper-class thug friends make it clear that Marramaque was attacked and murdered because he attempted to protect a non-white woman, Clara, from a white man, Cassi. This is similar to the case in Uncle Tom’s Cabin where Tom is beaten to death for trying to protect the whereabouts of Cassy and Emmeline:

“Tom heard the message with a forewarning heart; for he knew all the plan of the fugitives’ escape, and the place of

their present concealment;-he knew the deadly character of the man he had to deal with, and his despotic power. But he felt strong in God to meet death, rather than betray the helpless.” (Stowe 375)

The text makes it clear that Cassi and Arnaldo intend not only to beat Marramaque, but to kill him. They approach him masked by the dark of night and inform him of his crime: “Now, cripple; you’ve got to learn that you shouldn’t poke your nose in where it doesn’t belong.” (196) This vicious opening is followed by blows to Marramaque’s body with wood clubs until he stops breathing. Barreto underlines their callousness showing them frustrated by showing them frustrated because it took Marramaque too long to die. Cassi calls Marramaque a cripple starting with a verbal attack against him, which allows Cassi to dehumanize him, and calls attention to how racism is concealed in language and embedded in the culture. For Cassi, Marramaque was non-white and therefore had no right to protect Clara’s virtue. The killing of Marramaque for Cassi merely asserts his right to corrupt non-white women.<sup>47</sup>

In *Clara dos Anjos*, Barreto confronts the hidden dangers for women in not realizing that racism exists and they can be preyed upon. He resists constructing a fictional environment that supports the idea of Brazil as a utopia that protects non-white and poor white women. Joaquim and Engracia, Clara’s parents believe that because they are secluded and isolated within their own community, there is no need to combat the racism, sexism, or classism present in the society. In their minds, Clara is protected. Barreto is able to show that a protected child can become a victim to the seduction of a wealthy

<sup>47</sup>In this respect, Barreto unites women of color with lower-class white women, and how they are targets for men like Cassi – wealthy white men.

white Brazilian, because of the prejudice within the society, suggesting that isolation and sheltering can be problematic. He writes:

“Clara, the postman’s only child, had been reared with such care and delicacy that, given her situation and class, perhaps she had actually been harmed by such strict supervision” (135).

For Barreto, the right to protect Clara falls out of Joaquim’s control, especially since he fails to address questions about the relationship of race and love in relation to his daughter.

As the patriarch, Joaquim forged an imaginary safety net around his family, which was really non-existent because he failed to warn Clara about the cultural attitudes of whites about people like her. He sheltered his family and isolated them and limited his interactions to family, work, music, and a ritualized card game on Sunday with his small circle of friends. Significant to Barreto’s concerns, Joaquim “...didn’t read the papers closely and neither did he gossip very much with people from the suburbs, men and women who would have known these things” (133). Like his daughter, he did not participate in discussions from outside of his safety net. He relied solely on his friend Marramaque to translate any news outside of his utopian community, which in many ways allowed him to function in his safe haven. Unfortunately, because Joaquim was so isolated and somewhat blind to reality, he often failed to understand or consider the things about which Marramaque cautioned him such as the deceptive and manipulative nature of Cassi. He also dismissed Marramaque’s warning, believing that he could protect his daughter from Cassi, and that Cassi would respect his values. Even when Marramaque warned him of Cassi’s reputation, Joaquim defaulted to the promise of the

type of love sung about in the modinhas and accordingly:

“...received the news without distress. He didn't like Cassi, either...Cassi was a bit of a rogue, a social outcast and often in trouble with the police; he was also talked about a lot for being a bad sort. But, even so...if he wanted to marry their girl – in spite of all the precedents – he would not oppose it” (194).

Clara was not the only one mesmerized by the modinhas. Her father's refusal to accept the barely visible racism and classism within his society further encourages Clara to operate in a state of fantasy and feed her desire for romantic love with Cassi. And even though Joaquim is incapable of expressing doubt, his wife Engracia, despite her helplessness voices her concerns about Cassi, but Joaquim ignores and dismisses them and her fears. Predicting the eventual outcome, Engracia is disempowered and with her, the narrative of the seduced mulatto woman is not considered. Even with the knowledge that her daughter is at a delicate age where young girls dream of love and romance, she is unable to instruct Clara on the behaviors of men like Cassi toward people of her race and social class. Instead, she remains silent and allows Clara to be misled by her romantic fantasies.

In this aforementioned scenario, Barreto calls attention to the silencing of women about the seduction and mistreatment of non-white women which can be seen as a by-product of slavery. Again, this sanctioned abuse of white men seducing non-white women, would not be told by Engracia. This silence is so powerful that it prevents Engracia from being able to inform Clara about the history of this practice and save her daughter from exploitation. This inability to protect one's child is part of the slaves past, and in particular a major part of the narrative of the mulatto. Engracia knows that Cassi

will destroy her daughter, and use the promise of marriage to gain her confidence, and yet she remains a silent bystander as he ushers Clara into the position of exploited, tragic mulatta. Except, in this case, Barreto does not kill Clara physically, but he also boldly rejects a happy ending.

To further emphasize Clara's detachment from her environment and her preoccupation with romantic love, she is described as having an infatuation with modinhas, sentimental popular songs. This blindness and romantic longings contribute to Clara's refusal to consider all the past accusations against Cassie, and allow her to be manipulated by the very language she cherishes in the modinhas. Clara and her father lack a historical and cultural framework to understand the modinhas and use them as means to escape reality. And yet, while Clara is surrounded with many view points about life, she refuses to accept any that fall outside of the romantic fantasies presented in the modinhas, as she understands them. While the modinhas, as they were disseminated encouraged a non-colonial identity, for Clara, this translated into a romantic reality with Cassi.

Indeed, it easy to label Cassi as the sole violator of Clara, but a closer examination shows and supports that the ultimate destruction of Clara is in part, due to her parents' refusal to recognize existing cultural behaviors. Because Engracia was never directly affected by discrimination often felt by the lower class, women, and blacks in Brazil, she could not substantiate the rumors. Much like Clara, she was raised in a protected environment, under the roof of the Teles de Carvalho family, where she was treated like one of their children and never subjected to harshness. She was able to escape the treatment extended to the majority of non-white people in Brazil. Engracia was given

access to a good education in spite of her race, class and sex. A major part of Engracia's inability to function independently has to do with her background, which in many ways does not allow her to consider an experience outside her own and has her reject any stories contrary to her experiences.

Tragically, Engracia suffers from class confusion. As the narrative unfolds, the ineffectiveness of Engracia is further magnified. Not only is she out of touch with her daughter, she is disconnected from herself. She is incapable of making a decision in the absence of her husband, and she does not prove to be resourceful; yet, she instantly recognized the danger that Cassi presented. Evidenced in the narrative, "anybody who knew Engracia intimately would be astonished at the decisive attitude she took towards Cassis's visit". (145) The implications here is that while she might not have been directly affected by a "Cassi type", she is aware of the dangers of men like him. Again, even with these strong feelings, she is silenced. Engracia's denial causes her to suffer her defeat in silence. Her privilege and protection as a young woman encouraged her to adopt the same model for herself, and in doing so, she avoided contact with other women like her. Upon marrying Joaquim, Engracia assumed the role of mistress of the house and lived like a middle-class woman, without "passing."<sup>48</sup> In doing so, she continued to detach herself from the non-white community and remained fixed in an unrealistic space of comfort, where she and her husband cocooned Clara, avoiding any unpleasant conversations.

Clara's loneliness is filled out by the fantasy promised in the lyrics of the modinhas. If

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<sup>48</sup>Very similar to the matriarch in Fauset's, *Plum Bun*.

Clara is trapped in a dream world, within her world of romantic fantasy, she can pretend to inherit the security that her mother finds with her father. And in spite of Joaquim's efforts to protect her and insulate his family and their cultural awareness into a self-forged utopia, Clara is sexually exploited by and cast into a silence and confronted with the realities of class and race. This reality is where Clara finds herself in the end does not resemble the happy ending, but magnifies the sentiment she thought reserved for Etelvina: men like Cassi, do not marry women like her.

Clara is convinced because of her removal from the 'other' members of the community, that she is different. This is made clear when she is warned by a schoolmate about Cassi, because from Clara's perspective, Etelvina could not possibly understand since the modinhas did not mention a love for girls "like her"<sup>49</sup>. Again, much as in her mother's past, bad things don't happen to a girl like Clara (mulatto), only 'black' girls are mistreated. Clara's isolation did not equip her with the maturity and sound voice of a younger more observant companion, to distinguish fantasy from reality, causing her to be entangled in the fantastical world of the modinhas and encouraging her to discard any other possibility.

In addition to Clara's abandonment, the reader is left with the uncensored words of Dona Salustiana:

"What did you say, you little nigger?...Can you imagine such a thing? Just think of it...my son married to this...this...Married to somebody like this...indeed! Why, what would my grandfather, Lord Jones, the British Consul in Santa Catarina, say about this? What do you think he

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<sup>49</sup>Etelvina was a dark skinned young woman with kinky hair. Again, here we see Clara disconnecting from her community.



would say if he could see such a shameful thing befalling us? What would he think of such a thing?...These people are ridiculous! They're complaining about being abused,...It's always the same, old, song..."(225).

which jolt Clara from her modinha-forged world and force her to confront how she is perceived and excluded socially and economically by people from Cassi's class and race. It is not until the end of the novel that Clara is able to align herself with people like Etelvina, and be aware of how people like her (non-white) are viewed. Abandoned and disgraced she accepts that she is a part of the excluded class of Brazilians. Then the cost of her virtue, honor, and innocence, Clara is ushered into reality. Barreto intentionally guides the reader through the exploitation of Clara.

Clara does not evolve from the stereotypical environment of the tragic mulatta, as previously mentioned, she is protected by her parents; and yet like the tragic mulatta she is persecuted<sup>50</sup> (by Dona Salustiana) and violated by Cassi. Why would it take Dona Salustiana to force Clara to realize the reality of her life in Brazil? How is it that Clara is subject to the pitfalls of the tragic mulatta as she appears in American fiction, while under the watchful eye of her parents? I argue that while Clara was surrounded by her parents, she too was encased in the kind of environment that brings about the demise of the mulatta character and constructs her as the tragic mulatto.

Clara lived in isolation and:

"When Clara wasn't with her mother or father; she only went out with Dona Margarida, a very respectable widow

<sup>50</sup>When Clara claims to be a victim of Cassi's pursuits, Dona Salustiana replies: "These people are ridiculous! They're complaining about being abused,...did my boy bind and gag them...did he threaten them with a knife or a gun...? No, of course not. The fault is theirs and theirs alone..." (225).

who lived in the neighborhood, and who was teaching Clara embroidery and sewing. This, however, was a rare occurrence and only happened on Sundays” (113).

As a fragile object that needs constant surveillance and protecting, the looming question remains: What exactly is it that her parents are shielding her from? Reality? The excessive protection of Clara does not allow her alternatives. She is groomed to be a wife. While there is nothing wrong with this, Clara and her mother are in denial that they do not belong to the recognized leisure class. While Clara is under constant surveillance by her parents, there is no meaningful instruction or interaction taking place. Engracia is described as “...sedentary and a homebody”. (113) Notably, all interventions on Clara’s behalf were made by an outsider (Dona Margarida – not a Brazilian, and Marramaque). Her inability to teach Clara, speaks to her mother’s commitment to her fantasy about race, class, and social mobility. And while one could argue that Clara is being groomed to join the middle class, I argue that Barreto does not believe that social mobility is possible for dual-heritage people, particularly the mulatto woman.

In fact, any time Clara decides to gain agency, she seeks out Dona Margarida, someone who in many ways is removed from the community in that she is a transplant to Brazil. When Clara decides she will terminate her pregnancy, she steps outside of the protective environment of her parents and seeks the help of Dona Margarida. It is also Dona Margarida who accompanies Clara when she goes to confront Cassi’s family. Whenever Clara needs to gain agency or reclaim a voice for herself, she steps outside of the confines of her immediate community. Clara’s inability to communicate with her parents further complicated her ability to navigate her environment. In a sense, Clara’s

pregnancy is an opportunity for rebirth for Clara.

Clara is empowered by her illegitimate pregnancy. As a mulatto, she escapes death and she is a symbol for mulatto women in the future. Her experience with discrimination and rejection will alter her expectations about love and companionship. And now with the rebirth of Clara, she can be aligned with the voice of Marramaque, the sole character in Barreto's narrative that is not blinded by the fiction of racial democracy in the society and described as someone who has:

“always taken note of the atmosphere of corruption surrounding girls with the birthright of poverty and brown skin like his goddaughter. He had also noticed the generally low opinion which people held regarding the virtuousness of these girls. They were assumed to be morally lax *a priori* and everybody seemed to condemn their efforts...” (135).

His unwillingness to accept the unwritten law about non-white girls proved to be fatal. The moment Marramaque denounced Cassi's unwritten authority, and decided to collect written proof of Cassi's exploits; he is seen as a danger and killed (erased from the landscape).

In *Clara dos Anjos*, Barreto examines the hate felt for the mulatto class as well as the lower class, and to remind Brazilians, in particular, non-white Brazilians, of the importance of being connected to history and understanding its relevance in the Brazil of his time. All of that complicated the question of national identity and the rights and privileges this entailed. The fictional mulatto is an ideal subject for examination of post-slavery nations such as the U.S. and Brazil, in relation to the construction of a national identity and what narrative is presented as the dominant cultural narrative, which in turn

would become the foundational principles for criteria of national identity. Both Barreto and Chesnutt situate the fictional mulatto into a post-emancipation landscape and contemplate the function of the mulatto in the crafting of a national identity.

In particular, Chesnutt's first full-length novel, *The House Behind the Cedars*, provides a "...window into a lost world of American culture and lets us understand its continuing relevance to our own world". (Sollors 2) It does so by telling the tale of a young mulatto, John, who decides to claim whiteness and "pass," predicated on his understanding of the law, shared with him Judge Straight<sup>51</sup>, a family friend. After securing his position in white society and the death of his wife, John, upon seeing his sister, Rena, decides that she is 'good' enough to pass and should enjoy the rewards of whiteness, and he convinces his mother to allow her to come and live with him as the mistress of his home. Rena adjusts to living with John and living as a white woman up until she falls in love with a white man, George Tyron, and feels compelled by her belief in fairytale-esque ideas about love to unmask her true self to George. Rena found what she considered truth, in some book, "she had read that love was a conqueror, that neither life nor death, nor creed nor caste, could stay his triumphant course." (51) With this understanding, she contemplates the authenticity of George's love, particularly if he was aware of her ancestry.

Rena is presented as 'tragically colored'. Because of this tainted stain in her blood, she is unable to realize her happily ever after. Thus, Rena formed the question -"Would he have loved me at all,...if he had known the story of my past? Or having loved me,

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<sup>51</sup>Judge Straight cautions John: "I remember we went over the law, which was in your favor; but custom is stronger than law – in these matters custom is law." (25)

could he blame me now for what I cannot help?" (51) Unlike Barreto's protagonist, following the traditional path of the tragic mulatto, the novel ends tragically with the death of his protagonist, Rena and John disappears to love his life as a white man. Notably, though, there are some strategies Chesnutt employs that are not typical for the mulatto, especially in the empowering of John. The plot of the novel does not appear complicated, but Chesnutt is raising pertinent questions about social and economic barriers that are a result of race and shows the complexities that arise with the demand of white-racial purity.

In his essay, "What is a White Man?" (1889), Chesnutt surveys how each state continues to define and redefine whiteness with color laws, and how the mulatto is integral in this fluid definition. Chesnutt reminds us that as a result of "...the intermingling of races...[t]here has arisen in the United States a large population who are certainly not Negroes in an ethnological sense, and whose children will be no nearer Negroes than themselves." (1). Chesnutt limits his commentary to the white - looking mulatto and encourages "...the genuine Negro, who is entirely outside of the charmed circle, and must content himself with the acquisition of wealth, the pursuit of learning and other privileges...consistent with the welfare of the nation to allow him." Accordingly, Werner Sollors argues that:

"Chesnutt's prophetic essays challenge the intellectual underpinnings of racial segregation and disenfranchisement. They demonstrate a modern sense of the legal construction of "whiteness," and examine the possibilities of an interracial American of the future."

The essay can serve as a reference to Chesnutt or points to the character of John Walden

as he personifies and exercises what Chesnutt identifies as claiming his social position as a white person, by law.

The language of the color laws drives Chesnutt's probing question about what constitutes a white man and in *House Behind the Cedars* (1900), he uses the foundation of the law to situate his protagonist, John Walden. For Chesnutt, the law provides the boundaries and parameters for race. Further interrogating the legal definition of white, he inserts a romance plot where he shows the interplay between love and hidden identity; and how fear affects the outcome. Remember, Rena does not have much trouble adjusting to her new life as a white woman, it is when she is presented with the possibility of love that she becomes frightened. Chesnutt constructs Rena in a 'pure' sense. So much so that it is against the unwritten and unspoken code of love for her to lie to someone she loves. It appears that Rena is more afraid of lying to George, a white southern aristocrat, than she is of being rejected from him because she is not white. In the novel, Chesnutt very pointedly raises the questions – of who is white, and what is whiteness. It is the same questions he asked in his earlier essays, more specifically, in, "What is a White Man?" .

Chesnutt sets his novel a few years after the American Civil War in North and South Carolina, states with very distinct laws outlining the parameters for whiteness, which shows the fluidity of race across state lines. The novel opens with John Warwick, a mulatto, returning to Patesville, North Carolina after ten years of living in Clarence, South Carolina as a white man. He returns to his birth place to handle a business matter John walks down the streets of his hometown freely and:

“...when he recognized the red bandana turban of old Aunt Lyddy, the ancient negro woman who had sold him gingerbreads and fried fish, and told him weird tales of witchcraft and conjuration, in the old days...[h]e did not speak to her, however, or give any sign of recognition. He threw a glance toward a certain corner where steps led to the town hall above. On this stairway he had once seen a manacled free negro shot while being taken upstairs for examination under a criminal charge.” (7)

Warwick tries to remove himself completely from these past experiences and enters the town of Fayetteville as a newcomer. His apparent whiteness has erased him from the gaze of past acquaintances. Early in his life, John had determined for himself that he was white and he would not accept the identity of black, and thus:

“[he] was informed one day that he was black. [he] denied the proposition and thrashed the child who made it. The scene was repeated the next day, with a variation, - he was himself thrashed by a larger boy. When he had been beaten five or six times, he ceased to argue the point, thought to himself he never admitted the charge.” (104)

Unlike traditional mulatto characters, John not only rejects the label of being black and denies publicly that he is black and is willing to be beaten for his commitment to his whiteness. His refusal fuels him to seek out proof that he is white, and he finds it with the help of Judge Straight. In truth, John did not see sister nor himself in binary terms of white and black, as he proclaims to George later on in the novel:

“...my sister and I are not of an old family, or a rich family, or a distinguished family; that she can bring you nothing but herself; that we have no connections of which you could boast, and no relatives to whom we should be glad to introduce you. You must take us for ourselves alone – we are new people.” (56)

Accordingly, John lived his life as these “new people”, refusing to be restricted by the

definition of race, and settled in an environment that would allow him to function in an unlimited capacity.

To fully exercise his ‘newness’ openly and without backlash, John leaves Patesville and relocates to South Carolina as a white man where he marries into the southern aristocracy and produces a son. The death of his wife, coupled with some personal business he must attend, prompts him to go home and visit his family, which he had kept secret and upon being mesmerized by the whiteness and beauty of his sister, Rena, decides she should home with him and raise his son, Albert.

While John is committed to his whiteness, Rena wrestles with the question of her secret and does not accept that she is white. Having determined he is white, he asserts his privilege. Based not only on his understanding of the law but on his visual concept of what whiteness is, he sees himself as white, and therefore has no problem believing this is truly who he is – John Warwick, a white southern attorney.

The construction or treatment of John as a mulatto is unique in how John is positioned. He is shown as a powerful man. When he returns home after ten years, he plays on his mother’s sympathies to get her to release his sister, so that she can have a real chance at life. He is always seen in the novel as confident and does not appear ambivalent or torn at any point. Albert, his son, serves as an example of his fear. Typically, the mulatto fears to have children, because the birth of a child might reveal the hidden secret. More so, Chesnutt does not warn the reader that John is a mulatto and opens the novel with the reader assuming he is the default white protagonist of nineteenth-century literature. He limits his description of John to telling the reader that:



“He was dressed in a suit of linen duck – the day was warm – a panama straw hat, and patent leather shoes. In appearance he was tall, dark, with straight, black, lustrous hair, and very clean-cut, high bred features...’JOHN WARWICK’...the gentleman from South Carolina.” (5)

Chesnutt’s description is all about outward appearance, avoiding race, even in this very first introduction, John is not identified racially, and the reader can assume he has the power of any white man. John is merely a man and no immediate opinion can be formed. Chesnutt further empowers John in allowing him to lure the reader into the narrative, as he is seduced by the beauty of a young woman (his sister, unbeknownst to him) that has caught his eye – Rena. He follows Rena without fear of being recognized. As a ‘new’ man, he has determined that he can move about the town freely. Upon realizing that the young woman he follows is his sister, he determines that she should be rescued, and spared the burden of living as a black person. Chesnutt grants John the freedom over the reader, Molly, Rena, and George Tyron.

Miss Molly, John’s mother, although a victim of white male dominance, rejects being a member of the black community. Throughout the novel, she makes distinctions between mulattos and black people. In Miss Molly’s mind, the mulatto should not taint his or her bloodline with black people, but try to whiten his or her progeny. She proudly promotes the whitening of America, and John’s return is confirmation for Miss Molly that mulattoes are superior and deserve to be able to interact freely with white people, as white people, if they choose to do so. Using Miss Molly as a conduit, Chesnutt exposes the workings of racial prejudice even within the black community and shows the damages of slavery on black people like Miss Molly; and how racial prejudice exists

within the same racial group. Miss Molly is guided by her perceptions of race and is convinced by her son that her daughter Rena would have a 'better life' as a white woman. And because Miss Molly is committed to her attitude about race, she ignores how her story ended with a white man, and surrenders Rena to John. Chesnutt shows that Miss Molly is accustomed to deferring to whiteness. It would seem that Miss Molly's hope is that Rena will have a better ending to her story than she.

Noticeably, while Chesnutt empowers John, he tends to dis-empower the women in the novel, particularly, Rena. In order to ensure that Rena has a smooth transition to her role as a white woman, John arranges for her to attend a boarding school, to refine her manners. As John is pleased with his sister's physical presence, he is aware that she needs to be able to perfectly mirror the behaviors of white southern aristocracy.

Following her cultivation to whiteness, Rena is ushered into John's world with a grand entrance that turns her into of an object of desire; when she catches the attention of George Tyron and the observers of "the annual tournament of the Clarence Social Club. Rena's favorable welcome into the society, again puts John in a position of power. On the other hand, Chesnutt surrounds Rena in the language of fantasy and dreams. Rena, herself, summarizes her entrance into her brother's reality as a fairytale. She remarks: "It is a dream,"...only a dream. I am Cinderella before the clock has struck." Rena's sense or her association with Cinderella **before** the clock has struck is an intentional indicator that she understands that she is an impostor much like Cinderella, and she was able to escape the event without her secret being revealed. It is worth noting that Cinderella was not an impostor-she was the daughter of the lord of the house, and had

been demeaned by his second wife. That makes Rena's comment cleverly ambiguous: she is genuinely beautiful and accomplished, but demeaned by the racist society she is crashing but where by rights he should be acceptable. It is interesting that Rena makes this statement because it is her comparison to Cinderella which engulfs her imagination in terms of her love or George Tyron's confession of love for her. Rena's perception of herself as Cinderella is merged with the sentimental novel tradition.

Rena is mesmerized by the idea of true love. She believes that true love can exist and overcome all obstacles like in a fairy tale or a gothic romance such as Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. *Ivanhoe* celebrates and idealizes England's feudal past. The annual tournament of the Clarence Social Club reenacts the novel during Rena's coming out. Rena plays the part of her namesake, Rowena, as the queen of love and beauty chosen by the champion. Ironically, she is identifying with the white Saxon heroine of the novel rather than the Jewish heroine Rebecca, who struggles against social and political bigotry. Even her entrance into white society is fairy-tale like because of the expectations that the women have an elevated life, and a window of protection, but there is no guarantee of a happily ever after. Her entrance also resembles the *plaçage*<sup>52</sup> balls of New Orleans where interracial women were sold into common-law marriages parodies the romantic love celebrated by Sir Walter Scott. These relationships are anything but the idealized love

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<sup>52</sup>The practice of *plaçage* is well known to students of Louisiana history, specifically to any reader of the history of the Quadroon balls. However, the word to describe it is not always familiar. To quote one definition, *plaçage* was "a recognized extralegal system in which white French and Spanish and later Creole men entered into the equivalent of common-law marriages with women of African, Indian and white (European) Creole descent. The women were not legally recognized as wives, but were known as *placées*. <http://www.russguerin.com/odds-and-ends/placageplacee---an-investigation/>).

and romance of *Ivanhoe* or romantic. These women live in the illusion of upper-class life and rights, but in reality, have no legal or social recourse or protection. These relationships continued slavery for the interracial women - a false sense of privilege. The balls, as illustrated by Édouard Marquis play into an illusion of privilege because these women are in the same legal class as the dark-skinned slaves who wait on them (see appendix B). The difference between these two women is dependent upon the whims of white men in their lives

Notably, while Rena enjoys all the trappings of this new identity during the festival, she soon tires of the fantasy and wishes for the night to end. While Rena might be captured by romantic notions, she is dedicated to the authentic feelings of love. The mulatto is the collision of these two forces is American society: law and love. The mulatto is the result of the breaking of the law in the name of love, desire, and domination. However, John reminds Rena that she must continue to smile through the ball.

John never abandons his convictions of being a 'new' person. John's definition of a new person allows Chesnut to show not only the fluidity of race but the instability of the law in defining race. So much so, that George Tyron still thinks of John as a white man; and in this way, Chesnut continues to show how John is able to maintain control over all the characters in the text because of his position as a white man. Consider the irony: George Tyron uncovered that Rena is black. John is her brother, therefore, he is black. There is no evidence in the text that John apologizes for Rena. In fact, the possibility is never discussed. Further, Tyron fears more for John exposing his weakness for loving an

imposter, or John revealing his authentic ancestry, than John is afraid of being discovered. It is Tyron who is afraid, not John, though technically it is John who has violated the unwritten code of southern aristocracy. Chesnutt seems to be making a statement about the law about just how powerful the written law can be if manipulated properly. Ironically, John uses the same law that was used to enslave his ancestors, to claim a white freedom for himself and his sister.

*House Behind the Cedars* provides a controlled environment for Chesnutt to disrupt traditional and sentimental expectations and creates complex situations with characters that resist stereotypes. He complicates expectations not so much with the characters, but with the situations the characters find themselves. This is demonstrated through John's response once Tyron discovers that Rena is not white. Even more so, the situation is further layered when Tyron cannot make sense of Rena's appearance. For Tyron, he is unable to understand how he was misled by Rena's appearance. Chesnutt's multi-dimensional characters expose racism in white society, perpetuated by both black and white people. He shows the impact of racism as endemic in American society.

Both Barreto and Chesnutt dress their inquiry about the dilemmas of race within what appears to be a sentimental novel that incorporates narrative that draws from folklore and folk music traditions, articulated by Rena and Clara. But this fictional terrain is complicated by Chesnutt in his treatment of John. John occupies the role of both hero and villain, further problematized by the fact that the character presented as authentic or as the true hero of the tale is virtually invisible – Frank. Adding more interest to the character of John, Chesnutt gives him more power than any of his white characters.

Traditionally the mulatto is seen as a victim, as in the case of Rena and Clara, but in this instance, the mulatto seems to be in control of not only his own movements, but of others' as well. As mentioned earlier, Chesnutt complicates the character of John because he occupies the space of villain and hero. On the other hand with *Clara dos Anjos*, Cassi Jones is the obvious villain, Clara's parents who have good intentions that backfire and create a mist that blinds her rather than shield. The true hero in *Clara dos Anjos* is Marramaque who has an unlikely hero outcome, he is killed, and Margarida, who nurtures Clara throughout her confusion. Nonetheless, in both novels, both villains, Cassi and John are protected by the law. The law in a sense is their talisman. It is the law coupled with Cassi's family economic position that allows Cassi Jones to continuously prey on the women in the novel. Cassi clearly understands that the law will protect him from the numerous complaints launched against him as he violates the virtue of women; in particular, Clara's. Barreto shows how Cassi methodically seduces Clara, only to abandon her with shame and no legal recourse. Clara is an image of so many mulatto women who are left to care for their children because they have been abandoned by their lover. Chesnutt, on the other hand, is able to show how John with the support of the law is able to manufacture a life for himself while molding everyone else to conform to his "self declared identity". In each scenario, the law is what gives them their power. This strategy allows Chesnutt and Barreto to show that just as the lines of hero and villain are blurred, so are the lines of racial identity.

At first glance, *House Behind the Cedars* and even *Clara dos Anjos* appear to be sentimental novels about passing, love lost, but further examination shows that Barreto

and Chesnutt are doing something more elaborate. They are using a blend of genres to convey racial fragmentation and social alienation. Under the cloak of a sentimental novel, both Barreto and Chesnutt interrogate every aspect of race in society. They look at the myriad factors that contribute to the dysfunctional social constructions of race and the way racism interferes with intimate, interpersonal relationships. Clara and Rena ultimately suffer because they do not accept the boundaries imposed by race.

### CHAPTER 3 RACIAL PERFORMANCE AND RITUAL – MELDING A TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUE IN JESSE FAUSET’S *PLUM BUN*

“Oh coloured! Well, of course I suppose you would call her an American though I never think of darkies as Americans.”

In her introduction to *Plum Bun*, Deborah McDowell argues that the darling of the Harlem Renaissance, Jesse Fauset is often reduced to “...an apologist for the black middle class... [whereas] her most important role in the Harlem Renaissance was that of a midwife.” (ix) McDowell further states that “while Fauset had come to accept that most white publishers doubted her qualifications for representing “blackness,” in fact, most blacks doubted them as well.” (xxx) Contributing to the stinging critiques of Fauset, Claude McKay, an important member of the Harlem Renaissance, once remarked: “Miss Fauset has written many novels about the people in her circle...Miss Fauset is prim and dainty as a primrose” (Winzt 68) McKay limits Fauset’s reach and appeal to her middle class circle, simply stating that Fauset was detached and could not speak for nor appeal to the ordinary black masses. For the most part, sadly, Fauset was dismissed by both, white and black critics, as a polite, disconnected, middle-class coloured woman, who did not make or add any unique contributions to literature. One critic, Robert Bone, simplified *Plum Bun* as “a typical novel of passing, structured around a nursery rhyme...” (Bone 102). Contrary to earlier critics of Fauset’s contributions to the literary canon, Valerie Popp argues that “Fauset’s works are consummate drawing-room dramas, but the critical community has been relatively slow and at times unwilling to recognize their broader significance.”(Popp 131) Aligned with Popp, I contend that Fauset lends an important voice not only in the development of the passing trope, but in the discourse on race in a



more general sense, particularly in her second novel, *Plum Bun: Without a Moral*, is an. And while her approach seemed genteel to such critics, a careful and purposeful examination shows that Fauset actually forged a powerful argument that is still being debated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her contribution expanded the scope of the reader's gaze, and the mulatto figure in her writing became a device and vehicle to bring other concepts of race relations into the American conversation, and expand the conversation onto a transnational stage. More specifically, *Plum Bun*, explores racial passing in the U.S. and Brazil. Fauset reunites the slave pasts of the United States and Brazil through her protagonist, Angela, and her "realized" *prince charming*, Anthony Cruz, aka Anthony Cross, a Brazilian transplant. This chapter explores racial performance, ritual and loss, the unresolved fairy tale expectations of the heroine, and the relationship of gender and race in *Plum Bun*.

As a literary editor (1919-1926) for the *Crisis*<sup>53</sup>, Fauset had a keen eye for literary talent, and published influential writers of the Harlem Renaissance such as Arna Bontemps, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay. And even though she wrote four novels: *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy American Style* (1933), many of her earlier critics concur that she was not capable of producing a work as meaningful as that of her male counterparts. A close and careful analysis of Fauset's writings shows that Fauset deals in subtle ways with issues of race and gender that seem to have escaped her male critics.

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<sup>53</sup>*Crisis*, originally titled, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, was founded by W.E.B. DuBois in 1910. It is the official magazine for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Recognized as the first black woman to graduate from Cornell<sup>54</sup> (1909), a member of Phi Beta Kappa<sup>55</sup>, and fluent in French<sup>56</sup>, Fauset consistently challenged limits imposed on African-American women within the United States, and abroad.

Similar to her personal accomplishments, her views on politics and race stretch beyond the borders of the United States. This international perspective informed her treatment of the issues of race, racial performance and passing in her novels, as well as her role as literary editor for the *Crisis*. In fact, her column "Looking Glass," highlighted many of the questions around the idea of citizenship, America, and national identities in general, while introducing subscribers to international literature by black writers. In *Plum Bun*, Fauset starts a deliberate transnational dialogue about race and gender linking discriminatory historical racial practices in the U.S. and Brazil. In *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (2011), Jorge Duany opens with a couple of foundational definitions of transnationalism:

"As Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson (1999: 4) point out, 'the concept of transnationalism, which has become central to many interpretations of postmodernity, has as one of its principal referents international borders, which mark off one state from another and which sometimes, but not as often as many people seem to suppose, set off one nation from another'." (Duany 1)

This concept of transnationalism is further explored "in a now classic essay, Michael Kearney (1991) differentiated "borders" from "boundaries" in the contemporary world... As Kearney writes, "'transnationalism' implies a blurring, or perhaps better said,

<sup>54</sup> B.A. in Classical Languages.

<sup>55</sup> First black woman accepted in the Chapter in 1905.

<sup>56</sup> Fauset earned an M.A. in French at the University of Pennsylvania, 1929.

a reordering of the binary cultural, social, and epistemological distinctions of the modern period” (55). Moreover, “peoples that span national borders are ambiguous in that they in some ways partake of both nations and in other ways partake of neither” (52).” (Duany 1-2) Duany, however, expands this definition further and claims that the proliferation of transnationalism as a topic in scholarly work has tended to blur the definition of “transnationalism” rather than clarify it:

"However, persistent problems plague the field of transnationalism, including the operational definition of the concept; the classification of various types; the explanation of its causes and consequences; its alleged novelty; its relationship with assimilation; and its future beyond the first generation of immigrants.” (Duany 17)

Kearney’s statement seems especially significant for Fauset: partaking of both nations and neither simultaneously. In doing so, she creates a cross-racial dialogue within the narrative which resembles the sort of international awareness she attempted to raise through her column in the *Crisis*. Where Stowe tries to force that because she is unable to imagine a diverse nation, Fauset embraces this idea because of the failure of national identity to offer meaning and significance.

*Plum Bun* provides another literary territory where Fauset can expand these circles until they intersect, introducing culturally diverse international literary voices to the conversation of race. She recognizes and acknowledges the layered perspectives and conversations, both domestic and international, about race and shifts the isolated ideologies, creating a textured dialogue. This approach is notably different from the monologue that Stowe creates in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the 1850s. *Plum Bun*, instigates the discussion of race across cultural, economic, gender, and racial borders. No text in

the nineteenth century exhibits such interactions and intentions, except for Fauset's columns in the *Crisis*.

### **Racial Performance**

The idea of identity as performance was slow to enter mainstream thought; gender theorists such as Simone Beauvoir and Judith Butler are often credited with discovering the performativity of the self. While gender performativity is a term created by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Fauset begins exploring this idea long before Butler coins a term for it. Fauset focuses on the performance of race and presents racial passing as an illustration of the idea that "race" is not an essence, but a performance. Fauset's explicit presentation of the performance of race and passing in *Plum Bun* demonstrates the circulation of these complex ideas about identity outside mainstream discourse. Ahead of her time and the academics, Fauset presents the idea of "performativity" in *Plum Bun*. Butler suggests that identity is developed through repetition. And that this repetition is a part of a cyclical reinforcement of identity. As Butler sees it, "This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation." (Butler 526) Fauset seems to recognize that the act of passing is more complex than Butler suggests, if only in the way it affects the minds and psyches of the individuals who go through it. An examination of Butler's performativity shows that:

"Butler's definition of performativity emphasizes the surface nature of identity "to dramatize, to reproduce.... Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself can have double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'" (521-22).

Essentially, Butler defines gender as an identity act that is not tied to any deeper self. By contrast, Fauset seems to recognize that identity performance has meaningful consequences for the individual. Butler also uses the word “public” to emphasize the idea of performance (it is something shaped and understood in a *public* context). Fauset definitely demonstrates that, but she also seems to delve into the private aspects, or private costs of passing rituals. For example, Fauset explores the price of cutting oneself off from family members through the experience of her central character, Angela. Angela’s performance has far-reaching consequences; that sort of isolation- isolation from family leaves scars. Fauset captures that layered depth in the phenomenon of passing, which exceeds Butler’s grasp and her language. Fauset is also able to capture the mental, physical, and psychological impact that racial exile can cause.

*Plum Bun* tells the story of a young, Angela Murray, who decides that the only way she will become empowered and gain social, racial, and economic agency is by the performance of racial passing. From the onset of the novel, Fauset lays out Angela’s private desires and fantasies:

“Somewhere in the world were paths which lead to broad thoroughfares, large, bright houses, delicate niceties of existence. Those paths Angela meant to find and frequent.”  
(12)

Angela is not satisfied with the current condition of her life and does not have any intention, nor desire to model her parent’s status in life , and rejects her parents’ condition, particularly her mother’s. To Angela, her mother wasted her pale skin and settled for the constructed notions of race, which in Angela’s mind, is not logical nor

productive. Passing granted her access to power and prestige, and magnified her mother's importance.

She is introduced to the art of passing as a young child, by her mother: "It was from her mother that Angela learned the possibilities for joy and freedom which seemed to her inherent in mere whiteness." (14) This introduction to passing allows Angela, if you will, a rabbit hole, by which to escape and forge a new existence for herself. Angela associates passing with the magic found in myths and fairytales.

"Colour or rather the lack of it seemed to [Angela] the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming... black or white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods. ...she began thanking Fate for the... the heritage of her mother's fair skin." (14)

As a child, she witnesses how the world opens up to her and her mother because they are able to perform whiteness, merely by keeping silent and dressing in their best clothes, while slightly adjusting their mannerisms and expectations for respect. From passing, Angela concluded that "the good things in life are unevenly distributed; merit is not always rewarded; hard labour does not necessarily entail adequate recompense." (12) In her costume of whiteness, Angela is able to experience a power that she has never experienced as a black girl, and that elevates her above the status of a black woman in the United States. This ability to command access is intoxicating to Angela, and she looks forward to these adventures with her mother. So much so that, "Little Angela Murray, hurr[ied] through Saturday morning's scrubbing of steps in order that she might have her bath at one and be with her mother on Chestnut Street..."(17) Here, Angela engages in a

Cinderella-like activity in order to gain the promised domestic bliss of celebrated white fairy-tale heroine. (see Appendix B).

Passing triggers Angela's curiosity about why her mother would sacrifice access and an elevated status to be with her father, who does not have the proper "costume" to gain access to power and respect. As a child, Angela never wavers in her belief that whiteness equates to freedom, power, and respect. Even though as a child, she experiences a painful comedown as a result of her silence about her race when she enters into a friendship with a white classmate and decides not to tell her that she is black, Angela is still convinced that whiteness will give her access to the trinkets of white privilege. This early experience seems to enforce to her that it is important to guard your character or maintain your performance. Fauset crystallizes how the "stain" of blackness tarnishes and destroys friendships.

"Coloured! Angela, you never told me that you were coloured!"

"Tell you that I was coloured! Why of course I never told you that I was coloured. Why should I?" (38)

Angela's tone suggests disbelief that Mary Hastings is unable to put aside her feelings about race, and allow Angela to continue with the fantasy of her racial performance (silent passing)<sup>57</sup>. Angela convinced herself that Mary was a willing participant in the fantasy, and suddenly decides to disrupt the illusion. Here, Angela embodies, in terms of race, what Butler identifies as the instability of gender - "...gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity

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<sup>57</sup>Silent passing refers to the individual maintaining their silence about their race, with the conscious understanding that if they perform the role of whiteness, access will be granted.

tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”

(519) In effect, Butler’s point about gender can easily be applied to the racial dynamic that Fauset constructs for Angela. For months, Angela has perfected or mirrored behaviors that Mary identified or attributed to whiteness, and therefore, Angela’s reaction to Mary’s questions seems justified. As for Butler, she goes on to assert:

“...if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane and social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe, and to perform in the mode of belief.” (520)

We see this in terms of Angela and her commitment to whiteness when she is confronted about her race, throughout the text and surprised that her identity is questioned. Angela’s performance of whiteness is disrupted when she attends art school and ” had not mentioned the fact of her Negro strain...” (63) And yet again, the accusation:

“But, Miss Murray, you never told me that you were coloured.”  
 “Coloured! Of course I never told you that I was coloured.  
 Why should I?”(73)

As if she were reading from a script, Angela’s response to Mr. Shields, her art teacher, is identical to the response she gave to Mary Hastings in grade school. It never occurs to Angela that Mr. Shields feels betrayed because he assumed Angela was white and based on that assumption, he extended white privilege opportunities to her. The latter experience, however, causes Angela to really interrogate the morality of passing, and consider what it takes to cross over, if you will. By “cross over”, I mean she considers what is necessary to pass without being exposed. However, in truth, she does not fully



understand the consequences of passing until she moves to New York and is forced to ignore her sister during an encounter at the train station, for fear of being exposed. That scene at the train is strikingly similar to an earlier incident in Angela's childhood, when her mother ignored her husband and daughter in the street. The major difference being, unlike her mother, Angela is not haunted by her behavior, and she is passing for gain, not for play.

### **Ritual and Loss**

Fauset shows that there is a ritual involved in racial passing, and that ritual involves more than just a costume change (white/mulatto skin); not to mention the ritual is constantly being performed. In his chapter, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1964), Victor Turner indicates that "a transition has a different cultural properties."<sup>(47)</sup> This transition identified by Turner can be found in the ritual of passing, which in essence has its own rites of passage. I am using rites of passing in the sense that passing marks a stage in the life of the character and progressing through that stage involves accomplishing certain things. One can see the process of the passing ritual at work in the figure of John in Chesnut's, *House Behind the Cedars*. He is living away from home as a displaced white man who marries into the southern aristocracy, before he decides to send for his sister to come and live with him. However, he first goes back to his home-town, to observe her (and, so to speak, determine if she can fit the role). John fully understands that in order to prevent speculation or uncertainty, that passing requires more than just white skin. Upon finding his sister, Rena is suitable to assume the role of

whiteness, he sends her to school<sup>58</sup>, and provides her with a back-story. In this example, it is evident that the ritual of passing involves middle-class rites: clothing, education, land ownership, and some semblance of white patriarchal support/sponsorship.<sup>59</sup> Passing in this sense is not just performance because it is an achievement – a reality. While race is performed, those aspects of passing are not an act. To be successful in the art of passing, the subject must make a few things happen. For example, a change in geography is critical, a name change allows for rebirth, and for women, irresistible beauty is key. It is equally important that there is a believable narrative family history. All of these factors are in evidence in texts such as Chesnutt's, *House Behind the Cedars* (1900), Azevedo's, *O Mulato* (1881), Stowe's, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) , Harper's, *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), and Fauset's, *Plum Bun*(1948). Additionally, one critical point they all share is that all familial connections are dissolved and the subject must take on the appearance of an orphan in the world. This narrative of abandonment that accompanies the mulatto character suggests that the mulatto is entrapped in tragic circumstances.

Angela begins to understand that in order for her performance to be effective she must change her home-base location. She must be re-rooted, and planted elsewhere, in order to sprout anew. Again, it is important to understand that geography is key to racial passing. This is present in the majority of passing novels, if not all. However, this approach expands the scope of passing narratives in that it shows how slavery has shaped the ideology of race, and made it difficult for the descendants of slaves to claim

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<sup>58</sup>It is more like a finishing school, where she is to learn how to “act white”, properly. More evidence that race is performed.

<sup>59</sup>Angela experiences the ritual of passing while with her mother as a young girl when they passed her father and sister on the street, and refused to greet them.

citizenship. Angela and her mother leave their original neighborhood or racially designated environment to perform whiteness effectively; when it is her own turn, in order not to be derailed, discovered, unveiled, she knows from experience that she must relocate. This is a lesson she learned during her ritual passing episodes in Philadelphia. Fauset further pushes the notion of race as performance through Anthony Cross. With the disclosure, and Anthony, "...His name is Anthony Cruz-...he changed it to Cross because no American would ever pronounce the Z right, and he didn't want to be taken for a widow's cruse". (95)<sup>60</sup> This changing of the name also magnifies the ritual process of passing as a crossing over, and shows how racial passing creates a new type of being, if you will.

Anthony is presented as a transplant from Brazil, and initially is a love interest of Angela. Not only does Angela assume he is white, but so does the reader. Much like Angela, he also changes his geography, further establishing that a change of geography is critical to the performance of passing. We see this in *O Mulato* as well. It is not until Raimundo returns to his place of origin//birth, that the environment ceases to support his whiteness, and thus reveals that he is non-white. The change of scenery allows for racial shift and anonymity. In *Plum Bun*, Angela Murray moves from Pennsylvania to New York city, where she becomes Angèle Mory; not only does she change her racial classification, she changes her ancestral connection as well, by changing her name. In

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<sup>60</sup>These name modifications anticipate Butler's idea of repetition with variations. These slight changes do not move the characters into a new place (intellectually, emotionally). Instead, these changes are part of being trapped in a cycle.

many ways, this transformation mirrors the reconstruction of the Africans identity to slave.

As Angela equates freedom and whiteness, Fauset uses passing as an illustration of racial performance, and develops it throughout the novel. As Fauset notes: “Angela’s mother employed her colour very much as she practiced certain winning usages of smile and voice to obtain indulgencies which meant much to her and which took nothing from anyone else.” (15) In a more daring move, Fauset implies that Mrs. Murray understands passing as, in fact, natural, so it does not need to be announced in a culture that takes its racial cues from behavior and appearance. She has Mrs. Murray muse: “...I was at my old game of play acting again to-day,...Passing you know...”(19) One can argue that this invites the question of whether this awareness of the performance of race does not go even beyond the sort of performativity that Butler discusses. Butler implies that the performance of identity is largely subconscious. By contrast, Mrs. Murray’s game of passing is articulated as a conscious manipulation of social expectations. As for Angela, who seems to internalize mainstream ideas about race, she eventually decides to end her performance of whiteness. Notably, while she makes the decision to pass privately, she makes a public spectacle when she decides to inform the news media that she is not white. Further showing, the performance of racial identity is a deliberate, learned act for the interracial individual in Fauset’s novel. In effect- and this is one of the more important conclusions one can draw from Fauset’s treatment of the subject--, the ease with which these characters shift from one racial performance to another undermines the assumptions behind American racial hierarchies. As Stephen Tally points out in *Mulatto*

*America*, the assumed ability to visually distinguish an individual's racial identity was essential for the implementation of racial discrimination to work effectively. The unsettling realization of fluid racial boundaries continuously challenge the validity racial identity and the parameters for whiteness.

### **Reconstruction of the Fairy Tale**

Angela is in search of a fairy tale that ends with– “And so they lived happily ever after, just like your father and me” (33), the ending with which her mother concluded the stories she read her and her sister, Virginia. However, Angela has no desire to mirror her parents' specific “happily ever after”; she longs for the “happily ever after” that is draped in whiteness. “The stories which Junius and Mattie told...were merely a description of a life which [Angela] at any cost would avoid living.”(12) Angela soon comes to realize that the fairytale ending might be possible in the fairytale landscape of the white middle class, but is not attainable for people of color, and is actually limited for white women as well, within the transnational American back drop, from the American dream as well as for its counterparts in the rest of the Americas. Angela's American dream continues to be disrupted throughout the text. Ironically, while the lure of the fairytale was the promise of marrying Prince Charming, and settling into a life of bliss, as a white woman, Angela did not find bliss. She was subjected to the limitations placed upon her by race, gender, and economics. In fact, Angela found more restrictions being a white woman than she had encountered as a black woman.

In effect, Angela becomes a prisoner to her own performance of whiteness, and her sister ironically ends up with the happily- ever-after fairytale ending and the freedom and

protection that Angela is seeking. While the ending of Angela's story is uncertain; Angela's self-chosen whiteness controls her and she is unable to escape the restrictions placed on a woman, particularly a white woman. She is limited by her self-proclaimed whiteness, and finds herself virtually reduced to flesh without a voice; at least as far as Roger is concerned. Simply put, she is exoticized and her superhuman, black body, which allows her to pass as white, further entombs her. In *Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature* (2002), Carol E. Henderson argues that:

“...the [black] body has been viewed more or less as a conglomeration of social meanings, meaning that, in the end, mark this body as Other of 'bodiless' according to specific cultural and national mandates that objectify the [black] body so much that identity is formed in relation to the split between mind and body.” (Henderson 4)

For example, she cannot socialize freely with people outside of her restricted white circle without the permission of Roger, a wealthy spoiled white man, who Angele believes will marry her and be her protector. In the incident in which she is forced to ignore her sister at the train station, she does so because Roger controls her interactions (159). Although Angele had been looking forward to that day when she would meet up with her sister, the fear of being exposed was more important than “[w]aiting for her sister who was coloured and who showed it. And Roger hated Negroes. She was lost, ruined, unless she could get rid of him.” (157) At this point, it is more important for Angela to protect her chosen identity by not exposing herself, than to acknowledge her sister whom she leaves to find her way through New York City on her own. Angela's prior experiences with Roger taught her never to show empathy for the “coloured” race, and this is intensified with

behavior towards her own sister. Fauset uses this moment in the text to underscore the real price of passing. Angela not only denies her sister, but she abandons her and leaves her, not knowing if she is safe. Angela was trained by her mother to ignore her family, and this behavior seemed natural to her. However, unbeknownst to Angela, this behavior really tormented her mother, and she confesses to her husband: "...you and Virginia went by within arm's reach and we never spoke to you. I'm so ashamed." (19) Angela does not know about this exchange and therefore it seems natural for her to ignore her sister: she had done it before. Angela is very much committed to playing and living out her role as a white woman, and is therefore, not afraid of destroying or fracturing family relations or ties. This message permeates the entire narrative.

Unfortunately, if Angela had bothered to query her mother, she would have found that "...[that] white skin of hers had not saved her from occasional contumely and insult." (14) It is along this axis that Fauset aligns the challenges for white and black women. Particularly unmarried white women. Historically, black women were sexual targets, especially during slavery. There are countless narratives that recall sexual exploitation of slavery, one of the best-known and most dramatic being Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Holistically, slave narratives provide a central piece in the tapestry of constructing a literary history and a voice for displaced Africans in the Western hemisphere. Without a platform to construct their own identities, the psychological, physical, emotional abuse of slavery would have gone undocumented and left for someone other than the former slave to tell the story.

Nonetheless, Angela is unable to make this connection. And while Angela sought protection what she found in Roger was absolute exploitation. Roger continued through subtle and obvious behaviors and gestures to remind Angela that she, although with the appearance of a white woman, was not worthy to be shown in his circles, because she did not have the right socio-economic connections and stability. In other words, while she had white skin, talent, and other virtues, she did not have high social status<sup>61</sup>, and therefore would not meet the approval of his father. Eventually, Angela sees that all women can be targets of exploitation. And she realizes that in Julius, her father, Angela's mother had found protection, security, and happiness.

Fauset uses the reference to the fairy tale to connect race and gender. Arguably, she makes the case that there is no fairytale outcome for a woman, white or black, who minimizes her worth in order to live within the margins of conformity or maybe the limitations of fairytale expectations. Restriction causes frustration. Thus, her novel can be read as an intended alternative to the traditional fairy tale model, even if it still contains all the essential fairytale tropes - the hero, the damsel, the quest, obstacles, and villains, and in the end, the narrative itself is transformed.

Above all, Fauset subverts the image of the woman as needing to be rescued. She reimagines the damsel in this redefined tale, where the woman (damsel) must rescue herself, shedding norms found in the traditional format. Angela Murray initially appears more like a villain than the damsel who will be rescued and get her prince. However, as the author strips back the layers to Angela, you see a young woman who is tormented by

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<sup>61</sup> Roger measured Angela by her economic worth. And since she did not come from a well-known family lineage, she is reduced to nothingness to Roger, merely as a fling, a concubine.



questions of equality, and she goes on a journey to find fairness. As in the traditional heroic quest identified by Vladimir Propp<sup>62</sup>, Angela needs the right tools to complete her journey. While the plot is not as simple as that of a traditional fairytale, the concept is similar. In the case of Angela, the armor necessary is a new identity. Fauset also adds a new twist to the plot because in this adventure the heroine must experience several events before her quest is over. She must first experience rejection, which is what she finds in her relationship with Roger.

Fauset's conclusion or, alternative if you will to the fairytale called, 'The American Dream' is somewhat problematic. The heroine Angela finds closure abroad and not in the United States. Once again, as with Stowe's character, the novel ends with the mulattos (Angela and Anthony) seeking refuge in a country other than those of their births, in a country without a history of slavery. Does Fauset decide on this ending because she cannot imagine an interracial nation or is it because she embraces broader concepts about race and identity? Here at the conclusion of a novel about passing, you have the protagonist who forfeits everything she gained as a white woman in the U.S. to self-exile in France as a defector with a man who is somewhat without a country or a definitive racial identity. Ironic that the life Angela swore she did not want is the life she shaped for herself as a white woman.

The mulatto reaffirms or affirms that race is an illusion, and we are all under its spell. Once the spell of race is broken, Angela is freed from the need to perform and that releases her. It is at this point that she is able to truly gain the freedom she has been

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<sup>62</sup>Propp identifies 31 functions of the hero's journey, and the acquisition of a magical object or agent prepared the hero for the journey.

seeking all along. Virginia can be seen as her looking glass. She presents the contrast to Angela's race intoxication or self- imprisonment because she does not feel trapped by her so-called blackness. In fact, throughout the novel, she is shown happily embracing her cultural heritage and making attempts to participate in the upheval of her community. Angela looks to her sister and wishes or longs for the relationships and freedom she sees in her sister's life. It is because of Virginia's happiness that Angele actively seeks her out in New York City, even after initially rejecting her. Yet the question remains of whether the spell of race is limited to the mulatto, or is the spell of race prominent in Brazil and the United States because of their extensive shared history of slavery? After all, it seems that Angela and Anthony find happiness in Europe, outside the chalk-lines of race that have been etched in the U.S. and Brazil.

It appears that the real villain<sup>63</sup> in Fauset's re-imagined fairytale is the false construction of "race"<sup>64</sup>. Race is discussed cross-culturally throughout the novel. "It was from her mother that Angela learned the possibilities for joy and freedom which seemed to her inherent in mere whiteness."(14) "Angela had no high purpose in life; unlike her sister Virginia, who meant someday to invent a marvelous method for teaching the pianoforte, Angela felt no impulse to discover, or to perfect." (13) It is race that sends Angela on her quest for freedom. It is race that prevents Miss Powell, the only visible black student in Angela's art class, from being allowed to travel to France on the ship

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<sup>63</sup>Fauset's villain is a system, not an individual, as in fairy tales where a curse holds the hero/people captive but the evil witch is not really present. And yet people like Virginia do not seem concerned with race. Is race a curse that only exists for those who embrace it?

<sup>64</sup>Race in this context refers to the constructed definition that limits and confines a significant proportion of the population.

because no one wants to room with her, and it is race that has displaced Anthony and traumatized him as a young child (141). And while arguably, race is not real, the concept of race in Brazil and the United States operates like a spell. The moment people realized Angela was not white that reality caused a shift in how she was perceived and treated.

Passing allows Angeles access to diverse and unrestricted conversations about race as Fauset uses passing as an instrument to bridge the gap between transnational ideologies about race. Notably, while Angela Murray avoided conversations about race while living in Philadelphia, as a white woman in New York, she is drawn into discussions and situations that force her to reconsider her original position about race. In Philadelphia, Angela resented being lured into discussions about race – “Oh don’t drag me into your old discussion...I’m sick of this whole race business...No, I don’t think *being coloured in America*<sup>65</sup> is a beautiful thing. I think it’s nothing short of a curse”. (53) However, while in New York, Angela struggles to avoid empathy for black people who are confronted with discrimination, and initially to alleviate her discomfort, she tells herself that once she marries Roger she will donate money to uplift black people, but this sentiment does not alleviate her torment. As a white woman, Angela feels the discomforts associated with racial discrimination.

In *Plum Bun*, the mulatto’s body becomes the site for critiquing the American dream for everyone. The mulatto bodies of Angela, her mother, and Anthony are used as modulations of a racial performance in which the white patriarchal power structure is implicated. Fauset, just like Chesnutt, Harper, Azevedo, Baretto, and other writers show

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<sup>65</sup>Emphasis mine.

how mulatto bodies are destined to disrupt, in particular, modernity's racial imagination. The struggle in the American Dream was over the power to define identity and shape the racial, social, cultural, and gender discourse. Fauset juxtaposes Angela Murray to Angele Morey to tease out these similarities. Intentionally, Fauset does not replicate the messages about the mulatto, yet, she preserves the voices of Chesnutt, Harper, Azevedo, Baretto and Stowe, while expanding the focus to Brazil.

This project argues that Harper, Chesnutt, Azevedo, made a contribution to the discourse on race in the Americas. Angela undertakes a journey that is a rite of passage. The mulattos' struggles are an allegory of a nation in transition. Fauset teaches an important lesson:

that Angela's use of passing becomes, as Linda Schlossberg establishes it:

... not simply about erasure or denial, as it is often castigated but rather, about the creation and establishment of an alternative set of narratives. It becomes a way of creating new stories out of useable ones, or from personal narratives seemingly in conflict with other aspects of self representation (Schlossberg 4)

Raimundo internalizes that essential idea of race. Angela clearly understands that she performs her identity. Hence, her response to Mary Hastings. Angela recognizes that race has no meaning: I do not have to identify a certain way, as long as I can perform. What is implicit in the performance of race is that all of us are performing. Angela is so caught up in the performance, that the performance overtakes her.

### **Bridging Race, Gender and The Fairy Tale American Dream**

While Butler is talking about gender, I suggest race is linked to gender and I do not think the two can be discussed in isolation; particularly, when we are considering

equality, freedom –democratic foundational artifacts. Paulette, Angela’s friend from art school does not withhold her feelings about her impression of Dr. Van Meier, following his lecture in Harlem:

“He isn’t a man, he’s a god,...I wonder man; he is a man, just that; colour, race, conditions his case are pure accidents, he over-rides them all with his ego. Made me feel like a worm too; I gave him my prettiest smile, grand white lady making up to an ‘exceptional Negro’ and he simply didn’t see me...I wonder what he would be like alone.” (220)

While typically the virtue of the white woman is preserved, this character operates outside the boundaries of white virtue and attempts to entice a black man, Dr. Van Meir. Paulette is convinced that Dr. Van Meir would operate differently if in another setting. She implies that he prefers whiteness over blackness, and to prove or to test her (Paulette’s) Paulette goes to his office. She tells Angela:

“Of course I couldn’t let matters rest like that so I sat down and began talking to him, nothing much you know, just telling him how wonderful he was and letting him see that I’d be glad know him better. You should have seen him looking at me and not saying a word.”(222)

Paulette concludes and tells Angela that Van Meier called for his secretary and replied: “Take here away.” (222) While Fauset uses this moment in the text to attempt to bridge the gap between race and gender, she also touches upon the myth of black men and their desire for white women. Showing Dr. Van Meir as a champion for black people and advancing the idea that black is beautiful in monumental and noteworthy, in a novel about passing. During this particular period, there was a different standard of behavior for white women and black women. So, it is okay for a black woman to work outside the

home; in fact, it is necessary; and yet you see Angele trying to position herself so that she can follow the white norm. At some point, the middle-class white woman is fighting in many ways to be liberated, much like the black woman by working outside the home and establish her sexual prowess.

Butler argues:

“As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation.” (521)

Evident from her experiences with her mother, she continues to default to whiteness as a means of survival. For Angela, whiteness commands attention and respect, therefore performing whiteness diminishes her blackness.

Angela dramatizes whiteness which in the Americas equates to freedom. So, her behavior – that is, - is the catalyst of her desire. And her desire is for freedom. That is the sole purpose. “Passing” appeared during the course of slavery - why do African Americans pass? To escape slavery. Often their disguise was not only a disguise of race, but also of gender. So this performance of passing is a performance of survival, which makes passing a necessity. Fauset challenges the root of passing and her approach is from the lens of passing as a life decision - because I want to live this way to gain access to privilege and power. And in many ways, she does not see an immediate alternative other than to flee the country. However, Fauset does offer an alternative ending for people who cannot pass (darker-skinned African Americans). She allows Virginia to stay in her community, where she is happy. In this vein, Fauset reiterates Harper’s

commitment to building a strong community of color. A way to find this peace is in your community and the things you desire in white communities, you should try to create in your own. She is also able to show the flaws within white society and expose the fiction of the American dream, not only for African- Americans, but women as well.

It is the regret that causes her to disrupt her performance and profess she is a Negro. She abandons all desire to be white, and seeks sanctuary in France, which at some point becomes the sanctuary for male writers as well. She rejects the promise of the so-called American dream because from her experiences, that dream is reserved for the Ragged Dicks'- of the world<sup>66</sup>. Fauset shows that the conscious or unconscious decision to perform whiteness is destructive. There is a constant desire to break the performance. A good example of this can be seen in Chesnutt's John in *House Behind the Cedars*, who ventures back home after being away for ten years, evidence that there is a longing to be free of the performance. Not only does she disrupt the fairy tale, she deconstructs the myth of the mulatto woman and passing. Angela's mother narrative is the embodiment of this argument.

Chesnutt shows that the American dream is an option for men, and men only, whereas women only have the Cinderella paradigm, which is to marry up. Fauset challenges this paradigm when Angela decides to reject and abandon the things that she sought most –the American dream; and seeks sanctuary in France, where for Angela, race will not be a barrier.

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<sup>66</sup>Horatio Alger's novels claim this dream for all the Ragged Dicks of the world: white males.

Fauset reshapes blackness to magnify beauty. She does this in several ways. She positions Virginia as confident, capable, and desirable. And then she presents Dr. Moire in a light where he is desired by the white women in the text. Not only does she present him apart from whiteness, she positions him as untouchable by whiteness, which is a different strategy. So, not only does she restructure the fairytale, she paints or weaves a tale for the underclass, the Negro who cannot pass and learns to navigate within the restricted society.

“[Y]ou’re disclaiming your black blood in a country where it is an inconvenience, -oh! There’s not a doubt about that. You may be proud of it, you may be perfectly satisfied with it-I am-but it certainly can shut you out of things. So why shouldn’t you disclaim a living manifestation of that blood?” (171)

Even Roger, Angela’s elite love interest who is clearly anti-black, is eager to join Angela to hear the scholar, Dr. Van Meier, an African American scholar: “Well, I suppose it won’t rub off. I’ve heard of him. They say he really has brains. I’ve never seen a nigger with any yet; so this bids fair to be interesting.”(216) It appears that all the white people Angela has encountered as she passes are drawn to Dr. Van Meier and his message about afro-centric values, and elevating the race – race pride. Basically, you have a white person who is drawn to a man who is promoting unity in the black community and the beauty of blackness; this message is a strong contrast to what the dominant message emanates throughout the society. Fauset is offering this alternate ending, and the question presented is whether to pass, or not to pass. If you choose to pass then there is a ritual involved, and Fauset outlines the ritual involved in passing. She also outlines the ritual involved in not passing. In this context, ritual goes beyond the performance, which



is just surface. Fauset is showing identity is surface but the things you need to do to achieve this identity or that identity affects. Angela is scarred by having to ignore her sister. That emotional scar is not just surface.

### **The Harlem Renaissance and Performative Race**

Fauset's exploration of the performative nature of race fits within the context of the Harlem Renaissance. Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask"(1896), addresses the performance of African-American identity directly:

#### **We Wear the Mask**

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, -  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

-Paul Laurence Dunbar

Dunbar's reference to the world's unreal dream suggests that African Americans must wear a make to fit into (or live outside of) the American Dream constructed for white Americans. The mask becomes a refrain in the spirituals, the folktales, and even lullabies of African Americans. The notion of mask wearing was incorporated by early writers, such as Phillis Wheatley as well as in the slave narratives of the nineteenth century. The

recurring mask motif in African American art suggests a strong, coherent awareness that the Negro image has always been manipulated to fit the situation. During the Harlem Renaissance, the mask motif itself is decoded and deconstructed.

The performance of wearing masks is not a new concept to the Negro; mastering the art of wearing mask has been instrumental for the survival of black people during and beyond slavery. Since the Negroes deportation to the Western Hemisphere it seems that he has been forced to assume some other form of identity. Initially, when stolen from African and brought to the Americas, the captured African was forced to reject his religion, culture, and name; but there are remnants of the Africans' past on the North American shore. Van Meier is symbolic of the clinging to things that were stolen. The Harlem Renaissance provided the landscape for the Negro to be re-crafted into the fabric of America. This so-called New Negro would have values that in many ways mirrored those of his white oppressor. The New Negro had no need to speak of a slave past.

Although scholars like Butler and Beauvoir seem to think that they have discovered something new about identity construction in the middle of the twentieth century, authors like Chesnut, Fauset, and Harper explore performative identity decades earlier. Thus, the work of later feminists becomes another facet of a white myth of superiority and isolation. The failure of later feminists to acknowledge the work of early scholars and artists demonstrates a lack of awareness.

*Plum Bun* generates new questions and ideas to consider about race as a fixture for national identity. Not only does Fauset show people of color in a positive light, she embraces the idea of a multi-cultural and racial nation. Again, Fauset allows the

characters in *Plum Bun* to blend racial ideas and ideologies in the “melting pot” – New York City. It is here that Angela learns to embrace or consider her possibilities in the broader world as a black woman. Unlike before where we see in Stowe this endless paranoia about mixed race people attempting to mislead and virtually ruin the nation. As stated earlier, Fauset complicates and upsets the standard trope of passing. She does this by redefining the concept of ultra and she challenges the notion of the American dream and shows that it is revered for white women. This discussion in contrast truly embraces the concept of a harmonious multicultural nation.

## CONCLUSION - "THE MULATTO: REFASHIONING RACE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY NOVEL"

These were not really my creations, they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any reflection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use-I had certainly been unfitted for the jungle or the tribe. I would have to appropriate these white centuries, I would have to make them mine-I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme-otherwise I would have no place in any scheme.

-James Baldwin

Nineteenth century writers in the U.S. and Brazil enlisted the mulatto character to foster a discussion about race relations in the U.S. and Brazil, beyond slavery. However, through the circulation of these narratives the mulatto is a transnational figure that traveled the globe, generating dialogue about national constructions of racial identity, national identity, and racial slavery. Historically, mixed race individuals became central to the abolition movement because their existence touched on fears about enslaving mirror images of white people. In *Mulatto America: At the Crossroads of Black and White* (2003), Stepan Talty tells the story of Henry Ward Beecher, an advocate against slavery who went to great lengths to argue for the freedom of the Edmondson Sisters, two slave girls who looked white. According to Talty, Beecher appealed to the auctioneers' Christian soul, and spoke about the need to protect the virtue of these women (5). Throughout the course of slavery, it is well documented that the slave was looked upon as soulless. In *White Christianity is Fraudulent*, Robinson Milwood notes: "The Anglican Church presented three plans in support of the transatlantic chattel slave trade in Africans.... The Anglican Church categorically stated that Africans were not a part of

humanity... soul-less, pagans..." (2). Additionally, in *Veiled and Silenced* by Alvin Schmidt, Schmidt makes the same claim about black people being seen as soulless (31). In this instance of the white- looking girls being auctioned, Beecher Stowe does not look upon the Edmondson Sisters (slaves) as property, but as helpless, defenseless, creatures in need of rescue. The almost-white slaves needed protection and freedom, according to him. He made no mention of the Edmondson sisters' heathen soul, indicating this was not about salvation but about racial sameness coupled with compassion for these sisters. So much so that some of the language used by Beecher give the impression that he considered these women to be white, and that this was the basis for his appeal.

While Stowe used *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a platform, to situate or dramatize the argument against slavery, like the Reverend Beecher who appeals to white auctioneers (fellow white brethren), Stowe also appealed to the sentiments of her white readers with the dainty construction of her mulatto characters. The very appearance and demeanor of Eliza embody whiteness defined by visual attributes:

"As she was also so white as not to be known as of colored lineage, without a critical survey, and her child was white also, it was much easier for her to pass on unsuspected"  
(Stowe 58)

Eliza's very presence demands sympathy from the reader because of her likeness to whiteness. She is described by qualities and attributes of a virtuous woman, a position preserved in the current literature and society for white women: it turns out that saying she can "*pass on unsuspected*" is not as innocent a way of putting it as would seem.

As the country grappled with the language to affix whiteness to a national identity, the reality of the mulatto complicated these efforts. In fact, the U.S. census created a simple

binary between categories of Free Whites and Slaves from 1790-1840. It was not until the 1850s the U.S. census first incorporates the category “mulatto,” acknowledging racial diversity within the nation. The emergence of the mulatto in literature and law further jeopardized the ability of the U.S. (or slave-holding nations) to form an unambiguous national identity, given national identity at this point was determined by race, and racial categories were limited to white or black. Since the mulatto did not fit perfectly into either category, this presented a problem for a purified national identity. In Stowe’s narrative, there was always the option of exporting the mulatto, but for other writers, the mulatto’s fate was open-ended. Seemingly, the way to eradicate the problem of the mulatto was to relocate, confine, destroy, or to eliminate him. The constant struggle to define national identity demanded more of the mulatto presence in print. And there is a gradual shift in the development of the character evolving from protected to persecuted.

For some writers, specifically, Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, Fauset and Harper, the mulatto character functions as a catalyst to forge a multi-structured conversation about race, as well as challenge the validity of racial categories and definitions within the two developing nations, post-slavery. Stowe’s perception of the mulatto not only dominated and spanned the globe, but Stowe made the mulatto an international figure. The film *The King and I* illustrate the global influence of Stowe’s text. However, it also demonstrates the fluid transformation of Stowe’s racial constructions outside the United States. In *The King and I* (about an American teacher named Anna who becomes the governess for the King of Siam’s children during the 1860s), the king’s newest wife dramatizes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to protest her unwilling marriage to the king. This shows how the

international circulation of interracial characters can be completely separated from the idea of race as defined in the U.S., when they are seen simply as bending and breaking those socially constructed American boundaries. *Transatlantic Stowe* studies instances in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is used or studied outside the U.Ss (for instance, the use of UTC dramas in Asia to protest the government).

In “Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness,” Harryette Mullen concludes, “Passing on an individual level models the cultural production of whiteness as a means of nation building and as a key to national identity “ (72). Nineteenth-century authors, Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, Fauset, and Harper use the mulatto to challenge the notion of (white) purity that both the U.S. and Brazil were trying to force. These narratives of the mulatto which involves some form of passing, whether the character involved does it knowingly or unknowingly, continue to echo the same conclusion – that race is a social construction imposed on the marginalized to reinforce their inferiority. And even though slavery no longer exists, these artificial<sup>67</sup> race categories determine not only privilege, but protection as well. Mullen goes on to add that “America’s ethnic minorities have remembered what other Americans have chosen to forget” (72). The mulatto was a constant reminder of how racial identities blended during and after slavery.

The continuation of the preoccupation with the mulatto by the nineteenth century writers was a response to the displacement and anxiety felt in both the US and Brazil by the marginalized population of disenfranchised blacks, the poor, and the economically

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<sup>67</sup>Dr. Wasserman agrees with the concept of artificial but points out that “on the other hand, the discriminating practices use physical markers – the problem is that it turns out the markers are not entirely reliable; the real problem is that their unreliability does not convince people that there is not real way of making sure who is what.”

suppressed. Mullen notes that “passing is not so much a willful deception or duplicity as it is an attempt to move from the margin to the center of American identity.” (77) Yet an American identity is in the end, a national identity that is obsessed with race. However, the mulatto straddles the categories of whiteness and blackness, making it difficult to classify people as in a rigid racial hierarchy. As a consequence, the mulatto continued to stretch the category of race beyond its duality of white and black, which would not only modulate the discourse about race, but broaden that discussion to include the fuller parameters to determine a national identity.

New narratives were created by American, Brazilian, as well as Cuban<sup>68</sup> authors scrutinizing the attitudes and behaviors that produced the mulatto within the cultural imagination. These authors, specifically, Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, Fauset, and Harper constructed narratives that implicitly raised the question of who is allowed to be a citizen and how the answer affects the question of national identity. Implicitly woven into the early American fabric, one can argue, is that the claim of citizen was reserved for the white, landowning patriarch, thus excluding anyone who did not fit this description. And while this description also excluded white women, they still had access and certain advantages based on their whiteness and their familial connections. The passing trope, if you will, compounded all of the issues surrounding race and national identity; which ultimately are woven into the notion of the American Dream, and of Brazil as a racial utopia.

I started the dissertation with Crèvecoeur’s pondering the definition of citizenship and

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<sup>68</sup>Cuban authors did it too but a discussion of their approach lies outside the scope of the present study.



national identity. Although Stowe's mulatto characters are well-known, she was not the first to capture the complexity nor the plight of the mulatto. However, though Stowe, Crèvecoeur, and others contributed signally to the discussion of racial and national identity matters. The most compelling depictions of the mulatto can be found in slave narratives. The impact of the slave narrative on the literary canon – once it enters the discussion - it is significant because it gives voice to the subject (i.e., the slave), that had been relegated to the background. Slave narratives provide a central thread in the tapestry of constructing a literary history and a voice for displaced Africans in the Western hemisphere. The slave narrative also lends evidence to the heightened harassment of the mulatto slave, especially the slave woman, as it appears so clearly in Harriet Jacob's, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), in her account of hiding in a tiny crawl space in the attic to escape the sexual aggressions of her master. In particular, the slave narrative provides an accurate picture of attitudes towards the slave, and shows the difference in the treatment of black and mulatto slaves. The *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), was widely read, and much like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was read widely and discussed. Douglass opens his narrative disclosing his whispered heritage, while emphasizing how little the slave knows about himself:

“My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father; but the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me...that the master was my father, may or may not be true;...the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mother,...the slaveholder, in cases, not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father” (2)

Douglass shows that the slave is denied basic information about his parents; in particular about the father. And, most importantly, as a mulatto, Douglass shows that the mulatto is denied the right to claim white privilege because the slave child takes on the status of the mother. This claim is further evidenced in the mulattos' identity being shrouded in secrecy. Throughout the narratives about the mulatto, there is always a question of identity, posed by both the society and the mulatto. Douglass continues:

“...[S]uch slaves invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others. They are, in the first place, a constant offence to their mistress. She is ever disposed to find fault with them; they can seldom do anything to please her; she is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, especially when she suspects her husband of showing to his mulatto children favors which he withholds from his black slaves. The master is frequently compelled to sell this class of his, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife;...” (3)

Douglass confirms in his narrative that the mulatto was a point of discontent not only for the mistress, but the master as well. The mulatto is forced to exist between two hostile forces.

This duality of master and father, child and slave, which Douglass speaks of is invoked throughout the nineteenth and all the way into the twenty-first centuries, and I would argue prior to the nineteenth century. Most famously, it underlies DuBois', theory of double consciousness, as an integral component of the complexity of race and citizenship. Double consciousness refers to living with two identities. DuBois argues that:

“the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world

which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

Indeed the mulatto has occupied dual functions in both fiction and reality throughout.

In his historic speech, “the Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro”, Douglass exposes the ‘fictions’ of the nation, while highlighting the duality of black people in the landscape of the United States. And while Douglass is speaking about the United States, the concepts or the accusations can be applied to both the United States and Brazil. Douglass raises the question mid-way in his speech:

“Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?”

Douglass’s words are meticulous and purposeful. He is careful to highlight the history and the principles guiding the building of a new nation, the United States. He deeply probes the concepts and ideas of the new nation. His speech reflects his optimism about the potential of the framework of the nation, yet he is cautious about the future of black people within the nation. He uses the ceremonial event to raise the question about race and national identity, while making an appeal that the former should not determine the latter. He concludes that this was the initial concept of the founding fathers: to create a

nation of cohesion not division. And while this is the foundation of his argument, Douglass cannot imagine how to achieve it in practical terms.

The frustrations of the exclusion of the slave from the founding documents of the U.S. is also articulated in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), by George when he expresses to Mr. Wilson his understanding that he is excluded from the nation because he is identified as chattel and as a Mulatto<sup>69</sup>. George laments:

“My country again! Mr. Wilson, you have a country; but what country have I, or any one like me, born of slave mothers? What laws are there for us? We don't make them, -we don't consent to them,-we have nothing to do with them; all they do for us is to crush us, and keep us down. Haven't I heard your Fourth-of-July speeches? Don't you tell us all, once a year, that government derive their power from the consent of the governed? Can't a fellow *think*, that hears such things? Can't he put this and that together, and see what it comes to?” (Stowe 126).

George questions his ability to be accepted let alone integrated fairly in a society that excludes him from its foundational documents. George is determined to remove himself from a nation that excludes him. In this passage, Stowe is catering to the sentiments of the nation. In this sense, Stowe caters to the racist rhetoric of the nineteenth century, articulating the problem, while justifying how the Declaration is being implemented. She contributes further to racist stereotypes as she positions the mulatto as far superior morally, intellectually, and socially to the “pure” black slave.

Also participating in the rhetoric about the mulatto are nineteenth-century literary writers and scholars. I contend that Harper, Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, and Fauset

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<sup>69</sup>George suggests that he is excluded from the privileges of the discourse of this document, based on race.

expand these dualities of concepts. While the master shares the duality of master and father, the slave has the duality of African, and American. The mulatto character along with all non-white characters struggle with the duality of being both American and citizen.

Undoubtedly, citizenship and racial purity were guaranteed through the legal and social control of the elite, not to mention the rhetoric that was dominating the discussion of race, class, and citizenship. This question as well as many others seemed to have been dramatized, romanticized, and mythologized in the landscape of the literary imagination through the constructed narratives of the mulatto.

Similarly, these authors show that when the Mulatto attempts to align with the founding principles of their nation and claim ownership of white privilege they are punished. The blurred lines that define the place that the Mulatto occupies contradict the nation's foundational concept of national identity. In effect, national identity is primarily defined by the country's racial identity preference (or the country's embrace of whiteness). Hence, anyone outside of the boundaries of the legal definition of "white" is at odds with that construction of national identity, and is subject to punishment, often leading to death or exile.

In Azevedo's *O Mulato* (1881), Raimundo is unaware of his mixed heritage, but the moment it is revealed to him, he is immediately tormented and becomes sickened and instantly is reduced to nothingness. Immediately he is aware of the dangers of his relationship with his white cousin and subconsciously rejects all the privileges associated with whiteness and becomes frightened. This change in attitude is a literal

metamorphosis in the novel, and Raimundo is transformed and adopts the enforced behavior of a non-white person. This speaks to Azevedo's point that in Brazil, racial hierarchy is understood, even if not openly expressed. While the nation was able to rid itself of physical racial slavery, it could not rid itself of its attitude about race.

### **The Mulatto: Black and White --Ambiguous Nation**

Symbolically the mulatto championed the need for the decomposition of racial identities. If the mulatto, who represented a multicultural heritage could not claim national identity without prejudice, then how could black people? In spite of some mulattos' ability to blend there were too many institutional barriers to navigate and knock down. Nineteenth-century writers continued to use the mulatto to champion for the disenfranchised. The mulatto allowed writers to peel back the layers of the construction of racial identities. Just as Douglass calls attention to the muted voices of the oppressed in his Fourth of July address, and fills the gap in the American narrative, the continuous refashioning of the mulatto forces us to revisit our national fabric. In effect, even though slavery was abolished, the emancipated mulatto is inferior, dangerous, and needs to be monitored. Ponder the depth of the psychological quandary of the mulatto. Even if he had the ability to pass and participate in the privilege society, passing was not enough for him. The need to have the privilege of the privilege was just as important.

In appearance, the mulatto not only defied, but challenged the rules of whiteness and claimed the privileges that whiteness allowed. As the mulatto population grew and had to be constantly re-categorized, with terms such as Octoroon or Quadroon, it forced scientific pontifications about what was "true" whiteness. In "White Slaves: The

Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction” (1993), Nancy Bentley notes that:

“while U.S. law denied their existence- in legal terms Mulattoes were identical with blacks- white anxiety came from knowing what law and the social order would not recognize: that blood relations bound Africans and Europeans and subverted the idea of a natural boundary between black and white” (503, 504 ).

And even though in legal terms, the mulatto was virtually identified as non-white, the fear was still very real because the law could not enforce what it could not prove, and therefore it was important to protect white privilege. In short, the mulatto needed to be contained.

The question of the Mulatto was entangled in the arguments pertaining to slavery. In *The ‘Tragic Mulatta’ Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (2004), Raimon notes:

“...the implications of racial intermixture became inseparable at midcentury from debates over the future of slavery... the 1850 compromise and its component Fugitive Slave Act, suggests the degree to which confusion over the delineation and disposition of a new mixed-race American subject embodied national anxieties and sectional tensions about the fundamental racial composition of the burgeoning republic” (91).

Aesthetically the Mulatto not only defied, but challenged the rules of whiteness and claimed the privileges that whiteness allowed. As the mulatto population grew and had to be constantly re-categorized, into such as Octoroon or Quadroon, it forced scientific pontifications of what was “true” whiteness. In “White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction”, Bentley writes, “while U.S. law denied their existence- in legal terms Mulattoes were identical with blacks- white anxiety came from knowing what law

and the social order would not recognize: that blood relations bound Africans and Europeans and subverted the idea of a natural boundary between black and white” (Bentley).

Extreme measures were taken to contain the mulatto problem in the U.S. Dr. C.B. Davenport, was considered a “miscegenation expert”, and wrote a paper: “Race Crossing in Man” (1926) in which he claimed that man evolved to survive different climates and that racial hybrids have “conflicting instincts”. Interesting that Davenport also brings up conflict (like Douglass), however, Davenport projects that conflict onto interracial individuals (as if they were the *source* of conflict rather than *victims* of it). In 1927, Davenport was consulted by the Civic Protective Association about the marriage of a white man and a woman believed to be interracial. It seems Davenport could both prevent the marriage and have the woman sterilized (although it’s not quite clear). The apparent fear (and hate) motivating this sort of absolutely abhorrent (genocidal) behavior is linked – however tangentially – with the failure of the cultural imagination in fiction. Stowe fails to imagine a racially diverse nation with interracial individuals and people like Davenport follow that by trying to prevent interracial unions in the U.S. through things like forced sterilizations.

The question of the mulatto was entangled in the arguments pertaining to slavery. In the *The ‘Tragic Mulatta’ Revisted: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (2004), Raimon notes:

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over the delineation and disposition of a new mixed-race American subject embodied national anxieties and sectional tensions about the fundamental racial composition of the burgeoning republic” (Raimon 91).

Over time, the mulatto devolves from the position of beautiful to a monstrosity that would destroy the purity of whiteness. As West further notes, fiction addresses the problem:

The survival of the mulatto, especially in a thriving regenerating environment, would undermine prevailing presumptions that whiteness is clearly identifiable. The fictional death of the mulatto restores racial and social order: blacks remain confirmed outsiders, and white privilege and purity are protected from those who might falsely assume whiteness.” (West 5)

The post-slavery mulatto undermines the illusion that whiteness equated racial purity. The very root of the word mulatto implies that the birth of the mulatto was un-natural. It was a forced creation. This allows for the demystification of underrepresented groups, thereby presenting an opportunity to revisit works that had been overlooked in the genre.

There is no single grand narrative of the Americans (U.S. and Brazilian) experience, let alone any univocal experience, particularly in the case of the mulatto. Nineteenth century writers, Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, Faust, and Harper, collectively provide a critical framework that proposes demystification and deconstruction of the notions surrounding the mulatto character, and present an opportunity to revisit works that had been overlooked in the genre. The postmodernist strategy of challenging the “grand narrative” of the great American novel can provide a language to identify the complexities of the African American narrative within it and make evident that these texts were speaking many narratives that were not necessarily connected forging a

tapestry of metanarratives. It turns out African American literature has been functioning that way all along, even without the specific terms of postmodernism. There is no single grand narrative of the African American experience, let alone any experience, and the framework of postmodernism provides tools to execute the critical study and examination of these works to reflect such an argument. Unfortunately, it appears that in order for works by African American authors to gain critical recognition from the field of literature, such a term was necessary.

### **The Mulatto & the Metanarrative**

The mulatto character is a useful point of entry into the literary conversations about race. The critical and rhetorical practices around the figure of the mulatto destabilize identity, elevate the voice of the underrepresented and provide tools to interrogate racial constructions. In referring to the underrepresented, included are specifically women, colonized people, African Americans, Afro-Brazilians, and other groups who have been subjected to colonization. The way the mulatto narrative is re-purposed<sup>70</sup> by African-American and Brazilian writers, demand the rethinking of the metanarrative and expands the traditional and dominant stylistic voice informed by Anglo-American patriarchy. The debut of these earlier works has not been given the consideration extended to other works that construct a mulatto identity. Again, this allows for the demystification of the function of the mulatto in both nations, thereby presenting an opportunity to revisit work in which the “passing” trope had been overlooked. Re-purposing the functionality of the mulatto

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<sup>70</sup>The original narrative showed the mulatto as a helpless victim in a constant state of flux, in between realities. Additionally, the mulatto was limited to a tragic character attempting to pass. The repurpose mulatto shows that the mulatto narrative goes beyond passing.

character has triggered the excavation of past works that have been dismissed earlier and its role in expanding the critical discourse on race. Prior to this, the passing trope was recognized as catering to a white readership and elevating whiteness. It was not considered complicated in the critical sphere of academic discourse and literary criticism. Further noted by Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, “The dominance of the mulatto figure in Afro-American fiction during this period has too often been dismissed as politically unacceptable without a detailed analysis of its historical narrative function. Afro-American literary and cultural history needs to reconsider the frequent use of the mulatto and to ask what the mulatto enabled black authors to represent before we can understand any particular use of the figure.”(89) In *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*, M. Giulia Fabi asserts that:

”Critics have had difficulties in accounting for these ‘whitefaced’ novels as the founding texts of a distinctively African American novelistic tradition, especially because African American scholars have long been confronted with a white dominated academic establishment unwilling to recognize the literary value of black literature as a whole and mostly familiar with white literary stereotypes of the tragic mulatto as neither black nor white, an ill-fated in-between figure who was nevertheless somewhat “better” than blacks because supposedly genetically closer to whites. These critical difficulties in many cases have occasioned the summary scholarly disparagement or neglect of the early novels, which were accounted for as well-meaning but ultimately self-defeating attempts to revise the tragic mulatto motif that was so popular among white writers.”(2)

The mulatto character is a political and literary device for African American and Brazilian writers in the nineteenth century, although the function of the mulatto used by these writers has been reduced to passing.

The re-purposing of the mulatto character provides a new lens to identity the complexities of race and challenges the notion of the grand narrative in the great American novel. Re-examining the function of the mulatto character uncovers the importance of the passing mulatto trope and weaves a new tapestry of metanarratives showing that there is no single American racial experience and countering the flattening of this experience.

This newly re-purposed mulatto character would no longer permit the muting of the varied voices in the genealogy of the national narrative to be reduced to a single one, let alone be subsumed by white privilege. The mulatto characters presented in Barreto, Harper, Chesnutt, Fauset, and Azevedo demands the engagement of the present in the past they represent, as they explore the psychology of the mulatto character. These writers dismantle the tangled voices of the narratives that had been relegated to the background and moved them to the fore-front of critical discourse about race.

### **Shifts in National Perspectives about Race: Azevedo and Harper**

In both Brazil and the United States, the mulatto character reflects the complexities of race and national identity, pre and post-slavery. Particularly evident is how the mulatto shifts from the position of protected property to persecuted imposter. In Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, superior characteristics are reserved for the mulatto character. Even in the case of Cassy, who is sexually abused by Legree, Stowe attempts to restore dignity to her circumstances by allowing her to share her story with Tom in flashbacks. Stowe is unable to remedy the behavior of 'some' slave owners and is forced to reveal the sexual mistreatment of female slaves, in particularly, the mulatta. From her personal narrative,

Cassy is allowed to be seen as a victim, and not a sinful woman. Although she is presented as a slave, Stowe endows her with a dignity reserved typically for white women. Cassy, in her own story, validates her position from protected to persecuted.

With the same treatment used by Stowe, both Harper and Azevedo show that the initial concern for their protagonist was protection<sup>71</sup> and its gradual transition/shift to persecution and death. In both narratives, relocation is part of the plot strategy to protect the mulatto and the protagonists are relocated to avoid imminent danger from the Mistress. In each case, the protagonists are shielded from their racial ancestry and later ambushed with its reality. The initial reactions of the protagonists are similar in that both become ill once their racial history is unveiled, but this is where the similarities end.

After the initial shock, Harper's Minnie excitedly embraces her racial origin. In part it can be argued that the ease with which Minnie embraces her racial identity is possible because it is presented to her by a loving mother who resembles her, we see Harper grapples with the problem of discarding white privilege to the point of positioning Minnie's mother as heroic in the sacrifice she endured to protect her. As Minnie is recovering from an illness after discovering she is black, she identifies with her mother and relates her closure to a dream. A newly purposed Minnie awakens with the revelation: "Mother,'...It comes back to me like a dream. I have a faint recollection of having seen you before, but it is so long I can scarcely remember it. Tell me all about myself and how I came to leave you. I always thought there was some mystery about me, but I never knew what it was before, but now I understand it.'"(53)For Minnie, becoming

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<sup>71</sup>Protection was not just the authors' concern, but that of the characters who had the power to protect.

aware of her 'true' racial' self is a relief. Her feelings of discomfort and being displaced are assuaged when she becomes aware of her true identity. In a sense, she is 'rescued' by this unspoken truth regarding her identity, provided by her mother. In this light, Minnie's mother looks, or rather appears powerful. Her mother is able to do what the slave mother has been denied, and that is restore Minnie's identity. Unlike many literary slave mothers, she assumes a role that is generally reserved for the slave master, but in this moment she is able to give her daughter some type of identity closure <sup>72</sup>. Minnie is able to learn plainly and from her mother how she came to be without her. This intimate recollection nurtures her willingness to embrace her race.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Raimundo discovers his heritage through whispers, death stares, and in bits and pieces, and never has the opportunity to speak with his mother and learn of his actual history. The only contact he has as an adult with his mother is incomplete because she appears as a fleeing phantom shadow and does not speak. And even though Raimundo has spent his "...entire life, always far from his native land, amid all kinds of peoples and full of different impressions, he had ...never succeeded in arriving at a logical and satisfactory explanation of his origins." (59) The complete origins of Raimundo's life continued to torment him before and after his discovery.

Further complicating the mystery surrounding his family history, particularly the origins of his mother, Raimundo is socially and economically elevated in a world where

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<sup>72</sup> The argument surrounding the mulatto is often that they are caught in this in-between space. Identity closure suggests that they are no longer trapped in-between, and have accepted their racial typology.

he is unaware of his racial history and inherits that world's attitude that people of color are invisible and useless. That then applies to his mother, who he later finds was a former slave, and has lost her mind. Raimundo is not prepared for the reality of his mother, a "...skeletal ragged phantom. Dancing with a strange swaying movement, her scrawny arms...white and gumless teeth...eyes writhed convulsively in their deep sockets, and her skull seemed to poke angularly into her flesh."(199) The mother he imagines is:

"...Some lady, certainly beautiful, for she had been the cause of crimes; herself a criminal, out of love, driving his father to follies by kindling a fatal and romantic passion, full of dread and remorse! And from that secret and criminal life, from that adultery which had surely brought on his father's death, he had been born!" (198)

For Raimundo his birth was a fantastical, yet tragic love story. He romanticizes his origins, in contrast to Minnie's, Raimundo's discovery about his identity destroys his fantasy about his mother and collapses his perceived racial superiority, and he finds himself trapped within stereotypes constructed by the culture about non-white people. He questions his purpose, his education, and the point in all of his privileges, if he is reduced to an ex-slave. Complicating his reactions, even more, is hearing that his mother was alive and "...that poor lunatic at Sao Bras." (204) In spite of all his accomplishments, Raimundo is left fixated on having been born a slave, and ceases to feel worthy. He expresses the pathos of the tragic mulatto when he discovers he is not white. Azevedo uses this moment to examine the inability of the ex-slave to rise above the category of an ex-slave in the eyes of the post-slavery society and before his own. He shows the imprint of slavery on the colonizer and the colonized. The trauma of discovering he is black confirms the privilege of whiteness, and situates the mulatto as

inferior as well. But this is apparent in both Raimundo and Minnie.

O *Mulato* draws a strong distinction between mulattoes, blacks, and whites in São Luiz. The inequality of nonwhites can be seen in the contrasting communities and the roles where non-whites are positioned, i.e. as street vendors, servants, house boys. White characters are described as prosperous and black characters are described in a negative way and are mocked for their laziness. On the other hand, mulattoes are accused of attempting to imitate whiteness. In this community, racial prejudice is no secret. It is articulated loudly and expressed without censorship. It is in this environment that Raimundo discovers his identity designated by law.

In the end, both Minnie and Raimundo learn that their white identity was orchestrated by a parent. And while Raimundo crafts a fairytale about his missing mother, once he discovers the truth about his identity he is disappointed to learn that his assumed racial identity is an illusion.

In *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, Jack Zipes explains the power of fairy tales, “Few people would argue, however, that the fairy tale has become a very specific genre in our lives and has inserted itself in inexplicable ways so that many of us try, even without knowing it, to make a fairy tale out of our lives.” (xi) Collapsing or compacting mulatto identity into fairy tale form is also a technique used by Chesnutt in *House Behind the Cedars*, and Lima Barreto in *Clara dos Anjos*. Both writers situate their mulattas in language associated with fairy tales. Chesnutt’s Rena and Barreto’s Clara both believe that love will shield them from racial scrutiny, and erases the boundaries of race and class. In *Clara dos Anjos*, Clara is vulnerable to the advances of Cassie and never stops to think of



the improbability that they will be together because in the “modinas” that she listens to love overcomes all obstacles. Her reality is deformed by her misconceptions. Rena is shocked to find that love does not have a blinding impact on white males. This is made plain to her when Tyrone discovers she is not white. “When Rena’s eyes fell upon the young man in the buggy, she saw a face as pale as death, with starting eyes, in which love, which once reigned there had now given place to astonishment and horror.” (92) The fairytale expectation of love conquering all does not prove true in the face of racism in Rena’s experience.

Chesnutt and Barreto interrogate the foundation of the fairytale, that love is blind and blend the trope of passing with a romance plot which shows love is complicated by race, class, and gender power imbalance. And while Clara does not engage in racial passing, she is a participant in social mobility. The question posed to Clara and girls like her: is it reprehensible to aspire to change social class?<sup>73</sup> - is answered in the end of the novel where she finds herself pregnant and alone. Although she and Cassie are from different social and racial classes, she believes that they share similar, if not the same class status. Clara is a victim of the propaganda about race in Brazil. Because Clara experiences her identity in a safe secure environment, she is shielded from any negative attitudes regarding her racial identity. Whenever she leaves the house she is with an escort or chaperone. In the same context, it can be argued that Rena’s identity is also fostered in a

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<sup>73</sup>Certainly not in the American set of permissible aspirations-and neither is it in Brazil-in both cases there is the notion that the New World will change the rigid class structure of the old. The problem is when it turns out that it does not. And especially, that it does not when race is involved. But that has nothing to do with passing – and certainly not in the novels under examination.

protected environment. It does not appear that she thinks about race until she is presented with the idea by her brother, John. Both mulattas tend to identify with upper-class values and in many ways do not align themselves with other people of color. The development of the mulatto in an isolated environment can account for attitudes about race and allows for fairy tale expectations to exist.

Similarly, Harper picks up the motif of the fairytale in her *Plum Bun*, but her treatment of the mulatto character disrupts the mystification of the mulatto fairy tale existence and deconstructs the American Dream and the mulatto accomplishments. In this one text, Harper even juxtaposes the Brazilian and American mulatto to explicate the complexities of race and national identity in both nations. Fauset redefines what it means to be a mulatto by traditional standards. The mulatto is defined as having one white and one black parent. Both Angela's parents were black. Fauset in a sense also defines white privilege by empowering Angela to reject her whiteness publicly and reclaim her identity. In short, Fauset redefines the heritage and meaning of the mulatto.

### **Fear of the Mulatto**

There is a constant fear or rather a concern in both nations that the mulatto is attempting to adopt the behavior of 'whiteness', post-slavery. In *O Mulato*, the topic of discussion for the white characters is about this concern. "And they began to chat about the scandalous way the mulatto girls were doing themselves up just like white ladies. 'They're no longer happy with short skirts and lace collars. Now they want long dresses and, instead of slippers, high lace shoes! What frauds!'" (88) And the conversation concluded that because mulattos spend so much time emulating whiteness, they are

incapable of cleaning properly. The perpetual fear of the likelihood of the mulatto transcending the boundaries of racial categories generated the creation of laws that made clear distinctions of who could legally claim whiteness and the privileges of citizen. And while the sole purpose of the mulatto character is not just about race, it acts a catalyst to foster conversations about identity, gender, class and who has the right to privilege. Unfortunately because the mulatto character challenges colonized systems and historical legacies, oftentimes, the mulatto character is destroyed. The destruction serves as a further indication of the nations' fear of upsetting its foundational structure and unveiling its flaws. To unravel the history of the mulatto is to rewrite the history of the nation, which translates to national identity. In Stowe, Fauset, Barreto, the mulatto character is forced into some type of exile. In Azevedo and Harper, the mulatto is brutally eliminated. However, only Chesnutt offers a solution where Rena dies, and John is allowed to continue living as a white man, within the same laws that once enslaved him. In each case, the mulatto character challenges the concept of the so-called American dream. Destroying the foundation of a nation, upsets the reality of that nation. After all, it was Stowe who presented the argument that slavery was the destruction of the nation. The mulatto, a product of slavery, serves as a constant reminder to the nation of its flawed past. Azevedo, Barreto, Fauset, and Harper, reconfigure the conversation about race while repurposing the mulatto trope in literature.

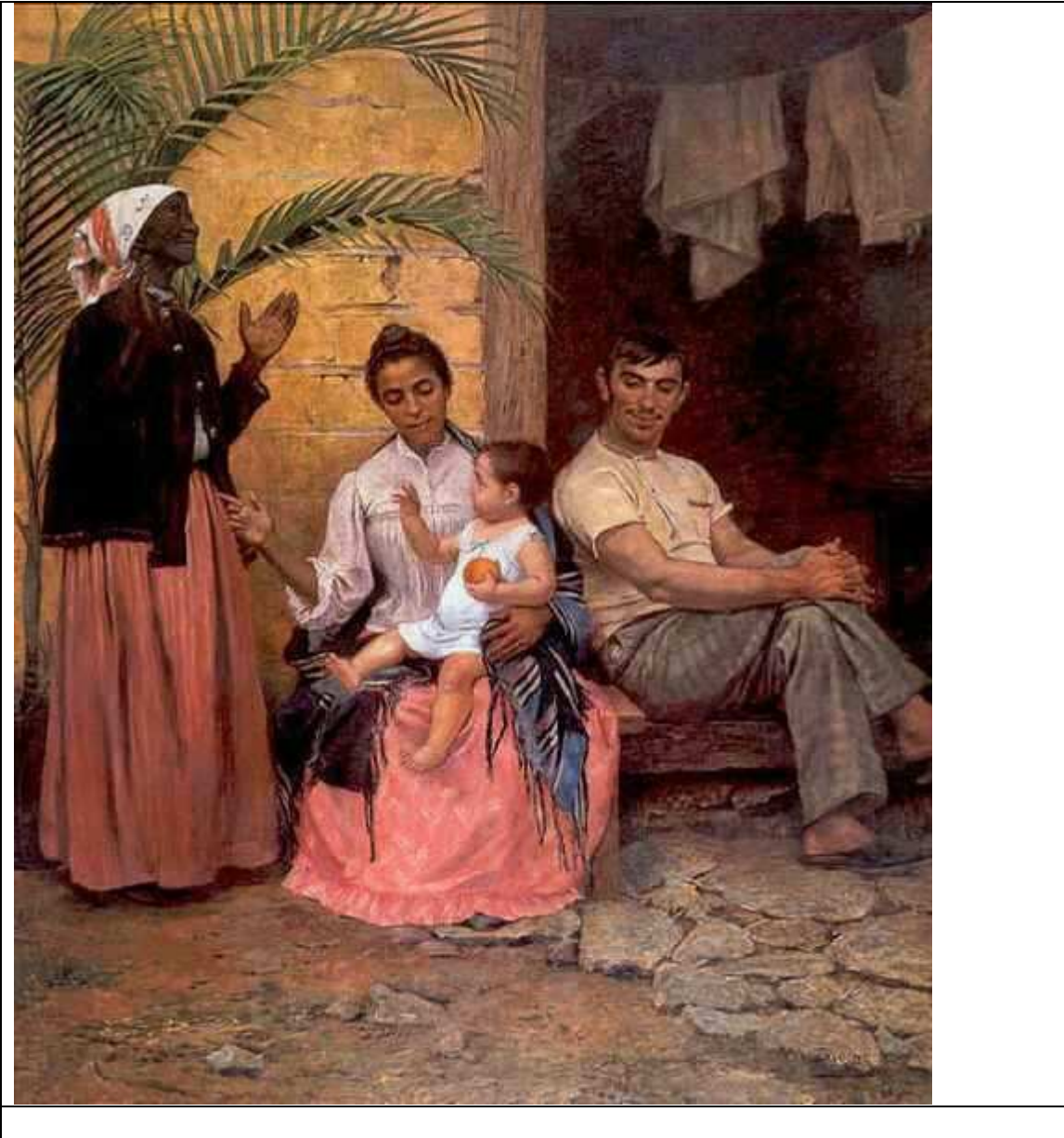
### **Cross-cultural Mulatto Linkings**

Azevedo, Barreto, Chesnutt, Fauset, and Harper show that attitudes about race and racial identity are deeply rooted in the national values and are in constant transition.

Apparent in the treatment of the mulatto character in Brazil is the willingness to stay and force the nation to accept his or her place in the national narrative. Contrasted to the treatment of the Brazilian mulatto, that of the American mulatto has the tendency to have such characters flee and seek sanctuary outside of its immediate community. On the other hand, in *Plum Bun*, the reader is presented with mulattos from both nations who feel disconnected and look to seek identity freedom in another nation. Looking at the mulatto presented by these nineteenth century writers, as the layers are peeled back from the mulatto character what is evident is the desire to understand – what does it mean to be a national citizen?, and this question changes the position of the mulatto character.

There is a significant similarity in the approach of the authors of both nations. Azevedo and Barreto try to make visible the invisible racism and colorism embedded in the Brazilian culture, while Chesnutt, Harper, and Fauset, rescue and redeem the mulatto and its primary function in African American literature. In the end, all authors show that white privilege cannot exist without blackness, and the mulatto is not seeking whiteness, but the privileges of a national citizen.

**APPENDIX A - MODESTO Y BROCCO THE REDEMPTION OF CAIN (1895)**



**APPENDIX B- MULATTO WOMEN**



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## ABSTRACT

### RETHINKING THE MULATTO CHARACTER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: 1865 AND BEYOND IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

by

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The presence of the mulatto challenged the definition of a pure national identity. The period following emancipation for the once enslaved African, particularly in the United States and Brazil, provided the landscape for the ex-slave to be ‘experimentally’ re-crafted into the national fabric of the Brazil and the U.S. through treatment in the literary landscape of both nations. As the country grappled with the language to affix a national identity to whiteness, the reality of the mulatto complicated these efforts. The emergence of the mulatto jeopardized the ability to form a coherent national identity, given national identity at this point was determined by race, and racial categories were limited to white or black. Considering the mulatto did not fit perfectly into either category, this presented a problem for a purified national identity. Seemingly, the way to eradicate the problem of the mulatto was to relocate, confine, destroy, or eliminate him. Considering these circumstances, this dissertation aims to construct a Pan-Atlantic reading of that literature, by examining the treatment of mulatto characters in the works



of Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Jesse Fauset, Aluísio Tancredo Gonçalves de Azevedo, and Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto. As characterized in the literature for this dissertation, this figure of the mulatto embodies a desire to cross cultural (and literary) boundaries. It simultaneously destabilizes and reaffirms racial boundaries. In effect, the literary and cultural construction of the mulatto between 1865 and 1929, in both the U.S. and Brazil is part of a “pan-Atlantic” cultural exchange.

This project aims to extend conversations about all of these artists as individuals and instead look at the *transnational discourse that evolved during the gradual emancipation of slaves in the Americas*. This project examines how these artists were in conversation with each other through their treatment of a single theme: mulatto.

### **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Theresa Lindsey holds a B.A. from Wayne State University and a Master's Degree from Cornell University. Her interest is in nineteenth and twentieth century Diaspora, African American, Brazilian, and Women's literature.