

# THE APOLLONIAN

A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (Online, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed)

---

Vol. 1, Issue. 1 (September 2014) || ISSN 2393-9001

---

Chief Editor: Girindra Narayan Roy

Editor: Anindya Shekhar Purakayastha

Associate Editors: Lalima Chakraverty & Maria Pia Pagani

Executive Editors: Subashish Bhattacharjee & Saikat Guha

---

Research Article:

“Let’s Go Up and Have Another Look Out That Window:”

Fetish, Obsession, the Tragic Mulatta and the Many

Descendants of Clare Kendry

*Marta A. Holliday*

---

Find this and other research articles at: [theapollonian.in](http://theapollonian.in)

“Let’s Go Up and Have Another Look Out That Window:”

Fetish, Obsession, the Tragic Mulatta and the Many

Descendants of Clare Kendry

*Marta A. Holliday*

---

Clare Kendry, a highly controversial central character in Nella Larsen’s 1929 novella *Passing*, has come to embody the prototypical tragic mulatta of modern American literature and culture. Her brief life and shocking death have inspired the increasingly graphic fetishization of the biracial female body from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward. Additionally, Clare is often vilified in the novella as well as in literary discourse for blatantly betraying her blackness: she weds a white racist, yearns to bear children who are as “white” as possible, and overall “passes” for white in her everyday social interactions. Perhaps given such reductive reasoning about her character flaws, Clare’s death becomes a convenient solution to her existence: if she refuses to live as “black,” and cannot truthfully live as “white,” then she cannot live at all. This “solution” is both abrupt and brutal: during a Harlem house party, she swiftly plunges to her death through her biracial friend Irene’s high-rise apartment window.

But Clare’s sudden exit determines her destiny not only in *Passing*, but more importantly in literary posterity. Her tortured existence renders her a foremother to subsequent “tragic mulattas,” i.e. the bi- and multiracial heroines of contemporary culture whose legacies are also defined by their inability to “belong.” Likewise, their lives and deaths are hallmarked by equally dramatic suffering—and their ordeals increasingly become more graphic, as the visualizing of the doomed heroine transitions from the author’s page to more concrete media like the camera shot. Some

of the most memorable of these controversial “descendants” include Dorothy Dandridge, who is reduced to the onscreen spitfire of the 1950s (most notably as the titular *Carmen Jones*), and Halle Berry, who, among her other roles as the golden skinned martyr or vixen, reduces Dandridge to an exploitation in the 1999 biopic about Dandridge’s life (*Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*). Thus, it is crucial to recognize that Clare’s existence and end are significant beyond the confines of *Passing*, in order to grasp how Clare symbolizes the increasingly eroticized downfall of the mixed race heroine during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Such an investigation into Clare’s conflicted significance evokes intriguing questions. Specifically, how and why has “tragedy” evolved from simply denoting the mulatta’s inability to “belong,” to connoting her graphic end<sup>1</sup>? What justifies the infliction of violence or suffering upon a body that, perhaps not coincidentally, is an ideal amalgam of swarthy exoticism and Western white beauty? And ultimately, is there room in the flux of blackness and whiteness for the mulatta to exist as biracial, or is the space so suffocating that she must be denied, and destroyed?

From the outset, it is important for the reader to have some understanding of the terms that are used to racially classify Clare, and the other characters and figures who follow her. These terms are used interchangeably here. Clare, simply put, is a biracial woman: her father is white, and her mother is African American. In her lifetime, she would have been designated as a “mulatto—” or as a “mulatta” (the female version of this term), which refers to a child who is exactly one half black and one half white. However, it is important to note that “mulatta” has historically yet inaccurately described *all* women who were, to any degree, biracial (of two races— i.e. “quadroons” or “octoroons”) or multiracial (of more than two races—but in

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the earliest empirical studies on the mulatta/o, which either predate or are contemporary to *Passing*, regard the biracial child as a quandary because of his or her dubious ability to racially transgress. His or her birth is read as a metaphor for the lax sexual attitudes of American (and global) society. Further information on these theories can be located in Robert Park’s 1931 article, “Mentality of Racial Hybrids.” (*The American Journal of Sociology*, 36.4. (1931): 534-551. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007) and in Edward Reuter’s *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. (Boston: Badger, 1918. Print)

which blackness and whiteness are usually included, to some degree). But despite these inaccuracies, I still employ the word “mulatta” as one of the synonyms to describe Clare’s race. This is because, in 1929, the year *Passing* debuted, this word would still have been used as a classification for mixed women, without any hint of political incorrectness. The designation “mixed race,” which is also frequently used here, is a more contemporary term that can refer both to biracial women, as well as to women who are of more than two races (such as the black, white and Native American Dorothy Dandridge). Likewise, the term “partially white” acknowledges that Clare and the characters who follow her are each endowed with some degree of European blood. “Near white” is also used as a synonym for bi- and multiraciality, but it refers more to appearance rather than ancestry.

Although Clare Kendry functions as the “foremother” of future generations of tragic mulatta characters, one cannot forget that every mother was once a daughter. Clare herself descends from literary “ancestors” whose embattled biographies are often simplistically resolved through beautified demises. These “ancestors” include the doomed biracial heroines of ante- and postbellum works about slavery. These ravishing daughters are conceived through the controversial and sometimes violent relationships between their white master fathers and their black enslaved mothers. Their dilemmas of belonging (slave or free? white or black?) predestine their inability to be unconditionally accepted by white family and white lovers—let alone by white society. And, quite often, these conflicts lead to their devastating if spectacular ends.

There is a strong connection between Clare and William Wells’ Brown’s doomed Clotel (1853), the titular heroine of the first novel penned by an African American writer. At a slave auction cleverly disguised as a Negro ball Clotel, the fictitious bastard daughter of a mulatta slave and President Thomas Jefferson, is marketed as a “Real Albino, fit for a fancy girl for anyone. She enjoys good health [and] has a sweet temper” (Brown 87). Other characteristics attest to her gentility,

and her unsullied piety. She is chaste, and she is “a devoted Christian, and perfectly trustworthy” (87). But her complexion and hair are prized much more so than her inner qualities. Writes Brown: “The negro, constitutionally, is fond of dress and outward appearance. *She* that has short, wooly hair, combs it and oils it to death. *She* that has long hair, would sooner have her teeth drawn than lose it” (150, pronouns changed).

However, the tragedy of loss and the physical and mental scars that are heaped upon her easily override Clotel’s beauty. She is gradually bereft of her mother, sister and children when they are sold away from her (or vice versa) on the auction block. She even loses her lustrous hair, when her insecure mistress Mrs. French forces her to cut it all off, lock by lock, in an act that leaves her looking as miserable as a prisoner of war. And ultimately Clotel, like Clare, dies abruptly—although her suicide is an act of liberation. Rather than be resold into slavery, she chooses to end her life by gloriously leaping into the Potomac River—the natural boundary that separated enslaved American territory from the Northern Promised Land.

Other “ancestors” of Clare, if they are not gloriously killed off, enter into the proverbial “happily ever after” of liberation. The most famous of these near-saintly survivors include Frado<sup>2</sup>, the heroine of Harriet Wilson’s autobiographical *Our Nig* (1857), who emerges from slavery as a liberated and extremely pious young woman. Harriet Jacobs’ alter ego Linda Brent<sup>3</sup>, the central figure in *Incidents in the Life of a*

---

<sup>2</sup> Wilson’s heroine/alter ego, who is conceived from her white mother and black father’s rendezvous, is sold into slavery because her parents’ illegal union inhibits the family’s preservation. Although Frado survives enslavement, her survival is an unoriginal theme. Too often, the fate of the biracial heroine is dichotomized between the sensational and premature demise, and the happier and longer selfless existence. Like Iola Leroy (see n. 4), Frado is good-suffering, though her abuse is more graphic than what Leroy endures, in that she becomes the family scapegoat who endures ritual beatings at the hands of her master’s family.

<sup>3</sup> Like Frado, Brent is Jacobs’ alter ego who revisits the latter’s traumatic adolescence. Brent’s near white beauty is a curse that makes her vulnerable to her master Dr. Flint’s advances—and his punishments if she rebuffs him. However, in Jacobs’ text, “tragedy” is not exclusive to the mulatta, but it more broadly defines the coming of age of any slave daughter. And, similar to Brown’s depictions of Clotel, Linda’s “tragedies” are defined through her losses. She is bereft of her parents

*Slave Girl* (1861) who flees her master's physical and sexual tyranny, exists in a crawlspace for seven years, and is eventually joyously united with her children. Frances Harper's titular heroine Iola Leroy<sup>4</sup>, who matures from the wrongfully enslaved teenage daughter into a selfless Freedman's Bureau educator (1892). The partially white Eliza of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) eventually emerges into an ennobled heroine who likewise escapes slavery's injustices. However, Eliza's flight from sale across the frozen Ohio River in the clichéd dead of night is overshadowed by Harriet Beecher Stowe's meticulous exoticizing of her body. Her gorgeous, abundant dark hair and exceptionally fair skin are juxtaposed against the stigmata-like wounds on her bare feet, which are caused by her journey across the harsh ice floes.

But despite the extensive, often controversial yet oft- multifaceted legacy that a heroine like Clare Kendry inherits, she is still regarded as a quandary in scholarly discourse about both the tragic mulatta canon *and* about the Larsen canon<sup>5</sup>. She has

---

and brother through sale; and she later fears the loss of her children to the jail cell or the auction block. Incidentally, when Linda attempts to gain freedom for herself and her children, she uses her body as both a vehicle for white sexual pleasure and as a strategy, in which she hopes that the conceptions and births of her son and daughter would coerce their fathers to recognize their offspring as legitimate and take measures to save them.

<sup>4</sup> Harper's heroine is not a martyr but a survivor who triumphs over her fate. Leroy's "tragic" existence is hallmarked by the fact that she was a partially white woman who was born free, but who is eventually classified as a slave. Harper does not conceal the fact that Leroy suffered during her enslavement, but neither does she glorify or condemn her existence. But unlike other mixed race slave daughters, Leroy is not sacrificed to a sensational death nor scarred by her ordeal. Instead, she emerges into a life of patience and piety, educating the pureblooded blacks whose fate she had once shared, but next to whom she is cast as superior, through her fluid language and white appearance.

<sup>5</sup> Clare's problem of belonging is an unoriginal dilemma that black studies scholars have attempted to historically and culturally situate. Some theorists concur that the need to "belong" is strictly a US dilemma, while mulattoes are an entirely new race in regions such as Latin America, the Caribbean or Africa. In the United States, biracial identity was nullified because of the necessity to classify the individual as black *or* white (the "one drop" rule). These controversies are discussed in significant detail in Patricia Morton's "From Invisible Man to 'New People:' The Recent Discovery of American Mulattoes." (*Phylon* 46.2 (1985): 106-122. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 April 2007) and in Naomi Pabst's "Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations Over Crossing Signs." (*Cultural Critique* 54 (2003): 178-211. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 June 2008.)

been scorned not merely as a doomed traitor, but more controversially as a rather manipulative biracial woman who *specifically* uses her whiteness to deny her blackness. Cheryl Wall, for instance, accuses Clare of being a persistent rebel who is never satisfied. She first rejects her blackness, and then “reclaims” it by throwing herself into Irene's all-black social circle to purposely ignore her whiteness. Wall also theorizes that Clare's very survival hinges on her ability to continuously perform her lies—and that any crack in her seamless facade will ensure her downfall.

Other readings of *Passing* discuss Clare as the antithesis to the doomed mulatta. Debra Silverman defends Clare as an unfair pawn in a dichotomy in which black female exoticism is posited against white female beauty standards. If one is to situate the notion of beauty into the typical Madonna-whore dichotomy, then white beauty is situated at the perfect, virginal “Madonna” extreme, and partially black beauty is more sexual, sinful and forbidden. In Silverman's view, any intrusion of black blood into the white feminine ideal automatically bestializes the biracial woman, and reduces her self worth to the sum of her easily exploited body parts. Claudia Tate, meanwhile, maintains that *Irene* is the more tragic player in *Passing*. Irene constantly begrudges and belittles Clare's decision to identify as white though she is fair enough to pass, herself. Tate concludes that *Irene's* demons come to a head in the window scene: Clare simply disappears, but Irene, who survives her, shall remain morbidly tormented with confusion about the both of them even after Clare's plunge ends all of her own conflicts<sup>6</sup>.

But wherever they stand, the critics of *Passing* agree on a key dilemma: the defining role of beauty in the mulatta's life and death. Through Irene Redfield's gaze (the primary if biased perspective through which Clare's biography is narrated)

---

<sup>6</sup> Scholarly discourse often describes the mulatta's “tragedy” as a psychological ordeal (as opposed to a literal death) that afflicts her opinions about herself and her negotiations with either race. Cheryl Wall analyzes Larsen's brief canon through this approach. Her article, “Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels,” compares Clare to *Quicksand's* half Danish half/black Helga Crane. The full text of this article can be located in the *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2 (1986): 97-111. Print.

Clare is merely a conniving chameleon. But regardless of how she makes herself appear, she is ever a sensuous and delicate creature, much to Irene's continued torment. Her hair and skin, however much they betray her racial mixture, are perpetually golden. Her beauty renders her as simultaneously doomed and unattainable.

Perhaps inevitably, Clare's biography and beauty, as the quintessentially ill-fated biracial heroine, become reduced to tropes. Her physical and psychological ordeals are not all that different from the struggles of the slave heroines before her. In fact, it simply seems that the plantations of Clotel, Eliza and Rena Walden's generation have transformed into the brownstones of Chicago and New York. And, much like the slave daughters, Clare is also an orphan. Therefore her sense of suffering, confusion and isolation begins at a very tender age for her. Her deceased black mother is conveniently nonexistent, and her white, alcoholic father dies when she is twelve. Over the brief course of *Passing's* chapters, Clare ages from a fragile, helpless girl who sobs and "stamps her slender feet" at the sight of her father's corpse into the glamorous socialite who intrudes into Irene's otherwise respectable life.

Clare's adulthood also adheres to a very narrow and predictable path. Similar to other biracial heroines who seek out lasting relationships in the late 19th century, as well as the early 20th century, Clare falls in love with the racist Jack Bellew who without irony or suspicion nicknames her "Nig." (Incidentally, the clueless Jack is perplexed by what he observes as his "white" wife's ability to "pass" for black.) But Clare never confronts her husband, nor does she ever declare who and what she really is. Instead, a horrified Jack stumbles upon her blackness at Irene's all-black house party. Clare's truth ultimately comes out in the wash because she cannot deny her yearning for a connection to her black ancestry. This yearning is what compels her to search for kinship among Irene's friends. But in her quest for black *or* white conformity she appears to blatantly shun her "other" race when it is convenient for

her. If she does not deny her blackness to her husband, or her whiteness to Irene's circle, then she will appear to be the misfit, the outcast, the rejected one who shall never quite belong.

Ultimately, Clare's beautified life culminates in her beautified death. The final lines of the novella ("Death by misadventure, I'm inclined to believe. Let's go up and have another look at that window") resurrect Clare into an objectified afterlife. Larsen unapologetically invites both the partygoers *and* the reader to freely manipulate Clare's corpse through uncensored and voyeuristic gazes. The actual plunge teems with scandals that other scholars have never been able to prove nor disprove. Was Clare's a careless or a predestined fate? Did Irene's hand, impelled by her insecurities and hidden jealousies, push Clare through that window? Or did Clare herself, tormented by her mulatta existence, jump?

Regardless of the catalyst, Clare's exit is a stylized and glorified descent through a stream of vibrant hues. The unlikely beauty of this tragedy is typical of the painterly prose that has consistently defined Larsen's writing: "One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone...Gone! The soft, white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry" (Larsen 111).

The suggestion of that final look transforms Clare's body into a compelling yet sickening fascination. A fall from an apartment window is undeniably sensational. Details of the victim's disfigurement might typically include a broken neck or a fractured skull, or perhaps massive blood loss. Clare could have experienced any of these effects—and in varying macabre degrees—when control over her body shifts from Larsen's pen to the reader's mind—that is, when readers allow themselves to envision what might be "out that window."

When Clare is placed in the larger context of the "tragic" biracial existence, she bridges the permissible and the taboo depictions of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century biracial

corpses. Her life is more glamorously fateful than the lives of the slave heroines. Unlike the near-saintly Frado, Linda Brent or Iola Leroy, Clare does not achieve a triumphant ending. Yet even when slave heroine dies untimely, the actual death scenes are more sanitized than what happened at Irene's party. Clotel's corpse vanishes into clichéd swift currents and leaves no similar invitation for the reader to gawk at her body. Charles Chesnutt's heroine Rena Walden<sup>7</sup> of *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900)-- who is overcome by a fever after her racist lover abandons her in the woods during a rainstorm—dies in bed. Although Rena becomes *mentally* disfigured, calling out to people who aren't there, her *body* remains shrouded in her bedclothes. Yet Clare's body meets a gorier fate, for a fall onto the unforgiving city pavement will rob its victim of both life *and* beauty. Thus, this type of death puts the once tragic, if glamorous, life on full display for all to see.

Although Clare's existence precedes more exaggerated depictions of bi- and multiracial life and death later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she is by no means the only mulatta heroine of significance in her generation, who has endured often life-altering struggles. Clare is contemporary to such characters as Janie from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, (1937) and of course to *Quicksand's* Helga Crane (1928). But these women evoke either pity or praise. Janie<sup>8</sup> is often revered by

---

<sup>7</sup> Rena Walden's exceptionally white appearance simultaneously beatifies and damns her. Though illegitimate, she is adored by her white father, but his convenient death jeopardizes her freedom. Rena's ordeal is further compounded by her involvement with an unoriginally clueless and racist white suitor, George Tryon. When she is betrayed as black and sold into slavery, her lover's transformation from suitor to sadist is swift and unmitigated. Rena's enslavement, like Iola Leroy's, is largely glossed over. When she is liberated, she initially transitions into a beatified adulthood and, like Leroy, becomes a schoolteacher for pureblooded black children. But unlike Leroy, Rena is eliminated. Tryon has Rena deserted in the woods, where she falls gravely ill. Unlike Clare's abrupt end, Rena's last moments are drawn out. Her delirium reduces her to a pitiful, childlike or even feral state.

<sup>8</sup> Hurston inverts the expectation of the white subjugation of the biracial female body by substituting the black masculinist perspective. Janie is the property of her two husbands and her lover, Tea Cake. The men's control of her is encapsulated in their reactions toward her hair. Joe, who is obsessed with his role as the mayor and chief merchant in Eatonville, Florida, regards Janie's tresses as a sexual advertisement, and orders her to keep her head covered to dissuade attention from her beauty. Tea Cake, meanwhile, combs her hair and confesses his fascination with it. But his adoration of Janie's body does not prevent the relationship from degenerating into a modernized version of slavery.

feminist thinkers and black studies scholars as a survivor. Although she is orphaned , abused by the domineering men in her life, and though she risks being sentenced to death for her lover's murder, Janie has a voice, and she routinely defends herself against adversity through vehemence or violence. Helga, meanwhile, is a sympathetic figure from the Larsen canon because she possesses more substance than Clare. While Clare is merely a beautiful socialite, Helga is a beautiful and intelligent academic, a respected professor at the fictitious historically black Naxos College. Clare's sex appeal, however, takes precedence over any substance of her character.

Since Clare's life and death, the gaze upon the glamorous body has gradually transformed from the reader's imagined glimpse out Irene's window into the perceptions of the camera lens. But while the reader is required to envision (and therefore inflict) the precise extent of Clare's damages, the filmic renderings of subsequent mulatta martyrs leave less to the viewer's imagination. Nevertheless, one can still see Clare's iconic resonance in these films. It was as if Larsen, in 1929, had her finger on the pulse of a new trend, and could foresee the extent to which life would be glorified and death, exaggerated.

From *Carmen Jones* onward (Otto Preminger's 1954 adaptation of the Bizet opera about the Spanish cigarmaker and seductress that features an all black cast), the body has become more frequently exposed—and exposure itself seems to have become more normative, in terms of how to represent "tragic" biracial beauty and identity. The vivid colors that Larsen dreams up to describe Clare's body and world (her skin, her hair, her party dresses) precede the advent of the 20th century American obsession with visual culture.

Moreover, when such images of near white beauty translate from the stylized images of the novella's pages into the moving picture, then beauty becomes not only

---

However, Janie moves toward self-liberation by murdering Tea Cake. The plantation heroines are rarely as bold as Janie; moreover, Janie's actions suggest that black chauvinism is merely an imitation of white authority that can be easily eradicated.

more idealized, but also more easily sexualized. Simply put, sex sells, especially when the box office is concerned. Thus, a film like Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954) puts mulatta beauty on display as a tantalizing spectacle. While a heroine like Clare Kendry is merely the product of readers' imaginations, Preminger resurrects Clare with a voyeuristic vengeance through his creation of the titular Carmen Jones. Even the theater posters themselves pushed the envelope, in the otherwise prim and proper 1950's. Here, Dandridge stands haughtily in her tight clothes, legs slightly spread and arms on her hips. A stylized cabbage rose (reminiscent of a Georgia O'Keefe's erotic flower) is placed squarely over Carmen's skirt, right over her genital area. It is also worth noting that the rose is a symbol of Carmen's character—a beautiful treasure to look at, but an object that can wound you if you dare to get too close to its beauty.

Preminger's adaptation of the Bizet opera *Carmen* is regarded as a landmark in American film history. The film itself reads as a series of translations—and not merely of the Spanish arias into English lyrics. The cigar factory translates into the wartime parachute assembly line; Don Jose translates into the fighter pilot Joe (Harry Belafonte), who is the initial object of Carmen's affections, and the bullfighter Escamillo morphs into prizefighter Husky Miller (Joe Adams).

Nonetheless, Carmen Jones' origins, like Clare's, are markedly obscure for someone who is so controversial. She comes from humble beginnings in the Florida backwaters. She is also assumed to be an orphan. Her only known next of kin is her grandmother (Madame Sul-te-Wan). Carmen is hardly a model employee. From the lunchroom scene, one can infer that she routinely flirts, arrives late, and works whenever she wants to. Carmen is not as cultivated nor as pretentious as Clare: she is quick with saucy comebacks and come-ons. She is unashamed of her promiscuity, or of getting into legal snares. A fight in the factory causes her arrest and extradition, which leads to her seduction of Joe, who must give up his 24 hour pass with his naïve fiancée in order to transport her to jail. Joe ends up falling in love with her

during this transport. He himself is arrested for letting her get away, and he forfeits his dreams of marriage and flight school to follow her. Although Carmen does appear to love Joe, Husky Miller later woos her with promises of an exciting and a faster life in Chicago. Joe, devastated by her betrayal, pursues her and strangles her to death. Ultimately, Carmen's treachery destroys two lives: first, she is killed by Joe out of desperation and revenge, and then he himself will certainly face execution for what he has done.

*Carmen Jones'* cultural innovations are obvious. It is not only the first mainstream production to feature an entirely black ensemble, but the characters themselves are not the simplistic expectations of black performance. Rather, *Carmen Jones* was a positive, uplifting antidote to the otherwise portrayal of black Americans as ignorant, second class citizens. In an era in which Amos and Andy, Rastus, Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben proliferated with their subservience, buffoonery and distorted English, the *Carmen Jones* personae speak fluidly and sing with classically trained voices. The men are the stalwart soldiers and the women are brown-skinned Rosie the Riveters who sew the parachutes their men will use on the frontlines. Still, despite the movie's surface-level political correctness, skin color remains problematic for some key characters, particularly the women. Paleness connotes purity whereas darkness describes deviance. Cindy Lou (Olga James), Joe's virginal and naïve fiancée, is the fairest of them all. Her rival, the swarthier Carmen (who is played by the mixed-race Dandridge), is more exotic with her tan skin, her curves and her struts<sup>9</sup>.

Carmen herself is problematic because she demonstrates how the "tragedy"

---

<sup>9</sup> James Baldwin's scathing 1955 critique summarizes the film as a blatant commentary on skin color that beatifies Cindy Lou's "paler" and "plainer" style and reduces Frankie to a floozy. Carmen, meanwhile, exists in the middle of this spectrum as "a sort of taffy-colored girl [who is] very obviously and vividly dressed, but [is] really...more sweet than vivid" (50). But he also perceives that the male characters are likewise scapegoated for their color. Both Joe and Miller are darker and therefore subversive. The very dark drill sergeant (Brock Peters), is especially nefarious because he forces Joe to extradite Carmen, which leads to her seduction of him, and his dashed dreams of marriage and flight school. (See: Baldwin, James. "Carmen Jones: The Dark is Light Enough." *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983. 46-54. Print.)

of the tragic mulatta is synonymous with exploitation. She is little more than the sum of her parts, much more so than Clare was in the Harlem Renaissance. Everything that is latently sexual about Clare becomes explicit through Carmen. Carmen is unapologetic about her beauty and its destructive temptations, while Clare is more oblivious to the torment she inflicts upon Irene. And whereas Clare is the racial misfit who doesn't belong in the rooftop cafes and house parties, Carmen is also the sexual misfit who struts into the cafeteria in her tight red skirt and lace blouse. She commands the urge to be loved or the urge to be hated: she toys with male soldiers in the cafeteria, at the same time as she promises a snitching female coworker that she will "cut out the one good eye [she] has left."

Carmen's golden toned sex appeal is especially emphasized when she and Cindy Lou are compared against each other. Unlike Clare and Irene, who come from similar backgrounds and experiences, and who share an uneasy "toxic" friendship, Carmen and Cindy Lou come to embody a Madonna/whore juxtaposition. When the viewer first meets Cindy Lou, she is a portrait of innocence. With her calico and pigtails, hunched shoulders and sheltered home life, Cindy Lou looks like a girl who has not yet come of age. She appears off the bus to surprise Joe at the base. When they are reunited, they cuddle and laugh, and really believe that they can achieve the great dreams that they have: Cindy Lou of marriage, and Joe of flight school. But when Cindy Lou sits back to back with Carmen in the lunchroom, Carmen becomes her antithesis. The insinuations in the women's solos/duets (Cindy Lou's maternal if subconsciously Freudian relationship to Joe in "You Look Just Like My Maw" versus Carmen's self-prophesies of her destructive irresistibility in "Dat's Love") exacerbate this contrast. However, once Carmen and Joe are in each other's possession, Cindy Lou becomes disposable. Though she was once so certain that the incarcerated Joe will forget about "that girl," she flees the prison visitation room in tears at the sight of Carmen's rose, and rarely appears in their lives after that moment.

Carmen's body increasingly tantalizes as the film progresses. Or rather, film

allows Carmen to become more eroticized. Unlike Clare, whose beauty and whose suffering can only come to life through Larsen's (and the reader's) imaginations, Carmen's sexuality is highly explicit. The factory fight scene, which is responsible for her detention and downfall, suggests lesbian eroticism even amid the limitations of fifties visual culture. Carmen manhandles her snitching adversary, thrusts her skirt between the splayed legs, and captures her in a parachute. Later, Joe cannot control her when she is arrested. The extradition scene renders the future lovers as a contrast in bodies: the seduced victim who is tautly hunched over the steering wheel, and the seductress who is loose and on the loose as she stretches her legs and arms over the driver's seat and impels Joe to desire her. She only divulges her lust to the camera as she pulls Joe to her crotch, or as her pedicure becomes Joe's excuse to touch her thigh, and kiss her bared leg.

Carmen's death scene is a climactic demonstration of how her body straddles the fine line between the risqué and the covert in 20<sup>th</sup> century visual culture<sup>10</sup>. Carmen's transition from a vibrant body into a lifeless corpse is more explicit than Clare's, because little of her strangulation is left to the interpreter's imagination. Joe removes Carmen from the crowd at Miller's victory and into the closet but the camera lens, like the ultimate invitation in Larsen's novella, urges the viewer to become the voyeur. And though Carmen's throat is efficiently crushed by Joe's hands, her death scene is drawn out. Her eyes widen and then linger. The stole slips off her shoulders as her body starts to slip. Though she is clothed from the chest down, her bared shoulders, neck and cleavage eroticize. The closet door is only thrust open after the deed is done. The other spectators—to the fight, and then to

---

<sup>10</sup> Curiously, the flaws of her men are what lead to her Carmen's destruction. Carmen feels affection for Joe, though Joe initially wants cool things off between them, as he is still determined to go to flight school. Carmen is also reluctant at first to accept Husky Miller's offer of traveling to Chicago, though the flashy and golden-voiced Miller eventually sways her with promises of diamonds and the fitted white gown and fur stole that she wears to the fatal fight scene. Incidentally, Joe only pursues Carmen when he feels threatened by the intrusions of another man into her life and her body. This reality parallels the choice that led to Clare's self destruction: after all, it is largely because of Brian Redfield's influence that Clare even sojourns to Harlem, at all.

the murder—can only glimpse incomplete fragments of what happened. First, they see the brilliantly alive Carmen disappear from view, and then they are confronted with her sudden elimination. Still, two and a half decades after Clare's descent, Carmen's end is considerably sanitized, because Joe is a gentleman killer who divulges his rage only to the camera-as-voyeur.

Through Halle Berry's performances of the actual Dandridge's life and death, Dandridge's corpse, like that of Carmen Jones, is epitomized as the conclusion to a film that obsesses over the public and private exploitations of her body--and much more graphically so than Clare Kendry could ever be imagined. The 1999 HBO debut of *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (as well as the subsequent DVD release) was advertised with the following tagline: "She was everything America wanted a movie star to be...except white." On the poster was Halle Berry, posing as Dorothy Dandridge. She wore an identical hairstyle, evening gown, and she seductively draped her body over a chaise lounge. Some elements of this image are true to life of the actual Dandridge (the teased hair, the diamonds and fur stole); some are quintessentially Berry (the perfectly arched eyebrow, the sultry gaze, the smug, red smile); and others advertise the mulatta woman in general as a visual feast (the exposed cleavage; the discreetly bared thigh). However, the tagline misleads about both the image and Dandridge's story. It infers that not only is black identity to be emphasized over Dandridge/Berry's mixed-race birth, but that the entire film is related to the civil rights struggle—and that Dandridge (quite unlike Clare Kendry) was at least forced to confront her black origins, and could not hide from them.

Quandaries of raced representation likewise emerge when the real-life Dandridge is played by Halle Berry. When Berry's Dandridge is read solely as an African American, then she is simply a pioneer in terms of the barriers she attempts to protest. But when "Dandridge" is read as a mixed woman who was purportedly of African American, white and Mexican extraction, then she becomes a stereotypical mulatta who, like Clare, never escapes the limitations of a woman

gloriously doomed as a martyred sex object by her hybrid beauty.

Although Berry-as-Dandridge-as-Carmen is a five-minute sequence in the entire biopic, this portrayal resembles a series of Russian dolls. Berry, whose father is black and whose mother is white, is essentially a mulatta who portrays a tragic mulatta who portrayed a particularly notorious tragic mulatta. In the “Dat’s Love” number, the viewer observes a 1999 interpretation of a 1954 studio depiction of a 1940’s cafeteria. But, in both the actual and interpreted examples of Dandridge’s performance, there is a blatant distinction between Dandridge the star and the stock characters who surround her. In the 1999 re-creation, “Harry Belafonte” and “Olga James” are elements of the background: “James” is only seen from behind for less than a minute on the lunch line, and “Belafonte” whispers a few words of encouragement to his co-star. Still, Berry’s Dandridge makes a dramatic entrance—not as the errant employee, but as Preminger’s Other Woman who arouses him in her red skirt. Her solo scene cuts to Preminger’s bedroom, as “Dat’s Love” is choreographed to their sexual encounter. However, in this rendition, “Carmen” is not a lusty performer, but rather the naive paramour who is juxtaposed against Otto Preminger’s (Klaus Maria Brandauer’s) age, whiteness and status.

Still, Dandridge must constantly confront and defend her (black) heritage in public. Whereas Clare Kendry’s blackness is a secret guilt, and though Carmen’s blackness is not explicitly emphasized, Dandridge must cope with the fact that her blackness is always a spectacle. At the beginning of the biopic, her future first husband Harold Nicholas (Obba Babatunde) is introduced to her mother while he and Dandridge are on a date at the local movie house: Harold and Dandridge are spectators to Ruby Dandridge’s (Loretta Devine’s) exploits as an onscreen mammy. Nicholas, himself a black entertainer, grumbles his discomfort, only to realize his embarrassment when he discovers why Dorothy insisted on *this* movie. She defends her mother with the obvious rationale—what *other* roles are available for a black woman who was the family’s breadwinner? However, when the light skinned

Dandridge herself becomes a star, she is frustrated by the fact that she is one notch above the sexless house slave. She is the jungle queen whose gyrations and vine-tethered limbs vaguely resemble kinky sex. Offstage, Dandridge is less the tropical delight than she is the demeaned black employee must comply with humiliations of the kitchen entrance and the Styrofoam cup toilet.

The dilemma of sex is particularly ironic regarding Berry's Dandridge, in that a typecasted spitfire was traumatized by abuse and terrified of intimate encounters. But compared to the actual Dandridge's contained exploits of jungle queens and factory floozies, Berry's Dandridge is a less sanitized martyr. The wedding night scenes are spliced with Dandridge's flashbacks to an incident in which her mother's lesbian partner "Auntie" accuses her of "putting out" and thrusts her finger up the teenager's vagina to verify her virginity. Close-up shots to Dandridge's contorted face emphasize her agony. But Dandridge must ignore such memories if she is to survive the wedding night, which itself becomes a catalyst for a different trauma. The camera cuts from Harold Nicholas' advances to nine months later, when his bride goes into labor with their daughter Harolyn, in a different moment of excruciating vaginal penetration.

But when specific homoerotic scenes in the biopic and in *Carmen Jones* are connected back to *Passing*, a curious trend seems to emerge. There is something titillating about the depiction of the mulatta body in scenes of confrontations with other women. Undoubtedly, both Carmen and Dandridge's relationships with (both black and white) men are questionable, and in some cases are plainly illicit. Still, these are heterosexual liaisons. However, the lesbian allusions create a tantalizing segue into the forbidden. As Carmen Jones, Dandridge is the active partner who penetrates, whereas Berry's Dandridge is penetrated. Regardless, whether Dandridge is the dominant or submissive, she is always the prettier and lighter-complexioned "partner." And none of these scenes, which are intended to be so enticing, conveys pleasure or intimacy. Instead, they hint at sadomasochism.

For Dandridge, both as the portrayer or the portrayed, such scenes of female interaction are explicitly electric. But, are these conflicts an extension of Clare Kendry's legacy? Is it possible that *Passing* teems with similar insinuations of not only eroticism, but also *homoeroticism*? Although Clare torments Irene, there is something that beckons Irene to her. Clare, like Carmen Jones, intoxicates everyone whom she attracts. She is a siren song to both white men and black men, and to both men and women, who confront her with their verboten fantasies of intimacy or conquest. Just as the tempting Carmen makes men swoon over her. Clare seduces Irene because she leads an intriguing life that is atypical for a janitor's daughter:

There were things that [Irene] wanted to ask Clare Kendry. She wished to find out about this hazardous business of "passing," this breaking away from all that was familiar and friendly to take one's chance in another environment, not entirely strange, perhaps, but...not entirely friendly...

Clare, it gave Irene a little prick of satisfaction to recall, hadn't got that by passing herself off as white. She herself had always had it.

Just as she'd always had that pale gold hair which...was drawn loosely back from a broad brow, partly hidden by the small close hat. Her lips, painted a brilliant geranium red, were sweet and sensitive and a little obstinate. A tempting mouth. The face across the forehead and cheeks was a trifle too wide, but the ivory skin had a peculiar soft luster. And the eyes were magnificent! Dark, sometimes absolutely black, always luminous, and set in long, black lashes...Ah! Surely! They were Negro eyes! Mysterious and concealing. And set in that ivory face under that bright hair, there was about them, something exotic (Larsen 24, 28-9).

Undoubtedly, Irene is both mystified by and attracted to Clare's beauty. However, it would be superficial to claim that Clare's slender, blond-haired attractiveness is the only aspect of her character that draws Irene to her. Rather, Clare's intrigues because she performs without ever questioning or doubting her capability to deceive. Her fair features, and her impeccable taste in makeup and

fashion cleverly belie the darker mysteries of her past—both her maternal roots, and her troubled beginnings. Indeed, there is something about Clare at face value that is questionable to Irene. Her white skin and white comportment minimize the black features she has inherited. As such, Irene (or, for that matter, Jack Billew, and any given stranger who beholds her) is left to ask the tantalizing question of “is she—or isn’t she?” But Clare is so skillful in the manipulation of her whiteness that, to Irene, she merely carries herself as someone who possesses no such secrets, at all.

Nonetheless, interracial heterosexual love remains a tantamount controversy. The white men possess a dubious power in the home, bedroom, and in the American racial caste systems depicted in these works. In the biopic, Dandridge is routinely humiliated by the white husbands and partners who objectify her through their power. She is won over by second husband Jack Denison’s lies of widowhood, only to become ensnarled in a union with a jobless and violent alcoholic who at one point hits her hard enough to knock her clear across their living room.

Dandridge’s earlier tryst with Preminger is without irony a metaphor for the lyrics of “Dat’s Love:” She goes for him but he, as a white married man, is taboo. Even her friendship with Earl Mills is exaggerated through the camera’s manipulation of her body. In two final scenes, Mills arrives at Dandridge’s home to surprise her with the promise of new gigs. But in both segments, incidents that normally shouldn’t be sensualized emphasize her vulnerability. In the first scene Dandridge, who is pumping weights and recovering from a prior suicide attempt, is so carelessly excited about new work that she trips over a weight in a slow-motion fall from grace. Her accident devastates her—for, with a broken ankle, she cannot perform. Then there is the scandal of the suicide. Although one would assume that an overdose is painless because the victim puts herself to sleep, Dandridge’s end is all the more controversial because she was found undressed. In the film, the white male intrusion is emphasized as detectives and medics mull around the body despite Mills admonitions to at least cover her up while they investigate.

While the white male is regarded as a threat to the biracial woman's body and identity, *female* whiteness is perceived as an asset to the mulatta. If blackness exoticizes her, then whiteness conveys a Eurocentric normalcy. Dark complexioned blackness in both *Carmen Jones* and *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* connotes heathenish qualities in both male and female characters (the wild Frankie; the roving Husky Miller; the sadistic drill sergeant who commands Joe to extradite Carmen and so defers his dreams of a weekend with Cindy Lou; Auntie; and Ruby with her ignorance of Auntie's abuse)<sup>11</sup>. But pure white maleness threatens the mulatta's integrity, and reduces her to a possession. Jack Denison, for instance, is as a nefarious character who captivates and then controls his wife. Likewise Preminger dictates to Dandridge how she is to please him both onset and in the bedroom. Even Earl Mill's primary role in Dandridge's life is not as her close friend, but as her manager.

Could Denison and Preminger (who onscreen are more characters than real life individuals) feasibly remind us of Clare's husband? Though Jack Bellew is not violent, he is quite unoriginal as the clueless and denigrating paramour. As such, Clare's performance is not for the mere social gain of hotel luncheons, but more so to secure Bellew's affections. She is Jack's adorable pet who arouses him with the golden skin that she refuses to explain. Jack is blunt in his racism ("I don't dislike them [blacks]; I hate them") but ironically he is mystified by the delusion that Clare is trying to "pass" for African American. His attitude fervently impels his wife to deny her blackness and, like the slave heroines before her, to parade her whiteness if she is to maintain both his approval, and her legitimate acceptance as white.

In addition to being racist, Jack is plainly unattractive. He has heavy eyelids, a

---

<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the biracial woman's blackness has often been literally commoditized. Patricia Turner's *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994) discusses the American marketing of black skin. Whereas light complexioned blackness denotes exotic beauty, darker skin is synonymous with the antebellum kitchen, and the mammy is a sexless and simple outsider who defers to whites.

“soft” and “womanish” mouth, his skin is an “unhealthy doughnut colour” (Larsen 38-9). Larsen’s rendering of Jack parallels how the white men in *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* are represented as unextraordinary creatures next to their exceptionally beautiful wives or bedmates. Preminger is an obese, jowly “bulldog,” and Denison’s incredible paleness (his white skin and platinum hair) is exacerbated by his bloodshot eyes.

But aside from such highly charged sexual interactions, Dandridge’s re-created demise is both physically and sexually compelling, much more so than the drama that unfolds at an open window. The discovery of her corpse creates a blatant intrusion into the death scene, as well as it is the capstone to this highly troubled life. Like *Carmen Jones* (and unlike *Passing*), nothing about September 8, 1965 is left to the perceiver’s imagination. On the day of her death, Dandridge *was* found nude in her home, presumably in the process of bathing. But, unlike *Carmen Jones* or *Passing*, Dandridge’s death is neither stylized nor contained. The viewer learns of the suicide through Earl Mill’s discovery of the body, and his shock is supposed to speak for the horror that the audience must feel. Dandridge is face down and her hair is done, and her body bridges a path between the bathroom and bedroom. She remains on display as investigators mull over quintessential accident-suicide hypotheses. But what truly makes Dandridge’s end so fascinating? Is it because she was a suicide victim, a relatively young suicide victim (42), a young suicide victim who led a troubled life, or a suicide victim whose painless though untimely end becomes aggrandized? Or, does Dandridge’s death intrigue because it is the *opposite* of Clare’s leap? Whereas Larsen invites the reader to envision the *outcome* of the fall on Clare’s body, the viewer instead must ponder the *cause* of Dandridge’s demise. Did she go peacefully or violently? How did she end up without any clothes? How long had she lain there?

Two summers before the debut of *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*, *Ebony* magazine ran a dual cover story (1997) on Dandridge’s life, which was gleaned from

Mills' biography, and on the careers of a set of actresses who at the time looked like strong candidates for the lead role in the planned biopic. Among the prospects were Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, Vanessa Williams, Angela Bassett and, of course, Halle Berry, who are all accomplished African American entertainers. But even in 1997, the handwriting seemed to be on the wall, at least in *Ebony*. Published along with the cover story was an article on the Berry's biracial childhood and her rise as a self-identified black star the early nineties onward. Nonetheless, it is eerily curious to observe how Berry's resemblance to Dandridge transcends the skin deep. Ironically, Berry herself achieved the milestone to which Dandridge, with her portrayal of the (self) destructive Carmen, had once aspired. In 2002, she became the first (self-identified) black woman to *win* the Best Actress Oscar. She earned this honor for her *Monster's Ball* portrayal of the conflicted wife of a black death row inmate (Sean "P. Diddy" Combs) who becomes intimate with a white prison guard (Billy Bob Thornton). But this role is an epitomical example of *who* Berry has become reduced to. Like Dandridge, she alternates between representations of the exotic and the tragic. She is the heroine of *Gothika* (2003), or the feral Catwoman of dramatic deaths, multiple reincarnations and dominatrix-style leather outfits (*Catwoman*, 2004). She is the honey-voiced and flamboyant Zola Taylor of *Why Do Fools Fall in Love* (1998). She is the May-December paramour of Jay Bulworth (*Bulworth*, 1998). She is the crack-addicted whore in her debut in *Jungle Fever* (1991) and the crack addicted mother in *Losing Isaiah* (1995) who abandons her titular newborn in a drug-induced delirium. More recently, Berry has become the bipolar stripper of *Frankie and Alice* (2010), and the heroic yet ever-beautiful 911 operator who must rescue a kidnapped teenager in *The Call* (2013)<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> However, contemporary mulatta actresses such as Berry continue to typecasted. Berry rose to fame following the 1980s popularity surge of exceptionally striking actresses who became trapped by famous roles they cannot escape. Jennifer Beals will always be the Pittsburgh welder turned stripper in *Flashdance* (1984), just as Lisa Bonet will always be the wild child of *The Cosby Show* (1984), *Angel Heart* (1987) and the infamous barely-clad *Rolling Stone* cover shoot (1988). Meanwhile, the New England-born Jasmine Guy cannot escape the prim and honey-voiced Southern belles of the *Cosby* spinoff *A Different World* (1987), *School Daze* (1988), or the Alex Haley miniseries *Queen* (1993).

And again, Berry's fate, like Dandridge's, stems from the legacy that Clare's Kendry's death has created. Although Clare's life span is barely 100 pages, she and her "descendants" (e.g. Dandridge and Berry) are perpetually resurrected from their fictionalized deaths. They have both encountered a lack of diverse roles, and a limitation of self expression. As was true for Clare Kendry, beauty is only skin deep for them. The heroine exists mainly to tantalize. She lacks any real complexity as a *bona fide* character, but is merely a caricature who, like the proverbial unbroken mold, is too easily replicated.

Ultimately, when *Passing* and its filmic descendants are recognized not as individually significant works, but as collective examples of the problem of representation, then what emerges is a devolution of biracial identity. The mixed race heroine from Clare Kendry onward becomes increasingly victimized, both by her fictitious circumstances, but likewise through the imaginations of both creators and the audience, who embody the unspoken yet very real lust of the voyeur. The mulatta's death, like her titillating life, is a complex product of various essential factors. A successful and captivating ending to each work must include her youth (and therefore her *undying* beauty); the inherent violence of the deed, and ultimately the compulsion of the reader/viewer to become fixated upon the ravaged corpse. Therefore, Clare's end is not only successful in and of itself, but it also expands upon the expectations of the mulatta archetype. Clare does not follow the lead of the slave heroine who either lives saintly (Iola Leroy) or dies shrouded (Rena Walden). Rather, her plunge transforms her death *and* her corpse into a showcase that subsequent creators have elaborated upon. Dorothy Dandridge as Carmen Jones (or, Dandridge as the typecast actress) flaunts the risqué through her scant costumes and gyrations. Halle Berry as Dorothy Dandridge (or, Berry in almost any other role) is Clare's most recent descendant who bookends a century of visual culture that is shaped by the increasingly intrusive and unapologetic gaze upon the body.

Indeed, Clare is nothing short of a prototype that the voyeur, through the

camera lens and the appeal to imagination and emotion, persistently improves upon. That is, if “improvement” just refers to an elaboration on taboo scenes. Ironically, the “tragic” mulatta continues to thrive through death. Incidentally, this perpetuation is antithetical to the archaic idea that spawned in the era of the slave heroines like Clotel, Frado or Iola Leroy. The partially-white black daughter, like the mule from which “mulatto” is derived, was assumed to be damned to sterility because of her hybrid birth. Likewise, miscegenation itself was thought to eradicate racial purity through the creation of a mongrelized species. However, these works of 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction prove that the mulatta is not extinct, and that she *cannot* become extinct. Clare Kendry, herself the hypothetical daughter of the slave heroines, ensures the continuation of young, violent and beautiful death as a fascination. Her immortality ensures the perpetuation of Dorothy Dandridge’s death and life, as well as it predicts the fame that Halle Berry has become (and perhaps shall be) limited to.

## WORKS CITED:

- Baldwin, James. "Carmen Jones: The Dark is Light Enough." *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon P, 1983. 46-54. Print
- Berzon, Judith R. *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York UP, 1978. Print.
- Bulworth*. Dir. Warren Beatty. Perf. Warren Beatty, Halle Berry, Don Cheadle, Oliver Platt, and Paul Sorvino. 20th Century Fox, 1998. DVD.
- Brown, William W. *Clotel or, the President's Daughter*. Ed. Robert S. Levine. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's P, 2000. Print.
- The Call*. Dir. Brad Anderson. Perf. Abigail Breslin, Halle Berry, Morris Chestnut, and Michael Eklund. Troika Pictures, 2013. Film.
- Carmen Jones*. Dir. Otto Preminger. Perf. Joe Adams, Pearl Bailey, Harry Belafonte, Diahann Carroll, Dorothy Dandridge, and Olga James. 20th Century Fox, 1954. DVD.
- Catwoman*. Dir. Jean-Christophe "Pitof" Comar. Perf. Halle Berry, Benjamin Bratt, and Sharon Stone. Village Roadshow Pictures, 2004. DVD.
- Chesnutt, Charles Waddell. *The House behind the Cedars*. New York: Modern Library, 2003. Print.
- Fauset, Jessie. *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*. Boston: Beacon P, 1990. Print.
- Frankie and Alice*. Dir. Geoffrey Sax. Perf. Halle Berry, Matt Frewer, and Stellan Skarsgard. Access Motion Pictures, 2010. Film.
- Goldsmith, Meredith. "Shopping to Pass, Passing to Shop: Bodily Self-Fashioning in the Fiction of Nella Larsen." *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self Representations by African American Women*. Ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001. 97-117. Print.
- Gothika*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Perf. Halle Berry, Robert Downey, Jr., Charles S.

- Dutton, and John Carroll Lynch. Dark Castle Entertainment, 2003. DVD.
- Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy or, Shadows Uplifted*. College Park: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969. Print.
- Harrison-Kahan, Lori. "Her 'Nig': Returning the Gaze of Nella Larsen's *Passing*." *Modern Language Studies* 32.2 (2002): 109-138. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007.
- Hodes, Martha Elizabeth. *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Print.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. New York: Harper Collins, 2000. Print.
- Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*. Dir. Martha Coolidge. Perf. Halle Berry, Obba Babatundé, Klaus Maria Brandauer, Brent Spiner, and Cynda Williams. HBO, 1999. DVD.
- Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987. Print.
- Jackson, Cassandra. *Barriers between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth Century American Literature*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004. Print.
- Jungle Fever*. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. Halle Berry, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Samuel L. Jackson, Spike Lee, Lonette McKee, Annabella Sciorra, and Wesley Snipes. 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1991. DVD.
- Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York and London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.
- Larsen, Nella. "Quicksand." *American Women Writers: Quicksand and Passing*. Ed. Deborah E. McDowell. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1986. 1-142. Print.
- Larson, Charles R., ed. *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen: Passing, Quicksand and the Stories*. New York: Anchor Books, 1992. Print.
- Lewis, Vashti. "The Near-White Female in Frances Ellen Harper's *Iola Leroy*." *Phylon*

45.5 (1984): 314-322. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 June 2008.

*Losing Isaiah*. Dir. Stephen Gyllenhaal. Perf. Halle Berry, Cuba Gooding, Jr., Marc John Jefferies, Jessica Lange, and David Strathairn. Paramount Pictures, 1995. DVD.

Marable, Manning, Leith Mullings and Sophie Spencer-Wood. *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle*. London and New York: Phaidon P, 2002. Print.

Mills, Earl. *Dorothy Dandridge: An Intimate Portrait of Hollywood's First Major Black Film Star*. Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Company, 1970. Print.

*Monster's Ball*. Dir. Mark Forster. Perf. Halle Berry, Sean Combs, Heath Ledger, and Billy Bob Thornton. Lee Daniels Entertainment, 2001. DVD.

Morton, Patricia. "From Invisible Man to 'New People': The Recent Discovery of American Mulattoes." *Phylon* 46.2 (1985): 106-122. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 April 2007.

Nunes, Zita C. "Phantasmatic Brazil: Nella Larsen's *Passing*, American Literary Imagination and Racial Utopianism." *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Interamerican Literary Dialogues*. Eds. Monika Kaup and Debra Rosenthal. Austin: U of Texas P, 2002. Print.

O'Neale, Sondra. "Race, Sex and Self: Aspects of Bildung in Select Novels by Black American Women Novelists." *MELUS* 9.4 (1982): 25-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 June 2008.

Pabst, Naomi. "Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations over Crossing Signs." *Cultural Critique* 54 (2003): 178-211. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 June 2008.

Park, Robert E. "Mentality of Racial Hybrids." *The American Journal of Sociology* 36.4 (1931): 534-551. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 April 2007.

Raimon, Eve Allegra. *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Antislavery Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004.

Print.

Reuter, Edward B. *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. Boston: Badger, 1918. Print.

Rosenthal, Debra J. "The White Blackbird: Miscegenation, Genre, and the Tragic Mulatta in Howells, Harper and the 'Babes of Romance.'" *Nineteenth Century Literature* 56.4 (2002): 495-517. JSTOR. Web. 13 June 2008.

Ruuth, Marianne. "Introducing Dorothy Dandridge, the Film." *Dorothy Dandridge: An Intimate Portrait of Hollywood's First Major Black Film Star*. Ed. Earl Mills. Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Company, 1970. 202-230. Print.

Silverman, Debra B. "Nella Larsen's Quicksand: Untangling the Webs of Exoticism." *African American Review* 27.4 (1993): 599-614. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 1852. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

Tate, Claudia. "Death and Desire in *Quicksand*, by Nella Larsen." *American Literary History* 7.2 (1995): 234-260. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007.

Tate, Claudia. "Nella Larsen's Passing: A Problem of Interpretation." *Black American Literature Forum* 14.4 (1980): 142-146. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007.

Turner, Patricia. *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

Wall, Cheryl A. "Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels." *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2 (1986): 97-111. JSTOR. Web. 4 April 2007.

*Why Do Fools Fall in Love?* Dir. Gregory Nava. Perf. Halle Berry, Vivica A. Fox, Lela Rochon, and Larenz Tate. Rhino Films, 1998. VHS.

**AUTHOR INFORMATION:**

Marta Holliday is an Assistant Professor of English and the Humanities at Alabama State University. Her articles have been published in various prestigious journals.