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Jamila I. Wiggins April 10, 2018

The Tradition of U.S. Repression: Reflections on Racial Passing in Relation to the Color Line and the Racial Uncanny in Early 20th Century Literature

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Abstract

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By Jamila I. Wiggins

This research explores the relationship that racial passing in early twentieth century novels has to U.S. society. Utilizing novels, such as *Passing* by Nella Larsen, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson, and *Imitation of Life* by Fannie Hurst, this analysis aims to explore the societal repression attributed to narratives of mixed-race and passing in the United States of America. The repression assigned to narratives of mixed-race bodies and passing figures arises from a sense of uncanniness, an idea put forth originally by Sigmund Freud, which explains the discovery of one's fears manifesting in a familiar entity. While upholding ideology associated with the segregation of races through the strict implementation of the color line, U.S. society, as depicted in these texts, denies the mixing of races before and during the twentieth century—specifically during times of slavery. Therefore, when met with passing figures, individuals who adhere to the color line, including white folks, black folks, and other passing figures, experience a sense of fear and dread at the insurrection of potential race mixing. Further, this insurrection manifests in the policing of the color line by black folks, as expressed through the labeling of individuals who racially pass as race traitors. However, individuals who racially pass choose their identities, denying the perceived naturalization of race and embracing it more as a social construction. This choice assigns them to a position of race desertion, meaning that they forsake the U.S. constructions and identifications of race in order to assert a sense of agency.

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For Crystal.

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Introduction

Built upon the bones of oppression, disenfranchisement, and, of course, racism, is the institution of U.S. American society. In a society supposedly founded upon tenets surrounding personal freedom, individuals with the ability to racially pass during the early twentieth century find that they, in relation to their black and mixed-race identities, have little power over ascribed racial identity. More specifically, these figures, discouraged by the racially binary system of U.S. society, cannot move with open fluidity between racial identities. However, within the world of fiction, which is based off of aspects of reality, exploration of the passing narrative is made possible—particularly in regards to the fluidity of racial identity. In reality, though, this lack of power that passing figures face in U.S. society mirrors the lack of representation in scholarship surrounding passing figures. As Juda Bennet laments, "This elusive subject still seems hidden in larger studies about representations of race. There have been many articles and chapters on passing, but the subject deserves greater study" (1). In order to provide a "greater study" of the fictional passing narrative, the history surrounding passing and its unique connection to the history of the United States must be explored (Bennet 1).

Due to the emergence of the one-drop rule "in Southern slavery and the Jim Crow segregation in the South," which classified "anyone with any known trace of black blood" as black, the tradition of racial passing chiefly exists as a U.S. American narrative (Khanna 97 and 98). In fictional narratives of racial passing, the color line—a fictional construction of U.S. society used to enforce ideas of white supremacy and racial separation—acts as a means of upholding the assumed racial binary in the U.S., which at the time encompassed whiteness and blackness. The physical manifestation of this separation, then, finds itself exaggerated in the

often mixed-race figures of passing narratives, known as the tragic mulatto or tragic mulatta. However, the distinction between passing and the tragic mulatto figure is that not all passing narratives involve a tragic mulatto, just as not all tragic mulatto narratives involve passing. Describing the tragic mulatto figure, Gosselin writes, "The trope of the tragic mulatto, a figure characterized by betrayal and race-denial [is] haunted by racial impurity, and whose very body bears the stigma of relations unsanctionable in the United States" (47). The notions associated with the tragic mulatto figure, "betrayal and race-denial, haunted by racial impurity, and whose very body bears the stigma of relations unsanctionable in the United States," are incredibly aligned with the taboo of racial mixing and crossing the boundaries of the color line (Gosselin 47). Essentially, because the tragic mulatto figures are constructed as individuals created out of racial tainting, they are, even in fiction, subjected to dehumanization and stereotypes based on the disenfranchisement of their personhood. According to Naomi Pabst, "mixedness is cast as—among other things—inauthentic, irrelevant, tragic" (190). The tragedy assigned to mixedness, as both Pabst and Gosselin propose, is based upon the idea that mixed-race and passing figures, whose existence rejects the perceived indestructability of the color line, have no sense of racial authenticity. Because mixedness is traditionally written out of the U.S. societal narrative during the early twentieth century, the representation granted to them is often riddled with stereotypes built upon the myth of "racial impurity" (Gosselin 47). Pabst expresses this idea, writing, "The tragic mulatto stereotype, in fact, functions as a silencing trope for mixed-race representation by overdetermining its meanings and significations" (195). Thus, ideas surrounding mixed-race, as presented through the tragic mulatto, often include "disconnectedness, displacement, alienation, and lack of belonging," along with "deleterious dualisms" that rob mixed-race figures of any true chance at social acceptance or balance (Pabst 196). Further, following the etymology of the

tragic aspects of the tragic mulatto figure, Aristotle defines tragedy as "essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery" (231). Applying this idea to the trope of the tragic mulatto, the tragic aspect of the tragic mulatto is that these figures are forced into a position where they must perform according to society's desires, which is true of everyone. However, individuals who choose to pass forsake a chance at a life that is, in a way, validated because society does not allow for mixed-race figures to exist within the U.S. narrative, and the racial binary system attempts to keep passing figures in one racial category: black. Thus, those who do pass and create lives through their passing must, in a way, imitate the lives of white folks through performativity. Where the disconnect between expected racial performance and imitation forms, however, derives from the fact that unlike white folks, passing figures must hide their ascribed racial identities, along with any traces of their blackness or mixedness. This imitation, then, along with the necessary precautions taken to preserve their performances, presents itself within the three texts analyzed for this project.

In order to provide a survey of literature concerned with racial passing, I have decided to incorporate the novels *Passing,* published in 1929 by Nella Larsen, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* published by James Weldon Johnson in 1912, and *Imitation of Life,* published by Fannie Hurst in 1933. These novels, containing passing figures that are well-known for their tragic mulatto and tragic mulatta status, vary greatly in their narratives. In addition, the variation of personality and personal history exhibited among these three novels suggests that the lives of mixed-race and passing figures cannot be reduced to meaningless stereotypes derived from constructions surrounding racism and white supremacy. While this variation could potentially be a product of the differing racial background of the authors, as Fannie Hurst was white while Nella Larsen and James Weldon Johnson were mixed-race and black, the independent

complexities of character presented in Clare Kendry, the Ex-Colored Man, and Peola undermine the overall emptiness found within the trope of the tragic mulatto/mulatta by asserting that lack of character is unnatural. Further, by indicating that lack of character is unnatural, these fictional passing figures also prove that lack of imagination, including social imagination, is unnatural. While these texts are exceptionally different in their execution, common threads link them together, formulating a sense of cohesion that makes them identifiable as passing narratives. These commonalities are what I propose as the racial uncanny and the dichotomy between the race traitor and race deserter.

The idea of the racial uncanny possesses some lineage to Fredric Jameson's political view of Freud's theory; however, this reading of the uncanny possesses societal and racial influence, as inspired by the politics of the early twentieth century regarding mixed-race figures. To begin, Freud argues that "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). Essentially, the experience of the uncanny erupts from the fear or fascination that an individual has with a particular entity that is deeply recognizable. Through stressing the past tense in the phrases "was once well known" and "had long been familiar," Freud argues that the uncanny is a present feeling that one experiences upon interacting with a being that holds some sense of familiarity within their mind (Freud 124). The uncanny possesses an appeal to the viewer, for "one would like to know the nature of this common nucleus, which allows us to distinguish the 'uncanny' within the field of the frightening" (Freud 123). The uncanny is recognizable due to the fact that it forces individuals into a state of fear; nonetheless, this fear informs one's fascination. Further, as most Freudian theory expresses, there is a convergence with the repressed, as expressed in the phrase, "the frightening that goes back to what was once known" (Freud 124). Analyzing U.S. racial

constructions of racial separation through this Freudian lens, the system operates in a similar fashion as Freud's conceptualization of the human mind, meaning that like the human mind, society, created from a network of human minds, possesses wishes, beliefs, and most importantly, harshly suppressed desires. In fact, looking at the history of U.S. society, society's past operates as a memory that is essentially manipulated and used against the potential for any sense of progression. In fact, I would argue that, in this case, what Freud identifies as the infantile belief is the idea that the races must be kept separate. This idea derives directly from white society's desire of the black body and the repression of white society's licentious behavior and sexual violence during a time when black folks and white folks lived in close proximity: slavery (Block 208). In a discussion of U.S. historical repression and its connection to repression in Freudian theory, Pabst, mirroring ideas put forth by Gregory Stephens, states:

> He exhorts his readers to consider the activity that the verb 'to repress' mandates, the strength of purpose, the force that creates and maintains the interracial as taboo. It is perhaps inevitable, then, even if contradictory, that the popular disavowal of mixed race has historically involved, on the one hand, painstaking attempts to dismiss, erase, and inappropriate mixed-race subjects, and on the other, passionate legal and moral debates about whether mixing should occur at all (181).

Ultimately, in order to uphold ideology surrounding racial segregation, U.S. society, the history of mixed-race figures is essentially, like the idea of interracial relations, regarded as "taboo," which is a term explored in Freud's book *Totem and Taboo* (181). In an attempt to suppress this past, along with the taboo desires associated with it, particular beliefs are upheld to encourage further separation, like the one drop-rule. When exceptions to these firmly set rules arise, however, white society is reminded of a past where mixing did, in fact, occur, and they

experience a sense of disorientation because they are faced with the repressed desires and horrors of the past. Thus, the beliefs, described by Freud as infantile represent the ideologies that individuals have unconsciously internalized or made familiar. Thus, within a society whose racial ideologies and beliefs essentially form the foundation of nearly all social and political interactions and personal perception, the ideas associated with racialized constructions, such as the one-drop rule and racial separation, construct one's sense of familiarity; therefore, when an individual is met with a figure who does not fit within these binary constructions, they are met with a sense of "fear and dread" (Freud 123). While this idea seemingly belongs to one side of the color line—the white side—racial uncanniness can be experienced by the individuals passing, as well, based upon their socialization and investment in white supremacy. The racial uncanny experienced by black folks and passing figures arises from notions of white supremacy and oppressive systems, for oppressive systems cannot survive unless they are supported by the groups labeled as superior and those with an ascribed identity of inferior. Thus, the racial uncanny experienced by black folks and passing figures originates from the black community's investment in white supremacy.

In regards to the dichotomy of the race traitor and the race deserter, the passing figures being analyzed for this project pass for white, disrupting notions of racial separation, for their passing essentially negates the one-drop rule. By disrupting notions of racial separation and, in turn, the racialized binary of U.S. society, one would think that these passing figures have, in a way, escaped the suffocating pressure of adhering to a binary. However, in these texts, the binary racial systems that the passing figures reject and move away from are ultimately replaced with a new binary: race traitor versus race deserter. Interestingly, *Passing, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* and *Imitation of Life* all present some form of this dichotomy. For instance, in

Passing and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* the protagonists both make clear references towards notions of race desertion by calling themselves deserters (Larsen 37 and Johnson 99). In *Imitation of Life,* however, Peola is, on multiple occasions, regarded as a race traitor through her passing, when she can be read as a race deserter. For the purpose of this project, race traitor and race deserter derive from militaristic language associated with active betrayal and passive abandonment. Thus, a race traitor is someone who actively seeks out ways to harm the black community, such as exposing other passing individuals to the rest of society, exposing institutions or individuals who rebel against racial separation, or any action that caters towards white supremacy and places the black community in danger. Conversely, race desertion takes on the passive act of essentially abandoning the system of race altogether. For instance, by passing for white, passing figures reject the notion that race is a natural reification. By doing so, they assert that race is a social construction, which rejects the biological systematization of race. Furthermore, in order to contextualize the proposal of race traitor and race deserter, it is important to recognize that these terms are essentially used by black folks in order to police passing figures. As a system based off of a racial hierarchy, it is key to remember that oppressive systems rely upon those labelled as superior, as well as those labelled as inferior, creating a cycle of dependency in which both parties engage. Because the U.S. system recognizes race as a naturalized condition with expectations assigned by biological disposition, white folks in these texts do not label passing figures as race traitors and race deserters. The expectations regarding the color line's stability prohibits them from doing so. Black folks within these texts, however, engage in a similar form of policing, as defined through the binary of race traitor and race deserter, that white folks do in terms of the U.S. American's optimum binary: race.

In Chapter One, I will analyze the revolutionary figure of Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, discussing how her racial performance breaks down the racialized binary system of U.S. American society. This chapter will outline the uncanniness associated with Clare Kendry, along with her role as a race deserter within the text. As a passing figure, Clare Kendry represents the physical embodiment of racial transgression, which inspires fear on both sides of the color line; however, through Irene, Larsen exposes the policing nature of the black community in regards to passing figures. In this chapter, I will also explore the shadow of ambiguity surrounding Clare's death, proposing that Irene and Clare are both complicit in the act. In Chapter Two, I will investigate the socialization of the Ex-Colored Man, focusing on how his upbringing, headed by a black mother, affects his growth and journey of transitioning from an unknown passing figure to a black figure to a permanent passing figure once more. The Ex-Colored Man's socialization informs the way he perceives himself, along with other figures, like his future wife, who can be read as passing. Interestingly, the Ex-Colored Man's socialization subjects him to the noticeable experience of the racial uncanny, which manifests in his inability to fully recognize his future wife as a passing figure. Repressing the knowledge of the racially mixed past of the U.S., the Ex-Colored Man, struck by his future wife's appearance, associates her with what he unconsciously perceives as superior: whiteness. Furthermore, his decision to permanently pass, inspired by the experience of witnessing a lynching, exists as a physical manifestation of his desire to not only repress his black identity, but his desire to repress his connection to a racialized past, as well. In Chapter Three, I will explore Peola's socialization and how it connects her to the racial uncanny. As an individual subjected to a form of socialization that supports black inferiority and essentially drives her away from the black community, it comes as little surprise that she grows to love whiteness through the hatred of blackness. The source of this socialization originates

from her mother, who openly expresses a deep investment in white supremacy. These notions, in turn, are instilled in Peola. The continuity formed between her socialization and the closeness in proximity to white folks that she matures in pushes Peola to experience a sense of uncanniness. As an individual who can pass, she views her ascribed black identity as a hindrance on her whiteness. Ultimately, the uncanniness that Peola experiences from infancy to adulthood manifests in her complete separation from blackness when she decides to completely pass as white.

In Search of Her People: Clare Kendry's Ascent to Blackness and Descent to Racial Deletion

Introduction

In order to fully understand the content of *Passing* by Nella Larsen, the historical context and conditions surrounding its fabrication must be explored, as well. As discussed earlier, the novel itself was published in 1929 amidst racial unrest within the racially polarized society of the U.S. This racial unrest existed openly, even blatantly coloring a *New York Times* book review delivered to Larsen shortly after the publication of her work. The review states, "Nella Larsen is among the better Negro novelists. She writes a good firm, tangible prose, and her dialogue is convincing except when she is trying to give you an idea of how intellectual people talk at a party" ("Two Thumbs Down: The Early Reviews of What Have Become Today's Black Literary Classics"). This condescension in the review's tone presents itself when the critic attributes Larsen's artistic prowess to her race. This review also criticizes black society as a whole—particularly black intellects—by attacking Larsen's grip on abstract thoughts, as they are expressed within intellectual circles. This attack, proclaimed by white society's *New York Times*, operates as a type of policing of black society ("Two Thumbs Down: The Early Reviews of What Have Become Today's Black Literary Classics"). The separation from the canon that Larsen experiences represents the atmosphere of U.S. American society in the 1920s. According to Rebecca Nisetich, during the 1920s specifically, racial unrest erupted amongst "white Americans" who "were becoming increasingly fearful of the potential for racial degeneracy and 'mongrelization'" (346). In particular, New York City, which is described as the overarching setting within *Passing*, presents the origin for the reality of the "anxiety over eroding race and class boundaries" (Nisetich 346). The perceived encroachment of black bodies into white

neighborhoods, along with the decriminalization of interracial marriage, already possessed enough power to draw the stability of racial boundaries into question (Graham 254-5 and Nisetich 346). However, The Rhinelander Case of 1925 represented the physical embodiment of U.S. society's fears (Thaggert 2). The Rhinelander Case, which centered around the marriage of a consenting wealthy white man, Leonard Rhinelander, to a lower class black woman who could pass, Alice Jones, speaks directly to the fears of white society that the mixing of races would disintegrate the constructed classifications of race and class (Nisetich 346). However, the marriage itself did not break down the societal barriers that had been put into place, as the purpose of the case was to formulate "an annulment… on the grounds of 'racial fraud'" due to the fact that racially passing individuals were labelled as "impostor[s]" (Nisetich 345 and Sollors 250). Occurring only four years before the publication of *Passing,* The Rhinelander Case introduces a narrative to American society of choice in regards to one's desire to marry and most imperatively, choice in regard to how one desires to present themselves to society racially.

Although *Passing* exists as a quintessential text within the tradition of narratives associated with passing literature and has been subjected to readings that construct Clare as a tragic figure whose death legitimizes the color line, I will defend her position as an autonomous woman who not only has control over the perception of her identity, but who also uses this control to free herself from the systematic oppression that she has been subjected to for the larger part of her life. The character of Clare Kendry, as intended by Larsen, is not meant to uphold the conventions of the tragic mulatta, which is reflected within her independent personality. Rather, much like her role in the breaking down of the racialized binary system of the U.S. American society, her construction as a woman who passes and openly asserts her ability to do so through

actions that are often labeled as dangerous indicates that she cannot be controlled by the systems created to oppress her further and, essentially, punish her for racial insurrection.

The Physicality of Whiteness in Relation to Clare's Identity

In keeping with the tradition of the tragic mulatta's physical appearance as phenotypically white, Larsen constructs Clare in a way that blurs the seemingly distinct lines of phenotypically informed racial boundaries. With her "pale gold hair" and "ivory skin," Clare Kendry possesses the most distinct features attributed to the strict standards of beauty, which value white femininity above all else (Larsen 28 and 29). However, the whiteness of Clare's skin and hair act as a canvas for features that, during the early twentieth century, would be identified as common features found among black folks. In the first physical description of Clare, which is extensive in its length, Larsen expresses Clare's racial ambiguity, as recognized by black figures, through the physical displacement of phenotypical features. She writes:

> Just as she'd always had that pale gold hair, which, unsheared still, was drawn loosely back from a broad brow…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 lustre. 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 an ivory face under that bright hair, there was about them something exotic (Larsen 28-9).

Within this passage, Larsen constructs Clare's phenotypically white features—in particular, her skin—as a canvas. Although U.S. American society's gaze accepts the whiteness of her skin as a type of racial expectation that defines her, Clare's white skin acts mainly as a vessel for features

that are traditionally presented within society as black features. In a sense, the whiteness of her skin renders all other physical features irrelevant upon the physical examination of her visage, for it is through the whiteness of her skin that Clare's entire identity is legitimized as white. In discussions of Clare's whiteness, terms associated with whiteness are proposed, including descriptions stating, "She was as white as…well as white as a lily" and "A pale rose-colour came into Clare's ivory cheeks" (39 and 70). Both descriptions present an image of assumed purity, which aligns itself with the traditions associated with white femininity. Essentially, the whiteness of Clare's skin overshadows the rest of her features, which, according to stereotypical phenotypes at the time, identify her as a black woman. For instance, although Larsen draws attention to the physical shape of her face as unfit for her skin color, deeming that "the face across the forehead and cheeks were a trifle too wide," she quickly justifies their belonging by stating that "the ivory skin had a peculiar soft lustre" (29). By constructing Clare's physical features as opposing forces upon her body that engage in a harmonious discourse of racial ambiguity, Larsen asserts that the passing figure physically possesses fluidity within their appearance. She does not simply aim to fabricate the racially passing form as a body that completely negates its assumed racial identity. Further, in fabricating Clare's physique in such a way, Larsen suggests that she has no interest in engaging with a passing figure who, in each and every way, expresses physical whiteness. The creation of a passing figure with ambiguous features also indicates a rejection of the binary racial canon, which asserts that phenotypic features are equivalent to one's racial identity. As Nadine Ehlers explores, the racial binary canon of U.S. American society relies upon features, such as "the phenotypic markers of white skin, straight hair…as 'Caucasian'" and "'black skin-pigment, 'wooly' hair'… [and] thick lips" for black folks, in order to concretely determine one's race (25). By employing this method of

mixing physical features, Larsen draws attention to the absurdity behind white skin automatically dictating whiteness, which destroys the entire system of phenotypic racial descriptors being the official indicators of racial identity.

Through the depiction of physical racial duality, a sense of stereotypical duality appears, as well. Larsen indicates this through the employment of the term "exotic" (29). Historically, black bodies have been exoticized by white society as an amalgamation of, employing Freud's terms of the uncanny, fascination and fear; therefore, it has acted as a vehicle for oppression—specifically in terms of the black feminine figure. Larsen expresses this exoticization, which translates into fetishization, by focusing on the sexualized features of the female face: the eyes and lips. By emphasizing that Clare has "a tempting mouth" with "lips, painted a brilliant geranium-red," Larsen places the reader in a position of forced consumption, meaning that the reader must imagine her mouth as "tempting" due to its initial description and lack of reinforcement within the text (Larsen 29). In addition, within this account, Larsen describes Clare's lips as being further emphasized through lipstick; therefore, Clare also maintains some responsibility over how her lips are viewed, which reflects how she perceives her sense of control over her performance of racial identity. However, as explored before, the physical features present on Clare's face act in unison with the canvas of her whiteness. Therefore, Clare simultaneously experiences a sense of outward purity, which, according to Mary Wilson, has been "raced as white," as well as hypersexualization through her assigned identity as a black woman (984). Larsen reinforces this idea through the sexualized language used to describe Clare's eyes and the effect they have on others. According to Larsen, Clare's eyes are "arresting eyes, slow and mesmeric, and with, for all their warmth, something withdrawn and secret about them […] Negro eyes! mysterious and concealing" (29). Through the use of language associated

with mystery, Clare's eyes are constructed as veils. This veiling, expressed through the "mysterious and concealing" qualities of Clare Kendry's eyes, influences individuals who consume her image to experience a type of desire to uncover the possible "secret" that her eyes protect (Larsen 29). Interestingly, this provides another duality, which incorporates the wish to both admire a figure that is "mesmeric" in its secretive quality and to uncover the truth behind the secrets that are being protected by a veil—despite the individual's reasons for keeping the veil in place, along with sacrifices that can be accounted for by the veil (Larsen 29). The secret behind these eyes, of course, refers to Clare's assigned racial identity; however, referring to them as "Negro eyes," Larsen disintegrates the possibility of there being any true secret by attaching Clare's eyes to eyes that phenotypically appeal to what "black eyes" are meant to look like by racially determined societal standards (Larsen 29 and 67). In fact, Larsen reinforces the image of Clare's "Negro eyes" and their appeal, in terms of exoticization, by objectifying them as "dark jewels" and, in a later passage, suggesting that the combination of her eyes and pale skin are sexually desirable (Larsen 29 and 74). Larsen writes, "Clare had a trick of sliding down ivory lids over astonishing black eyes, and then lifting them suddenly and turning on a caressing smile" (Larsen 93). In this passage, Clare's identity as a passing figure is directly hypersexualized by a black figure who recognizes the truth of her identity. With the knowledge of her black assigned racial identity, Irene creates the connection between pure white femininity and the eroticization of the black female identity; therefore, she, along with other black figures or figures presented with the understanding of the racial passing, recognizes the potential for the discovery of sexual desirability within her ambiguous features. In addition to the exoticization of her identity, Clare's "trick" of looking at people and "turning on a caressing smile" once more speaks to the level of control that she has over her identity (Larsen 93). By granting Clare power

over her physical expression, especially in terms of her racial identity and the performance attributed to racial identity, Larsen creates the "arresting" quality of Clare as a human, which is reflected by the veiled nature of her eyes (Larsen 29). This sense of control that Clare both possesses and expresses over her racial identity, however, forces her into a position of exoticization within the black community.

As explored, the duality that Clare embodies, categorized through the dichotomy of white appearance and black assigned racial identity, inspires a sense of desirability amongst black male figures. In particular, a moment occurs in the novel where, as mentioned, Clare's whiteness directly connects to desirability; however, this desirability exists among black men. Larsen writes, "And all because Clare had a trick of sliding down ivory lids over astonishing black eyes and then lifting them suddenly and turning on a caressing smile. Men like Dave Freeland fell for it. And Brian" (93). The inclusion of how black male figures are entrapped by Clare's "ivory lids," "astonishing black eyes," and "caressing smile" suggests that to other black women, Clare is the perfect temptress and a threat (Larsen 93). While the label of temptress already carries racialized assumptions directed towards black women, the idea of there being a perfect temptress arises from Clare's ability to exist as pure through her white appearance, for "western ideas of feminine beauty [link] whiteness and purity," and hypersexual in her black assigned racial identity (McEuen 37). Thus, her ability to inspire sexual desire, which Larsen expresses by stating that men "fell for it," derives from the paradox of perception that labels her as both pure and hypersexual (Larsen 93). Larsen reinforces this aura of temptation that surrounds Clare during a moment where Clare physically interacts with a married black man, writing, "She saw Clare clinging to Brian's other arm. She was looking at him with that provocative upward glance of hers, and his eyes were fastened on her face with what seemed to Irene an expression of

wistful eagerness" (109). Once more, the image of Clare's gaze is invoked, suggesting that the mere action of her "upward glance" inspires the will to please within black male figures (Larsen 109). This dichotomy of white purity and black hypersexualization presents itself in the moments that black male figures view her white femininity as a threatened entity. In particular, the moment where Clare, a woman of assigned black identity, is forced into a position of danger by a white male exhibits this urgency that black males feel to protect both her whiteness and her assigned black identity. Larsen expresses this by writing, "Bellew didn't heed him. He pushed past them all into the room and strode towards Clare. They all looked at her as she got up from her chair, backing a little from his approach…Everything was in confusion. The men had sprung forward" (111). While this scene encompasses rich prospects for analysis, an idea that should first be recognized is the racial reversal occurring within this moment. As an individual included within the categorization of white femininity, a U.S. American societal assumption would be that her most immediate sense of danger would essentially arise from the black males within the context—not the white male, who is often propagated as the protector of white femininity. However, within the context of this situation, determined through the fluidity of racial passing and introduction of the possibility of "racial 'truths'" being inverted, the danger originates from the white male, who not only threatens the institution of white femininity, but he endangers black femininity, as well (Ehlers 20). In an overt statement, Larsen reiterates this idea, writing "'Careful, You're the only white man here.' And the silver chill of her voice, as well as her words, was a warning" (111). By drawing attention to the white male's isolation within a black space, Larsen indicates, once more, that the racialized societal norms have been subverted. Further, the protective forces within these circumstances are attached to the black males. Their desire to protect Clare, as suggested through the tone of the scene, originates from their wish to

both protect her social white femininity, which casts a mesmeric effect over them all, as Larsen asserts, and to preserve blackness. Racial passing operates as a black tradition within the novel; therefore, as a legacy, passing and passing figures must be protected. Due to the fluidity of passing figures, who possess the ability to perform within the identities of black and white, the factors included in the desire to protect social white femininity and simultaneously preserve black femininity cannot be separated from one another.

Clare Kendry's Marriage to White Society

In order to commit herself to the role of a white woman, Clare marries a white man; however, he is not a man without racial biases. In fact, he is a bigot, which interestingly works to Clare's long-term advantage. By marrying a man who radically believes in the separation of races, Clare essentially proves her whiteness. Describing black folks, Jack states, "'I don't dislike them, I hate them…they give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils'" (Larsen 40). Essentially, Jack Bellew represents the overbearing pressure of the bigoted institution of U.S. American society. His thoughts and opinions on topics pertaining to race only come from other bigoted individuals and entities. Larsen reinforces this, writing, "'I know people who've known them, better than they know their black selves. And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people. And,' he added darkly, 'worse'" (41). Ultimately, Jack's lack of desire to be informed of the humanity of black folks reflects the ignorance of the corrupt U.S. society. However, the extreme nature of Jack's hatred ultimately solidifies Clare's performance. By marrying a bigot, Clare not only proves her whiteness, but she socially indicates that her allegiances belong to the bigoted forces within society. Larsen writes, channeling the voice of Jack Bellew, "'I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she's trying to turn into one'" (40). While Clare Kendry clearly does not harness any antagonism towards black folks, she must express a

sense of indifference—presented in her rejection of accepting a black maid into her household, which suggests that she does not wish to participate in the degradation of black members within her race—so that the extreme bigotry of her husband and greater society can project their bigoted views onto her, further reinforcing her whiteness (Larsen 40).

While Clare seemingly exists as a figure who is imposed upon, she is the powerful force within the marriage. As another institution, determined through the racialized boundaries of anti-miscegenation, marriage provides a foundation for another entity with the potential to be desecrated. Already, Clare's marriage to Jack as a woman with an assumed black racial identity terminates the basis of anti-miscegenation; however, Clare's knowledge of her racial identity, along with the control she has over it, directs an incredible amount of control to Clare. Larsen writes, "In Clare's eyes, as she presented her husband, was a queer gleam, a jeer, it might be" (Larsen 39). This power exists as no secret to Clare; she recognizes it, using it to manipulate Jack Bellew into allowing her to accompany him on a trip that places her in contact with the black community (Larsen 34). The understanding that Clare has of her power within her marriage rouses a protective force, for her life, as a performative white woman depends heavily upon her marriage. Discussing this protective nature, Larsen details Clare's reaction to Irene's laughing fit during a time of racial discussion within Jack's presence. She writes:

> She turned an oblique look on Clare and encountered her peculiar eyes fixed on her with an expression so dark and deep and unfathomable that she had for a short moment the sensation of gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart. A faint sense of danger brushed her, like the breath of a cold fog (Larsen 40).

Although Clare represents the ideal of white femininity, this moment where the seamlessness of her performance has the potential to be broken apart inspires a type of primordial desire to

protect the social comforts of her life. This "sense of danger" that Irene encounters after meeting Clare's gaze, which she can only describe as being akin to "gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart," emerges from Clare's instinct of survival within her marriage (Larsen 40). Irene's perception of Clare's gaze also gestures towards the racial uncanny, as Clare becomes almost unrecognizable as a person; rather, she is "some creature utterly strange and apart" (Larsen 40). The freedom, both financial and racial, that Clare possesses within her marriage directly connects to her sense of power over Jack Bellew. On Jack's part, however, the power that he directly gives Clare is the power of love and, most importantly, the power to fully disintegrate the institution of segregated marriage.

While Jack Bellew represents the bigoted U.S. society, Larsen does not create him as an individual so far removed from humanity that he, in turn, is dehumanized. Rather, she constructs him as a character who is capable of love, even when this love is based upon Clare's racial performance as a white woman. Although Clare's identity is constructed, this does not mean that their marriage has been constructed, as well. The marriage presents itself as an authentic experience, which completely undoes Frantz Fanon's argument that romantic interactions between women of color—particularly black women—and white men cannot exist. He states, "It is our problem to ascertain to what extent authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority" (28). According to Fanon, relationships between black women and white men cannot be successful, for they possess power dynamics so deeply rooted in racialized systems that they present themselves within even the simplest of romantic interactions. However, in *Passing,* Clare Kendry exhibits no evidence of inferiority when interacting with Jack; in fact, to reiterate a point presented in the last paragraph, Clare puts forth a confident expression of superiority and control over Jack and her marriage, even as a woman of

assigned black identity. Admittedly, Fanon's misogynoir view of black women informs his arguments of how "a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man's eyes" and "white men do not marry black women" (Fanon 29 and 34). Essentially, he argues that genuine respect can never be achieved within interracial relationships where the man is white and the woman is black due to the implications of postcolonial living. Due to the racialized systems constructed through colonialism, Fanon argues that the postcolonial world consists of individuals whose lives have been affected by colonialism, even on the most intimate of levels. The complete and utter disempowerment that Fanon uses to categorize black women with, however, is unacceptable, for not all black women are obsessed with the desire to, as Fanon asserts, "bleach" the world, nor do they, in some cases, have the choice to live within a world where they are not forced to "bleach" their identity (31). In the case of Jack Bellew and Clare Kendry, it is the white male who possesses more love and respect for the black female figure, even though Jack does not fully recognize Clare's racial identity until just moments before her death. However, the intense love that Jack, a white man who did marry a black woman, feels for Clare is expressed by Larsen when she writes, "Before them stood John Bellew, speechless now in his hurt and anger […] There was a gasp of horror, and above it a sound not quite human, like a beast in agony. 'Nig! My God! Nig!'" (111). Larsen's portrayal of Bellew's distress as "not quite human, like a beast in agony" indicates a deliberate creative choice on her part (Larsen 111). As mentioned, Jack represents the bigoted U.S. society in its extremes, meaning that he represents Fanon's phrasing of "one is white…as one is intelligent" (Fanon 36). Therefore, his inability to create coherent phrases to describe emotions more complex than disappointment at her assigned racial identity or anger undoes the racial assumptions that white figures possess a higher intelligence than black figures. Further, Jack's animalistic appeals to express his emotions

suggest that he truly cannot comprehend Clare's death, which inspires the more instinctual reaction of crying, rather than formulating a response that some would deem as more rational or verbally communicative of his emotions. His outburst also indicates that he is much more concerned about Clare's safety than the truth of her assigned racial identity, for he, even after referring to her as racial slurs, affectionately calls her by the nickname that Clare encourages (Larsen 111). Ultimately, the scene that occurs at the moment of Clare's death is far more telling of the nature of their relationship than the passages presented where Jack meets Irene and Gertrude. Placing the couple into a context where death looms overhead, Larsen exposes the possibility of genuine love occurring between racial boundaries, even though the nature of the love appears as one-sided. This one-sidedness, however, subverts Fanon's arguments and operates in a way that empowers black feminine figures who are involved in the illegal institutions of interracial relationships. Most importantly, though, Larsen exposes the construction of marriage and race within marriage as institutions that can be broken down by employing racial passing.

The Attitudes Associated with Racial Passing within the Narrative

While Clare Kendry often appears as a character who is associated with the figure of the tragic mulatta, her actions and attitudes—specifically in terms of her desire for control—create a chasm between her vibrancy and the stock-character nature of the tragic mulatta role. In truth, Larsen's creation of Clare asserts a desire to destroy the convention of the tragic mulatta. Suzanne Bost writes, "Many African American writers, from William Wells Brown through Charles Chesnutt and Nella Larsen, opposed the tragic mulatto type and developed biracial heroines who are empowered by their betweenness" (675). Rather than portraying Clare as the seemingly irrational tragic mulatta, who is "dominated by emotional excess," Larsen constructs

Clare as a deliberate character, who is often in control of her identity, her surroundings, and the perception of others (Hiro 97). Rather than allowing for Clare to be "mechanistically [interpolated] into the tragic mulatto trap," which is a "silencing trope," Larsen meticulously crafts her into a figure who maintains an incredible degree of self-awareness that allows for her to have a voice, a presence, and mundane emotional affect (Pabst 195). Free from what Hiro determines as the "extreme self-consciousness" of the tragic mulatta figure, Clare does not live her life at the mercy of others; rather, she creates her own destiny (98). The agency that Clare exhibits operates to dissolve the tragic mulatta trope, which, both within the confines of reality, as well as in the novel, are applied to her. By breaking away from the tragic mulatta trope, Clare constructs an aura of fascination and dread. However, this liberation and empowerment that Clare feels within her passing identity originates from extreme oppression. It is through this oppression, which readers often mistake for the budding of Clare's supposed tragic mulatta identity, that she ultimately gains full control of her life, along with her perception of racial identity and performativity associated with race.

Within the narrative of *Passing,* Larsen makes it clear that the act of passing has a lineage of tradition within the black community. This etymology, while popularized by white abolitionists, indicates that the physical act of passing has been a part of the black community before written narratives were introduced to the general public for the purpose of currying favor for the emancipation of blacks (Bost 675). Through Brian, she states, "'It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it'" (Larsen 56). Although racial passing creates a home for itself within traditional means of individual survival or, as Larsen deems it, "instinct of the race to survive and expand," the

relationship that the black community has to passing is an incredibly complex one (Larsen 56). In a way, racial passing is a coded existence that black folks both reject and accept. The complexities associated with racial passing can be connected to the racial binary of U.S. society, which cater to phenotypic descriptors that form "racial truths" (Ehlers 20). This "contempt" that black folks feel originates from a sense of otherness that racially passing figures, who, according to the one-drop rule, are black, invoke through their whiteness (Larsen 56). Nevertheless, as oppressed individuals—as individuals attached to one another through their assigned black identity—black folks recognize the lineage of passing and protect it, for it has, in circumstances both historic and fictional, saved enough individuals, like William and Ellen Craft, to be accepted as a true tradition—or defense mechanism against U.S. society (Sollors 261). Larsen reinforces this idea, writing, "'What are friends for, if not to help bear our sins'" (Larsen 95). Once more, she invokes the tradition of protecting passing figures. Through the identification of passing figures as "friends," a type of camaraderie is established between members of the black community (Larsen 95). This collective configuration of individuals, who come together to "bear [each other's] sins," further suggests the existence of a fierce desire within the black community to protect its members, including those whose physical features do not particularly match society's racial expectations (Larsen 95). To Larsen, the greatest bearers of this "sin" of racial passing are the individuals in the black community who either cannot pass or choose not to pass, which interestingly forces these individuals into the role of the martyr. This martyrdom arises from the fact that these individuals are forced to live within an unforgiving racialized system while simultaneously protecting those who, against "racial truths" declared by society, choose not to participate in the binary system (Ehlers 20). Interestingly, the protection of this passing legacy supersedes even the most personal grievances that one could harness against a passing

figure. This idea is exemplified towards the end of the novel when the passing legacy is tested. Referencing Irene, Larsen writes, “She shrank away from the idea of telling that man… anything that would lead him to suspect that his wife was a Negro” (98). Although Clare Kendry’s passing experience is the focus of this chapter, it should be noted that Irene, a woman who only passes when there is some gain involved, expresses a sense of dread at the idea of exposing Clare to U.S. society and, further, white society as a whole. As a woman who seemingly embraces her assigned racial identity and occasionally passes, Irene has a sense of understanding that comes from knowledge integrated within the black community, as well as experiences of passing; therefore, her feelings of apprehension at the idea of exposing Clare originate from a holistic view of the racially polarized U.S. Essentially, Irene, along with the black community, as analyzed, exhibits an incredible sense of duty to the individuals who live within a place of liminality within society. Within the black community, passing figures represent a legacy or secret tradition that ensures the lives of others and protects individuals from horrific circumstances associated with the treatment of blackness within the U.S. society; therefore, passing figures must be protected.

Due to racial passing’s deep connection to the black community, as Larsen suggests, it comes as no surprise that black figures within the text possess a type of second-sight when it comes to recognizing passing figures. This second-sight, however, does not include white folks. In a discussion between Irene and Brian, Larsen asserts this idea, writing, “‘We know, always have. They don’t. Not quite. It has, you will admit, its humorous side, and, sometimes, its conveniences’” (55). Essentially, according to Brian, within the black community, passing exists as a secret joke. The humor he speaks of refers to the fact that within the U.S. American society’s strict racial binary, which fights to keep the races separate, there are figures from the

black community who move fluidly between the racial boundaries without detection. Also, this knowledge of passing figures ascribes itself to the legacy of passing within the black community. Larsen reinforces this idea by including Clare's aversion to having a black maid in her household, knowing that it could lead to the detection of her assumed racial identity (Larsen 40). Referring to the detection of passing figures, a white ally deems it "the trick," suggesting that he recognizes the difficulty for white folks to know who is passing and who is not, stating, "'I'll be as sure as anything that I've learned the trick. And then I the next minute I'll find I couldn't pick some of 'em if my life depended on it'" (Larsen 77). While he possesses some consciousness of the detection of passing figures, his ability to do so does not come as easily as it does for black folks; rather, it is a skill that he has forged through his constant presence amongst black folks—a status that exposes him to the legacy of passing. Interestingly, Larsen suggests that due to the forced separation of the races, as reinforced by U.S. American society, white folks cannot tell when an individual is racially passing. It does not exist within an acknowledged tradition of whiteness, like it does for black folks. Further, the level of difficulty increases substantially for white folks attempting to pass for black. As Larsen explains, "'It's easy for a Negro to 'pass' for white. But I don't think it would be so simple for a white person to 'pass' for coloured'" (78). This confusion either presents itself in the form of blatant ignorance, like in the case of Jack Bellew, or extreme fascination that nearly borders onto fear, for fascination and fear are incredibly similar emotions that work together to inform one another.

The Racial Uncanny in Relation to White Society in *Passing*

The racial uncanny within this text is best presented in the scene where white ally Hugh Wentworth attempts to identify Clare's true racial identity. Through the employment of Freud, supplemented by this scene, I will assert and explain the existence of the racial uncanny in

Passing. To begin, the uncanny is a sensation that an individual recognizes because it forces them into a state of fear; however, this fear informs one's fascination, as expressed through their desire to know the origin of the uncanny figure or "common nucleus" (Freud 123). Hugh expresses this same sentiment, stating that instances of racial passing are "a thing that couldn't be registered" (Larsen 77). Although he attempts to uncover racially passing figures for his own interest, he experiences moments of vertigo, meaning that he does not always succeed in the detection of passing figures. However, his fascination with Clare suggests that while he does not fully recognize her as a passing figure, he unconsciously understands that she does not particularly belong within the familiar binary system of racial categorization. Larsen writes, "'What I'm trying to find out is the name, status, and race of the blonde beauty out of the fairytale'" (75). Due to Hugh's inability to place Clare within humanity's constructed systems of race and class, he cannot fully place her within reality; therefore, he aligns her identity with fiction. Also, his desire to know her race and status directly connects to both his unconscious wish to ground Clare in what Freud argues is the "familiar" and to also "to know the nature of this common nucleus" (Freud 124 and 123). His active pursuit of her identity—particularly, her racial identity—suggests that Hugh is unnerved by his inability to categorize Clare. Freud suggests that the sensation of the uncanny is felt in different ways, depending upon the individual, writing, "People differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling" (124). This difference in "sensitivity" directly connects to the legacy of passing that exists within the black community and is lacking in the white community (Freud 124). It also resonates clearly with Hugh's desire to possess access to the "trick," which would allow him to identify passing figures (Larsen 77).

Although the uncanny is experienced in different ways, the origin of the uncanny is essentially the same in most cases. Freud writes, "The sense of the uncanny would derive not from an infantile fear, but from an infantile wish or simply from an infantile belief" (141). As explored earlier, this idea relates directly to U.S. society's tendency to repress its history of racial mixing; therefore, Hugh's desire to possess the "trick" originates from his desire to once more become acquainted with a socially repressed history (Larsen 77). For some figures, like Jack Bellew, who is struck with the realization of passing when he sees Irene walking with a figure who cannot pass, this uncanny sensation forces individuals to experience the "fear and dread" associated with the possibility of the racial boundaries being destroyed (Freud 123 and Larsen 99). Though, I would further argue, informed by Hugh's desire to make Clare familiar within both his conscious and unconscious mind, that this "fear and dread" inspires a form of fascination within the individual experiencing the uncanny (Freud 123). The establishment of the fascination, influenced by the uncanny, ascribes itself to both the admiration of figures who can live with a liminal identity, moving fluidly between black and white racial identity, and the interest placed in their ability to possibly disintegrate the fundamental basis of U.S. American society: racism.

The Racial Uncanny in Regards to Clare Kendry

Further, looking at Clare's contributions to the racial uncanny, it should be noted that, like her identity, she constructs an aura of fascination and dread around herself in order to preserve her masquerade of whiteness. In her discussion of the tragic mulatto trope, Pabst asserts: "The trope of the tragic mulatto places on the mixed-race subject, rather than on society, the responsibility for any disconnectedness, displacement, alienation, and lack of belonging he or she might experience in a social context that widely subscribes to deleterious dualisms" (195).

Essentially, the tragic mulatto figure, who is, of course, forced into a position of isolation by a society that has deemed mixed-raced figures as impossible, experiences a sense of disorientation. This disorientation originates from society's desire to suppress their identity through the propagation of white supremacy by deeming it as taboo. This, in turn, alienates mixed-race bodies from society. However, for Clare, the "disconnectedness, displacement, alienation" is externalized and experienced more by those around her (Pabst 195). While Clare experiences instances of longing for the black community and spends the entirety of the novel attempting to repair her bond to the black community, she upholds her connection to white society—a notion that other mixed-race figures view as "risky" and "plumb crazy" (Larsen 43). The fear that Clare inspires in figures who understand the experience of being forced into a category labelled as impossible indicates that she is both familiar and unrecognizable to various groups who have been socialized with the beliefs that white supremacy and the color line are absolute. Breaking away from this, Clare exists as a disruption to society and stereotypes.

The externalization of duality associated with Clare's identity presents itself in the foundation of her identity: her name. Returning to the topic of Clare's marriage, the change in name that Clare undergoes in order to legitimize her white identity not only marries Clare to her white identity, but it suggests the figurative death of her black identity, as well. Interestingly, through the figurative death of Clare's black identity, paired with her life, she exists in yet another uncanny state of dualism. The figurative death of Clare's identity arises from the fact that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, passing originally means "dying" or "the action of ceasing to exist." The world outside of the black community does not know Clare Kendry; rather, they know her as Clare Bellew. A juxtaposition forms through Clare's passing, as the black community no longer recognizes Clare as a living individual within their community, even

though the members of her community know that she does, in fact, have black ancestry. The liminal space between recognizing Clare as Clare Kendry and misinterpreting her new identity as Clare Bellew creates a sense of uncanniness. The creation of this uncanniness interestingly forces the black community to ultimately formulate a type of lore in order to explain her disconnection from their lives (Larsen 19). Interestingly, the stories that the black community fabricates do not contain any noticeably black figures; rather, the players are either white or they appear as white. The omission of black figures from the stories associated with Clare indicates that the novel's black community subscribes to notions of white supremacy, choosing to maintain the color line by accepting Clare as a white woman. This narrative choice on behalf of the black community suggests that rather than being faced with the uncanniness, the community would rather repress the societal trauma of the color line being disrupted than acknowledge its ability to be deconstructed. Further, after Clare passes, she no longer exists within the black community; therefore, identical to her position within the white community, Clare Kendry ceases to exist. Larsen brilliantly exemplifies Clare Kendry's evaporation from the black community, as well as the white community that oppressed her into passing, writing that on a visit to check on Clare's well-being, Irene's father discovers that "Clare had disappeared" (19). Neither Clare's relatives nor family friends from the black community know where Clare Kendry is, which essentially marks her as a non-existent being. Immediately following this scene, however, Larsen delivers a potential explanation for Clare's disappearance, stating, "What else he had confided to her mother, in the privacy of their own room, Irene didn't know" (19). Although Irene does not understand the conversation between her parents, Larsen, referring to Clare as Clare Kendry in a later passage on the same page, suggests to readers that Clare cannot be found due to the fact that her black identity, solidified in the name Clare Kendry, no longer exists because she forsakes her

name to become Clare Bellew. Further, the difficulty that Clare's relatives and members of the black community face in their search for her originates from their knowledge of her black ancestry. By marrying and choosing to continue her passage into whiteness, Clare exercises her sense of agency over her life and takes initiative by killing her black identity. The ultimate act of maintaining agency for Clare, however, occurs when she, recognizing the forces of the color line trying to police her identity and take control of her life, is complacent in her own death, removing herself permanently from the harmful systems trying to force her into one prescribed identity.

The Racialized Uncanny in Relation to Clare's Death

Ultimately, the amalgamation of oppressive societal forces colliding around Clare's mixed-race body, along with the dread she inspires as a mixed-race figure, lead Clare to her only escape: death. However, Clare's death should not be generalized by the conventions of the tragic mulatto figure, who, after suffering a life of "deleterious dualism" kills herself (Pabst 195). Rather, Clare's death arises from an effort to maintain a sense of control over life and, in a way, delete herself from all assumptions and conventions ascribed to her by society—whether they be directed at her assumed blackness, performed whiteness, or socially suppressed mixedness. Clare's own complacency in her death encapsulates the idea that Bost puts forth about "biracial heroines who are empowered by their betweenness" (675). Before exploring Clare's role in her death, however, the ideology of the color line must be examined from the opposing sides, as her identity lies between the color line and flows from one side to the other at will. Due to the policing nature of the color line, Clare's transgressions are disapproved of by black and white folks alike. To the black community, Clare is disregarded as a traitor of the race, who does not use her passing privilege in order to uplift the rest of the race. To the white community, she is

deemed as unnatural and, to take it a step further, a sexualized trickster. While Larsen represents backlash from both communities through Irene and Bellew, the policing of the black community over Clare's life is admittedly more shocking than that of the white community.

Within the novel, it is no secret that Irene Redfield views Clare in a patronizing light that, by the end, borders on extreme hatred. However, rather than exploring the tumultuous nature of Irene's view of Clare throughout the novel, this section will focus particularly on moments set prior to and in the "Finale," for this is the chapter of the novel that centers around Irene's paranoia of Clare's whiteness. In fact, Irene views Clare as a solely white figure when confronting Clare in relation to the black community. For instance, while discussing the ball for the Negro Welfare League, she states that "'so many other white people go'" (Larsen 70). By aligning Clare's presence at the ball with "so many other white people" who wish "to see Negroes," Irene upholds racial separation, insinuating that Clare does not belong to the black community (Larsen 69 and 70). Nisetich explores the racial chasm that Irene places between Clare and the black community, insinuating that Irene's view of Clare originates from notions of white supremacy. She writes, "Irene adheres to the master narrative of race in America, according to which one's race is determined by physical factors. The strictest interpretation is embodied in the so-called 'one-drop rule,' which holds that a single drop of 'black blood' is enough to make a person 'black' (Nisetich 345). Essentially, the separation or, as Labbé expresses, "a wall," that Irene projects onto Clare directly correlates with notions of white supremacy, meaning that the absence of popularized notion of supposed black racialized features on Clare's figure permanently removes her from the black community (127). Irene's refusal to recognize Clare's blackness, along with her identity as a mixed-race figure, directly correlates with her desire to police the color line; thus, to Irene, what appears black is black and what

appears white is white. Irene reinforces this separation in an earlier moment, placing a barrier between Clare and herself, justifying that she belongs to the black community while Clare does not. Larsen writes, "Why simply because of Clare Kendry, who had exposed her to such torment, had she failed to take up the defence of the race to which she belonged" (52). Rather than including Clare in "the race to which she belong[s]," Irene makes the conscious effort to separate Clare from blackness, further establishing that she exists as a separate identity within the black community. Already suggesting that she views Clare as white, Irene takes her disregard of Clare's belonging to the black community further, stating that "Clare Kendry cared nothing for the race. She only belonged to it" (52). The assumption that Clare does not care for the black community, in a sense, dehumanizes Clare, which not only indicates Irene's investment in white supremacy, but her active participation. Essentially, Irene's investment in white supremacy arises from the, as termed by Freud, "infantile belief" that the races must be kept separate, and in order for this idea to be maintained, individuals cannot live their lives moving fluidly between society's static racial categorizations (141). Further, the removal of Clare's emotional connection to the black community, at Irene's discretion, essentially makes her into a living stock character within the tragic mulatto trope, who has no sense of control over her identity, lacks societal discipline, and is a danger to the hierarchies within black society, along with society as a whole. Stating that Clare "only belonged to" the black community isolates her from the community from the inside and removes her from any sense of connection that could potentially be formed (Larsen 52). Ultimately, this statement suggests that the black community is as responsible for the maintenance of the color line as white folks, leading to the idea that Irene, a symbol of the ruling class within the black community, potentially participates in Clare's death.

Surrounding the event of Clare's death, Irene's thoughts and actions develop into a mixture of violence and oppression. Labbé describes this state, writing that "the limitations of Irene's perspective proliferate as the tale unfolds" (125). While Irene's violent attitude towards Clare could arise from the popular notion of the oppressed becoming the oppressor, Larsen makes it clear that Irene's repugnance emerges from the seemingly active role she has in racial uplift. As an individual who views herself as the pinnacle of racial uplift, Irene, of course, views Clare's racial passing as traitorous (Wilson 1004). Dwelling on her understanding of Clare's constant racial passing, Irene expresses her own concern about her racial position, pondering over whether she is truly loyal to the race. Larsen writes, "She was caught between two allegiances, different, yet the same. Herself. Her race. Race! The thing that bound and suffocated her…A person or the race. Clare, herself, or the race. Or, it might be, all three" (98). Within this moment, Irene understands that Clare does have racial ties to the black community; however, rather than accepting Clare's desire to be a part of the black community, Irene continues to both separate Clare from her own blackness and militarize her racial identity. The militarization of racial identity, as expressed through the "two allegiances," constructs an atmosphere of violence around Irene's view of Clare (Larsen 98). In fact, reinforcing this idea, Larsen uses terms, such as "bound and suffocated," in order to fully capture the fatal way that Irene views Clare's racial passing within the black community (Larsen 98). In addition, the oppressive language mirrors Irene's desire to maintain the comfort of her infantile belief that racial identities are stagnant (Freud 141). Interestingly, as an individual who takes pride in her allegiance to the black community, Irene turns to brutality in order to keep racial boundaries in place. This brutality, of course, presents itself in Irene's thought processes, which potentially lead her to her decision to rid the world of Clare. The major justification that Irene returns to is that she must essentially

protect the black community from Clare's societal disobedience. Irene obsesses over Clare's potential to destroy the pillars of safety, "proper morals" and "sense of duty," that uphold black society; therefore, in order to preserve the foundations of the black community, Irene deems it appropriate to confine Clare (Larsen 81). In a disturbing sequence of thoughts that stretch between the Clare, Brian, and Irene's arrival to a party and the moment right before Clare's notorious fall from the window, Irene exposes her fear of Clare's freedom, thinking: "If Clare was freed, anything might happen" and "she couldn't have her free" (Larsen 108 and 111).The risk of Clare, a mixed-race figure and passing body, fully reintegrating herself into black society, which to Irene is dictated by visibly read blackness in the form of "the brown paper bag and ruler test," is catastrophic (Graham 1). Therefore, in order to preserve her socialization of racial separation and repress the knowledge of the history of mixedness within the U.S., it is possible that Irene kills Clare, robbing her of any sense of freedom to continue her performance.

In a way, black society attempts to push Clare's body, narrated with literal and figurative duality, from the black community. Larsen indicates this by writing, "[Irene] ran across the room, her terror tinged with ferocity, and laid a hand on Clare's bare arm. One thought possessed her. She couldn't have Clare Kendry cast aside by Bellew" (111). In this tense moment, the figure acting for the black community, Irene, makes an incredibly rapid and active motion towards Clare, the passing figure. Her fear, of course, is driven by the uncanniness of Clare's potential to reintegrate herself into the black community. The duality of Clare's racial identity, as explored earlier, presents itself in her name change from Kendry to Bellew; however, within the novel, the two names do not actively engage in opposition. Rather, they represent a transition or fluidity within Clare's life. In this moment, nonetheless, when Larsen asserts, "Kendry cast aside by Bellew," she indicates a rigid binary between blackness and whiteness that does not allow for

mixedness within U.S. society, especially in terms of racial passing (111). The duality causes a sense of "terror tinged with ferocity," as it reminds individuals on both sides of the color line of the racially mixed historical past of U.S. society; thus, in order to maintain societal control and repression, the stimulus must be removed (Larsen 111). In fact, Irene expresses an intense moment of an uncanny lapse in her own repression of U.S. society's history of race mixing and passing at her tea party, which occurs in the section before Clare's notorious fall. Larsen writes:

> Did you notice that cup? Well, you're lucky. It was the ugliest thing that your ancestors, the charming Confederates ever owned. What I'm coming to is the fact that I've never figured out a way of getting rid of it until about five minutes ago. I had an inspiration. I had only to break it, and I was rid of it for ever. So simple! And I'd never thought of it before (94).

As Hering suggests, this moment is often hailed as a mere foreshadowing of Clare's death (40). Other critics, such as Mary Wilson, suggest that the broken teacup exists as an externalization of Irene's frustration towards Clare's status as a race traitor, stating, "Irene makes the cup a metonym for the betrayal Irene imagines in Clare" (1004). However, a deeper analysis suggests that Irene is not only planning a violent means of ridding the black community of Clare, but she is also allowing herself to remember a history of racial mixing within the U.S. By invoking the image of the Confederacy, which, woven with "a history of slavery," is riddled with racial mixing through the licentiousness of white figures, Irene connects Clare to a mixed-race identity (Hering 40). However, she undermines this recognition by labelling mixed-race identity as "the ugliest thing […] ever owned" (Larsen 94). Essentially, Irene forces herself to view mixed-race identity and racial passing as an unnatural force within U.S. society, which contributes to the repression of this history and, to take it further, a refusal to accept Clare as a member of the

black community. Additionally, the last physical description of Clare suggests a wiping-out of her perceived perverse existence from U.S. society, which directly connects to Irene's desire to "break" Clare's ties to U.S. society (Larsen 94). Larsen states, "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. That beauty that had torn at Irene's placid life" (111). Interestingly, the language that accompanies this passage focuses mainly on her whiteness, finishing on the note that it is her "beauty" that has been killed (Larsen 111). The omission of her features, which Larsen stresses could be read as black, creates a sense of duality or uncanniness when paired with her name, Clare Kendry. While Clare Kendry is identifiably black through her name, as it is linked to a known black ancestry within the black community, Larsen indicates that she physically dies as a white woman. Through the focus on whiteness and its relationship to U.S. society's obsession with white femininity, Irene once again exposes her suppressed investment in white supremacy.

Repression, in relation to the black community's support of white supremacy, reveals itself when Irene actively forces herself to "never clearly" remember pushing Clare out of the window and, further, out of the black community (Larsen 111). Additionally, the repression that Irene subjects herself to immediately after potentially pushing Clare out of the window communicates a sense of desperation to leave mixed-race identity as an unspeakable aspect of society—as a taboo that does not involve the black community. Rather, black individuals within the text who are present for Clare's death—specifically Irene's husband—fight vehemently to blame white society, as represented through Jack Bellew, for Clare's erasure from the U.S. narrative of race and life. Larsen expresses, "'You're sure she fell? Her husband didn't give her a shove or anything like that, as Dr. Redfield seems to think?'" (114). Because U.S. society is built

upon the foundations of white supremacist patriarchal society, to the black community, it makes sense that bigoted Bellew would take violent action in order to maintain societal control and to keep the racial hierarchy in place. The black community represses its memory of participation in white supremacy by blaming white folks for the strict maintenance of the color line; however, as explored, the black community has some participation in the maintenance of forcing mixed-race figures and passing bodies into states of "deleterious dualisms," where the policing of their identities becomes so intense that they must take their lives into their own hands (Pabst 195). While both the black and white communities have some culpability for Clare's death through the propagation of white supremacy, Clare potentially kills herself in order to maintain full control over her life while simultaneously removing herself from the racialized systems of U.S. society.

As explored earlier, Irene views Clare as a race traitor; however, I assert that in order for an individual to be a traitor, they must actively participate in the act of betraying an individual or community by exposing them to those identified as the enemy. Therefore, in order for Clare to be considered a race traitor, in relation to this definition, she would have to actively transgress against the black community by openly adopting notions of white supremacy and expressing a sense of violence towards the community; however, as explored within the novel, Clare has neither the desire to harm any member of the black community nor the motivation to even engage with white supremacy. In fact, by choosing to pass, Clare Kendry dismantles the societally reified notions of white supremacy that work to keep the races separated into a strict binary. Interestingly, in her attempt to escape the racialized binary, Clare recognizes that she falls into yet another binary dictated by the identifications of race traitor and race deserter. Likening herself to other individuals who choose to leave the racially binary system, Clare states, "it's only deserters like me" (Larsen 37). Rather than actively betraying the black community by

imposing white supremacy, Clare asserts that she essentially does not wish to have any involvement in the racial binary system of U.S. society at all. By being a self-labeled race deserter, she chooses to abandon participation in the harmful systems. The ultimate act, then, for Clare to take in walking away from all binaries—white versus black and race traitor versus race deserter—is death.

Larsen makes it incredibly clear that Clare is open to a self-insured exit from society even before she commits suicide. In a conversation with Irene about the potential of Clare's racial exposure, Clare insinuates that she knows to do in the event that Bellew discovers her racial identity. Larsen writes, "'Yes.' And having said it, Clare Kendry smiled quickly, a smile that came and went like a flash, leaving untouched the gravity of her face […] Clare, who was sunk in a deep chair, her eye far away, seemed wrapped in some pleasant impenetrable reflection" (105). As a master of performativity, all of Clare's actions should be accounted for as processes calculated and controlled by her. Therefore, the "smile that came and went like a flash," along with the seemingly "untouched […] gravity of her face" act as indicators of Clare's ability to control her appearance to others while maintaining discretion over her own thoughts and intentions. The emphasis that Larsen places upon the atmosphere of her face, which seems frozen after the smile reflects the immobility of a corpse (Larsen 105). Clare understands the dangers of her actions as an individual passing within U.S. society; however, rather than cowering at the thought of her racial identity being discovered, she conceptualizes death as a viable option for maintaining control, going so far as to externalize her thoughts surrounding it in a "pleasant impenetrable reflection" (Larsen 105). This externalization exhibits itself once more moments before Clare's death when she watches her entire performance fall apart before her serenely. Larsen writes:

> Clare stood at the window, as composed as if everyone were not staring at her in curiosity and wonder, as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her. She seemed unaware of any danger or uncaring. There was even a faint smile on her full, red lips, and in her shining eyes (111).

The expected reaction of an individual whose life is, as Irene states, "lying in fragments before her" is extreme panic (Larsen 111). However, in this moment, Clare showcases her resilient fluidity, refusing to react or perform in the ways prescribed to her; rather, she maintains a sense of control that, like her racial identity, is dictated by her. The discovery of her racial identity does not have catastrophic consequences for her, even though she resides at the center of the controversy. In fact, her "faint smile" and tranquil nonchalance indicates that she is happy that her racial identity has been exposed (Larsen 111). The exposure of her racial identity creates a way for her to exit society and vanish from the oppressive binary systems once and for all. Larsen writes, "One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone…What would the others think? That Clare had fallen? That she had deliberately leaned back" (111). The dualisms presented within Clare's death directly gesture to the dualisms forced upon her in life. At the center of this passage, Larsen, through Irene, questions "what would others think" (111). It is exactly this, the pressure of society and opinions of others, that inspire Clare to take some responsibility for her death. In order to escape being labelled as black, white, race traitor, or race deserter, Clare chooses to converse with the ultimate binary of life and death. In her convergence with this binary, she chooses the most certain state: death.

In Search of His Self: The Ex-Colored Man's Socialization of Whiteness and Conversion to Blackness

Introduction

Discussing the 1912 publication of his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* which was disseminated beneath a veil of anonymity, James Weldon Johnson writes, "When I chose the title, it was without the slightest doubt that its meaning would be perfectly clear to anyone; there were people, however, to whom it proved confusing…most of the reviewers, though there were some doubters, accepted it as a human document" (Goellnicht 17). Essentially, in regards to his literary work, Johnson reveals that his creation of the text, along with the choice of the title, was not meant to confuse its audience in regards to its inclusion of autobiography. However, in keeping his "original idea of making the book anonymous," Johnson creates a rather brilliant narrative between the authenticity of the autobiography itself and the social critique he makes within the novel about the perceived authenticity of race (Goellnicht 17). Reinforcing this idea, Donald C. Goellnicht writes, "An important part of establishing the text as complexly ironic is an examination of the crucial, but largely ignored, question of why a novel about a black man who passes for white would itself pass as a genre it was not: autobiography" (17). Essentially, the publication of the novel, which passes as an autobiography, creates a sense of tension within narratives of authenticity—whether they include the authenticity of a genre or one's experiences as they are determined through one's identity. This tension between authenticity and inauthenticity, a dualism that connects to ideas surrounding the racial uncanny, repression, and fear is described by Jennifer L. Schulz as "the dichotomy of an authentic versus an inauthentic identity" (35). As a narrative on passing with a tragic mulatto figure at the center, the tension between the Ex-Colored Man, his sense of self as it is determined by him, and his

self-perception based upon external determinations and socialization greatly adheres to ideas surrounding questions of authenticity. Further, within the text, the supposed authenticity of the Ex-Colored Man's masculinity is called into question due to his mixed-race status, which suggests that notions of black masculinity are essentially softened and feminized by one's ties to a known white ancestry. This, of course, creates yet another dualism within the life of the Ex-Colored Man that forces him into a position of uncanniness. Interestingly, as a passing figure, one would expect the Ex-Colored Man to essentially be immune to ideas surrounding the racial uncanny; however, Johnson portrays him as an individual who experiences the racial uncanny in relation to himself, as well as towards other passing figures.

Additionally, in order to understand the context of the Ex-Colored Man's passing, the attitudes expressed by both himself, as well as the society he is living in must first be addressed. Interestingly, within this short novel, Johnson presents attitudes towards passing and mixed-race bodies on both sides of the color line, along with the revelations of an individual living on both sides of what he characterizes as a "race drama" (VII). The holistic incorporation of attitudes towards mixedness, particularly in terms of passing, offers a multivalent view of the Ex-Colored Man's world. Within the text, racial passing appears once more, like in *Passing*, as a tradition within the black community that exists as an in-group "secret," meaning that black folks essentially understand the notions of passing (Sollors 254). Mirroring this idea, white folks who spend their time around the black community gain a sense of knowledge of passing figures through their exposure to the black community; however, without the ability to experience the oppression associated with the history of passing, these white figures are rendered unable to recognize passing figures independently. White figures within the novel who explicitly subscribe to notions of racial separation through the propagation of white supremacy create extremely

generalized interpretations of what mixed-race bodies and passing figures mean for U.S. society. As an individual able to, as Johnson states, move freely along both sides of the "veil," which, mirroring W. E.B. Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness, has "been drawn aside," the Ex-Colored Man records the attitudes of passing on both sides of the color line, along with his own (Johnson VII). As individuals socialized in the bigoted atmosphere of U.S. society, however, these opinions towards racial passing reflect a sense of unification through their conformance to the mainstream.

The Ex-Colored Man's Socialization of Whiteness

In order to explore the racial uncanny as it presents itself in the Ex-Colored Man's life, his childhood, along with his early investment in white supremacy, must be addressed. As expressed in the opening pages of the novel, performativity, particularly in connection to gender, essentially shapes most of the Ex-Colored Man's life. Johnson writes, "My mother dressed me very neatly, and I developed that pride which well-dressed boys generally have. She was careful about my associates, and I myself was quite particular. As I look back now I can see that I was a perfect little aristocrat" (3). Within this passage, Johnson makes the careful choice to omit any explicit indicators of racial performativity or identity. Instead, he focuses on the aspects of masculine performativity, as indicated when he states that the Ex-Colored Man "developed that pride which well-dressed boys generally have," which suggests that, during the time of the novel's publication, outward appearance contributes heavily to notions of masculinity (Johnson 3). By seemingly omitting race, Johnson demonstrates the hidden nature of the Ex-Colored Man's blackness, as well as his mother's attempts to essentially separate him from his blackness in order to further connect him to whiteness. While the racialized nature of the statement, "She was careful about my associates, and I myself was quite particular," is noticeably implicit, it

suggests a construct of control that the Ex-Colored Man's mother institutes within his life that becomes a part of his social interactions, as well; therefore, the socialization that the Ex-Colored Man is exposed to maintains a deep intimacy to his own mother's practices. (Johnson 3). Such a meticulous regard towards the Ex-Colored Man's associates invokes notions of white supremacy—principally in relation to the worship of white individuals with the supposed "best blood of the South" (Johnson 8). While the Ex-Colored Man refers to himself as "quite particular," suggesting that he maintains a sense of diligence in his actions, Johnson suggests that the Ex-Colored Man has a "particular fondness for the black keys" of the piano (3 and 8). While this attraction to the black keys could potentially be an unconscious attempt by the Ex-Colored Man to connect the black identity that has been repressed, his socialization, as aligned with whiteness, indicates a relationship to the black keys that mirrors what Johnson later identifies as the paradoxical relationship that white folks, particularly Southern white folks, have to the black body.

This fascination that the Ex-Colored Man has with black bodies maintains expression in adulthood, as explored by Johnson in the racial stereotypes he utilizes in order to categorize black folks. For instance, when met with black bodies, the Ex-Colored Man at first addresses them by their skin color and build, relying upon the physical, much like pseudo-scientific accounts of blackness. While the Ex-Colored Man meets an incredible amount of black folks in his journey, including the unmistakable Aunt Jemima figure, who is "scrupulously clean, in a spotless white apron and colored head handkerchief" and delivers "motherly kindness" by regarding him as "'chile' and 'honey'," two incredibly fascinating moments regarding race include his friend Shiny, as well as his introduction to Atlanta University (Johnson 27). The connection between these scenes emerges from the complexions of groups of black folks in

relation to the Ex-Colored Man's perception of said individuals. In the first passage, Johnson writes:

> There were some black and brown boys and girls in the school, and several of them were in my class. One of the boys strongly attracted my attention from the first day I saw him. His face was as black as night, but shone as though it was polished; he had sparkling eyes, and when he opened his mouth he displayed glistening white teeth. It struck me at once as appropriate to call him 'Shiny face,' or 'Shiny eyes,' or 'Shiny teeth,' and I spoke of him often by one of these names to the other boys. These terms were finally merged into 'Shiny,' and to that name he answered good naturedly during the balance of his public school days (6).

Now, much like the Ex-Colored Man's earlier statement about his "fondness of the black keys" on the piano, he admits to having a type of magnetic attraction or fascination towards the boy he refers to as Shiny (Johnson 8). This attraction, of course, originates from how deeply he objectifies Shiny, especially in terms of his skin. By referring to his skin as "black as night, but shone as though it was polished," the Ex-Colored Man manages to separate Shiny from his blackness and align it more deeply with the blackface often used in minstrel shows (Johnson 6). Thus, by suggesting that his skin mirrors that of the actors who portray racial stereotypes, the Ex-Colored Man expresses his investment in white supremacy through the acceptance of racial stereotypes. In addition, despite the fact that Shiny becomes one of the top individuals in his class, as Johnson quickly emphasizes after this passage, Shiny is the name that the Ex-Colored Man chooses to use for the rest of his life (6). In an interaction with Shiny after the Ex-Colored Man meets his future wife, he expresses the difficulty in actually remembering Shiny's true name. Johnson states, "It took me only an instant to recognize in him my old friend 'Shiny'…An

amusing part about the introduction was that I was upon the point of introducing him as 'Shiny,' and stammered a second or two before I could recall his name" (95). The fact that the Ex-Colored Man expresses more comfort calling his friend by a racial slur throughout childhood and even into adulthood suggests that he still views him in an incredibly racialized manner. In relation to this passage, another moment occurs at Atlanta University where upon viewing a group of black and mixed-race folks, he effectively breaks down their worth by skin color. Johnson writes:

> They were of all types and colors, the more intelligent types predominating. The colors ranged from jet black to pure white, with light hair and eyes. Among the girls especially there were many so fair that it was difficult to believe that they had Negro blood in them. And, too, I could not help but notice that many of the girls, particularly those of the delicate brown shades, with black eyes and wavy dark hair, were decidedly pretty. Among the boys, many of the blackest were fine specimens of young manhood, tall, straight, and muscular, with magnificent heads; these were the kind of boys who developed into the patriarchal 'uncles' of the old slave regime (28).

In connection to Shiny, the Ex-Colored Man centralizes his interest in black folks upon the darkness of skin. This passage moves fluidly, detailing the diversity of complexion and appearances that, in some ways, defy "racial truths" of phenotypical features being the only determinates of one's ancestry; however, once the Ex-Colored Man engages with the figures in the passage who do have darker skin, he hyperfocuses on their complexions and assigns a socialized meaning to them (Ehlers 20). By describing individuals as "jet black" and "the blackest," the Ex-Colored Man automatically separates himself from these figures and connects himself to the "girls, particularly those of the delicate brown shades, with black eyes and wavy

dark hair" who "were decidedly pretty" (Johnson 28). Interestingly, the connection he makes between the attractiveness of the girls and their skin, which is fairer than the men he focuses on, directly implies the feminization of tragic mulatto figures; however, this idea will be elaborated on during the discussions of the racial uncanny. The attachment he forms to the fairer skin women creates a deeper separation between the Ex-Colored Man and the darker skinned men, and in an attempt to reconcile himself with these men, he fastens their skin color to what he is familiar with: racist stereotypes. The declaration that these darker skinned figures "were fine specimens of young manhood, tall, straight, and muscular, with magnificent heads; these were the kind of boys who developed into the patriarchal 'uncles' of the old slave regime," invokes a tone of pseudo-scientific racism, as the Ex-Colored Man draws a connection not only between skin color and physique, but he summons the history of slavery (28). Interestingly, as this will later connect to the racial uncanny, this assertion appears as one of the most explicit statements in the novel regarding the narrative of slavery in the U.S.; however, rather than connecting all of the figures within this group to the history of slavery, black and mixed-race, the Ex-Colored Man chooses to only focus on "the blackest" (Johnson 28). This concentration speaks not only to his deep socialization of whiteness, but it speaks to how he views the history of blackness within the U.S. As a mixed-race figure who spends the greater part of his earlier years and later years passing, the Ex-Colored Man obviously has difficulty seeing himself within this narrative for reasons that shall be explored in a later section.

While the Ex-Colored Man's use of racial stereotypes is an issue that has been explored by a number of critics, a fascinating argument regarding the Ex-Colored Man's classism, as opposed to his internalized racism, is presented in Roxanna Pisiak's article, "Irony and Subversion in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*." Within her

article, Pisiak states that "Some critics have commented on the narrator's own racist tendencies, but he seems to betray more class than racial prejudice. He is given to making broad generalizations and forming simplistic classifications… Some of his generalizations do rely on stereotypes of blacks and whites, but both races are implicated" (91). The idea surrounding class versus race is the predominant vein within this article, even including the scene where the Ex-Colored Man reveals his tendencies towards dressing well and keeping sensible company (Pisiak 86). While class does exist at the forefront of this novel, especially in terms of the Ex-Colored Man's desire to surround himself with "the best class of colored people" wherever he goes, Pisiak fails to recognize the intersectionality of race and class and how these two societal factors considerably determine one's place within society (Johnson 34). The reason the Ex-Colored Man focuses on the ascribed "three classes" of black folks relies upon the fact that when he reads himself as a black man, he still views himself as an individual at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy (Johnson 35). Viewing himself as a mixed-race man who can be read as white not only allows him a great amount of passing privilege, but it removes him from the culpability of engaging with particular classes of black folks who are, as he perceives, beneath him. This issue, of course, relies more upon his self-perception as a mixed-race man with a position at the top of the social hierarchy, which has been awarded to him for his close proximity to the whiteness of the color line.

The Racial Uncanny in Relation to the Ex-Colored Man

As explored in the introduction, as well as in the previous chapter on *Passing*, elements of duality present themselves as the racial uncanny in narratives surrounding racial passing. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* is no exception to these elements; in fact, the dynamics of the racial uncanny in this text offer a multivalent experience that exceeds the racial,

incorporating intersectional elements of what it means to be not only a mixed-race figure who can pass, but a passing figure with the potential to be deemed as a tragic mulatto. In addition, a fascinating element that Johnson contributes to the discourse surrounding the racial uncanny is the notion that uncanniness in relation to race can be experienced by the individual labelled by society as uncanny. I believe that the Ex-Colored Man's self-awareness of the racial uncanny arises directly from the fact that he is a male figure who is passing.

Concerned with the potential for dualisms, the racial uncanny presents itself in the Ex-Colored Man's presentation of gender, which is incredibly feminized. Addressing the feminization of mixed-race male figures, Pabst asserts:

> The biopolitics in which the 'mulatto' is enmeshed, like it or not, male or female, are unequivocally femalist. For mixed-race subjects, transhistorically, have, like women, been cast as effete, as effeminate, as weak, as impotent…Mixed race black men are generally portrayed and perceived of as a far cry from stereotypes of the muscled, hypersexualized heterosexual black buck (192).

Essentially, the dualism of the mixed-race male identity arises from the perceived deterioration of masculinity. Regarding the feminization of both male and female mixed-race figures, a fascinating breakdown of gender barriers occurs. This breakdown, of course, adheres to society's assumption that mixed-race figures are, as Pabst cites Joel Williamson, "highly confused people" who are so preoccupied with their racial identities that gender presentation is rendered insignificant (192). Johnson adheres to the feminization of the tragic mulatto figure by portraying the Ex-Colored Man in the exact way that Pabst details. For instance, on many occasions, the Ex-Colored Man explicitly expresses himself in ways that convey constructed forms of femininity. For instance, while detailing his piano playing, the Ex-Colored Man reveals that weeping occurs

quite frequently. Johnson states, “Often when playing I could not keep the tears which formed in my eyes from rolling down my cheeks. Sometimes at the end or even in the midst of a composition, as big a boy as I was, I would jump from the piano, and throw myself sobbing into my mother’s arms” (12). The Ex-Colored Man’s note of his age and gender, as expressed in the phrase “as big a boy as I was,” proves a great significance, for it suggests that he maintains some sense of awareness of the gender role he is expected to occupy by society (Johnson 12). He reinforces this idea, stating once more, “To counteract this tendency to temperamental excesses I should have been out playing ball or in swimming with other boys of my age” (Johnson 12). By addressing his open expression of emotions, particularly crying, the Ex-Colored Man essentially recognizes his feminized tendencies. While Hiro argues that mixed-race figures are “dominated by emotional excess,” the Ex-Colored Man undermines the unconscious implications of emotional domination by exhibiting self-awareness (97). While the Ex-Colored Man’s “feminine” tendencies progress over the course of the narrative, his choice to inform the reader of moments when “a wave of homesickness swept over [him] and made [him] feel faint” and his “feelings divided between a desire to weep and a desire to curse” disintegrates the shame associated with the feminization of masculine figures (Johnson 25 and 63). Essentially, Johnson creates a passing figure who is, in fact, aware of societal expectations of femininity due to his racial identity, and in “divulging the great secret” of his life in his fictional autobiography, he asserts a sense of agency over the gendered expectations of his mixedness (Johnson 1). Thus, he creates an uncanniness at the intersections of the familiar assumptions of gender expression and mixedness and the dreadful breaking down of identified expectations. Through this sense of uncanniness, the Ex-Colored Man forces his fictional audience into a position that addresses his

agency in terms of both his identity, as well as his emotions included in assumptions surrounding his identity.

Returning to Pabst's argument, the underlying issue of masculine deterioration originates from the focus placed upon the sexual capabilities of mixed-race figures, which, according to Pabst's analysis, is constructed as nonexistent. The construction of infertility surrounding mixed-race figures arises from the terminology assigned to their bodies: mulatto (Pabst 192). This identification, following the scientifically racist projection that "mules […] cannot reproduce" onto mixed-race figures, creates a dualism suggesting that black figures, including black males, are "hypersexualized" (Pabst 192). However, by imposing ideas surrounding sterility onto mixed-race figures, who fit into a categorization that U.S. society labels as "a physical impossibility," an uncanniness forms (Schulz 54). To be hypersexual through blackness yet sterile through mixedness is, in a way, paradoxical; however, the construction of sterility forces U.S. society to address the racial mixing of the past. Johnson addresses the construction of mixed-race sterility by asserting the Ex-Colored Man's reproductive capabilities. In fact, he punctuates the novel's end through the revelation that two mixed-race figures, the Ex-Colored Man and his wife, have two healthy children (Johnson 99).

However, Johnson also adheres to physical assumptions of mixed-race male figures in terms of a perceived lack of masculine physique, particularly in terms of muscularity and appearance. From a young age, the Ex-Colored Man is regarded as beautiful, rather than handsome, which aligns more directly with expectations of femininity than masculinity. Regarding this, Johnson writes, "There were a great many ladies coming to our cottage. If I were around they would generally call me, and ask me my name and age and tell my mother what a pretty boy I was. Some of them would pat me on the head and kiss me" (3). Now, by

characterizing the ladies as white, which Johnson does by stating that the women come to his home while his mother "rarely" ventures to theirs, he asserts that the feminization of the Ex-Colored Man greatly originates from white societal constructions within U.S. society (3). Therefore, they recognize his mixedness, and because he is a mixed-race male figure, they see him as a more feminine, benign figure, which directly incorporates an uncanniness. The uncanniness, of course, resides in the fact that these women, who recognize his mother's blackness, as Johnson implies that she does not go to their houses due to her blackness, view a mixed-race figure, who society deems as impossible by means of the color line, with a sense of fascination. While the uncanny, along with the racial uncanny, deal with the fascination and dread associated with what is familiar, the dread does appear when the Ex-Colored Man identifies with the white students (Johnson 7). However, until this moment, he is assumed by white society as a benign figure. The assumed benignity arises from the assumption that the Ex-Colored Man's blackness is essentially softened or, in a way, cancelled out due to the presented white ancestry. Johnson reinforces this idea by writing, "'What a pretty boy you have.' I was accustomed to hear remarks about my beauty" (8). The softened way that the Ex-Colored Man is viewed and, in turn, views himself appeals to a sense of feminization, along with an awareness to such, that defines the Ex-Colored Man. Further, as explored earlier, while at Atlanta University, the Ex-Colored Man describes the students, black and mixed-race, and he expresses a stronger sense of physical connection towards the fair skinned women than the dark skinned men (Johnson 28). This fascinating connection could, of course, be an unconscious occurrence due to his socialization; however, his identification with more feminine figures speaks to his awareness of his feminization. This occurs after the Ex-Colored Man decides to live his life as "a great colored man," which, in a way, undermines what Pabst deems the "stereotypes of the muscles,

hypersexualized heterosexual black buck" (Johnson 21 and Pabst 192). By softening himself as a declared black man, the Ex-Colored Man hopes to promote a sense of uncanniness, as the "infantile belief" associated with black masculinity is one of hypermasculinity and, of course, violence (Freud 141). This softening connects to the feminization of the Ex-Colored Man and reinforces the feminized way that white figures look at him, as well as the way he perceives himself.

Until the Ex-Colored Man is made aware of his ascribed blackness in the classroom, he navigates his life believing that he is white. However, upon recognizing himself as a mixed-race figure, the Ex-Colored Man reveals his physical appearance, citing ideas of visual illusions in order to fully capture his ability to pass for white. Johnson writes:

> Now, for the first time, I became conscious of it, and recognized it. I noticed the ivory whiteness of my skin, the beauty of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, and how the long black lashes that fringed and shaded them produced an effect that was strangely fascinating even to me. I noticed the softness and glossiness of my dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making my forehead appear whiter than it really was (8).

Interestingly, the Ex-Colored Man lives with a sense of racial invisibility due to his passing privilege, along with the fact that his ascribed racial identity is essentially undetected by U.S. society until the moment of revelation. Due to his environment of binary racial identities, as defined by his school and community, he perceives his mixedness as an intersection of the binary racial system. Johnson expresses this idea, much like Larsen, by portraying his appearance as essentially a white canvas for what society recognizes as black features. Interestingly, the Ex-Colored Man notes that the "ivory whiteness" of his skin is emphasized by his darker features

(Johnson 8). His darker features produce an illusion, expressed through "the darkness of [his] eyes," "the long black lashes," and "the glossiness of [his] hair that fell in waves over [his] temples," that makes him "appear whiter" (Johnson 8). An uncanniness forms through this physical representation, as the U.S. society would much rather prefer to stifle his passing identity as his blackness diluting any sense of white ancestry; however, Johnson asserts that the Ex-Colored Man is whiter due to his blackness. The Ex-Colored Man's abrupt introduction to his racial identity, however, also creates a sense of uncanniness between his internal and external self. Growing up, he believes that he is a white boy, having been socialized to believe so; therefore, to discover that he is, in fact, a mixed-race individual of black ancestry, disorients him (Johnson 8). This disorientation directly occurs within his "infantile belief," which is that he is white (Freud 141). Recognizing the uncanniness of his racial identity, the Ex-Colored Man describes his moment of racial consciousness as "a radical change" that he "felt fully conscious of" yet "did not fully comprehend" (Johnson 9). Ultimately, being forced into the category of black through the intense racial policing of the color line pushes the Ex-Colored Man into a state of vertigo. While he recognizes his ascribed racial identity, he does not fully understand why he occupies a space of forced racial consciousness after living a life of racial invisibility.

However, even as a racially conscious individual, the Ex-Colored Man experiences instances of disorientation in regards to other passing figures within the text. As discussed earlier, racial passing is essentially a tradition within the black community; therefore, black folks recognize passing figures. This idea exists in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* when black figures read the Ex-Colored Man as a black man who can pass. For instance, when he first arrives in Atlanta, his travelling companion states, "'Of course, you could go in any place in the city; they wouldn't know you from white"' (Johnson 26). This idea is reinforced during the Ex-

Colored Man's search for employment when his landlady, a black woman, excludes "white pupils" from the prospects of his piano lessons (Johnson 32). Now, as a passing individual who spends a great part of his life identifying as black, one would think that the Ex-Colored Man's knowledge of passing figures would be incredibly sharp. However, after the Ex-Colored Man decides to live his life as a white man in reaction to the lynching, he essentially disconnects from this black history, including the knowledge associated with it (Johnson 91). Thus, when he first comes into contact with the woman who becomes his wife, a passing figure, he once more experiences a sense of disorientation. Rather than exploring the possibility of her mixed-race identity, the Ex-Colored Man, in an attempt to repress his own black ancestry, attempts to convince himself of her whiteness. Johnson writes:

> When I saw the girl, the surprise which I had felt at the first sound of her voice was heightened; she was almost tall and quite slender, with lustrous yellow hair and eyes so blue as to appear almost black. She was as white as a lily, and she was dressed in white. Indeed, she seemed to me the most dazzlingly white thing I had ever seen. But it was not her delicate beauty which attracted me most; it was her voice, a voice which made one wonder how tones of such passionate color could come from so fragile a body (93).

Before embarking on a psychological analysis of the Ex-Colored Man's repression, a comparison must be drawn between this moment and, of course, the physical descriptions of Clare Kendry in *Passing* and Peola in *Imitation of Life*. As explored in the previous chapter, Clare Kendry has "black eyes," which are immediately connected to, as Larsen expresses, "Negro eyes" (29 and 67). In *Imitation of Life,* Hurst stresses that Peola has "soot-colored eyes," which are essentially, like the eyes of Clare Kendry and the Ex-Colored Man's future wife: black (118). Further, Clare Kendry has "bright hair," which connects to the blondeness of the figure that mesmerizes the Ex-

Colored Man (Larsen 29 and Johnson 93). Further, both figures are categorized as being "as white as a lily" in the exact same terms (Larsen 39 and Johnson 93). Therefore, the woman who interests the Ex-Colored Man could, in fact, be read as a woman of mixed-race passing for white. Rather than accepting this idea or, more importantly, recognizing her passing status, the Ex-Colored Man, who adopts white society, along with its views, refuses to consciously recognize her as a passing figure. However, the forcefulness in his conviction to recognize her as "the most dazzlingly white thing" suggests that the unconscious remains of his racial conscious is fighting for him to recognize her passing status and mixed-race (Johnson 93).

In fact, traces of a racial past—particularly that of mixed-race—present themselves in the language he uses to describe his future wife. Once more, just as the Ex-Colored Man views himself as a white canvas, he sees her as a white canvas for black features—specifically of a pigmented past. Three primary colors present themselves in the introduction of this passing figure: yellow, blue, and red. Each color represents a form of the mixed racialized past of the U.S. For instance, when the Ex-Colored Man discusses her "lustrous yellow hair," he chooses the word yellow instead of blonde, making a greater emphasis on the connotation of the color yellow in relation to race. The primary form of yellow essentially suggests a sense of originality or independence that cannot be hidden, meaning that diversity amongst artistic colors cannot exist without the color yellow, along with the other primary colors. Most importantly, however, the word itself directly connects to mixed-race. In her chapter, "Early American Bodies: Creating Race, Sex, and Beauty," Sharon Block writes, "By the nineteenth century, yellow would increasingly become used in reference to light-skinned, mixed-race people—a means of identifying people who might be called 'mulatto'" (92). Thus, by stating that the woman has yellow hair, the Ex-Colored Man unconsciously recognizes her status as an individual of mixed-

race. The second primary color used in reference to the woman is blue, referring to "eyes so blue as to appear almost black" (Johnson 93). Regarding blue, this reference directly connects to the history of the Middle-Passage slave trade, which, of course, took place across the large stretch of the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, the Ex-Colored Man directly references "'the great and impassible gulf' between the races" that essentially acts as the genesis of racist ideology in the U.S. (Johnson 89). The connection drawn between his future wife's blue eyes and the color black indicates that she, too, shares this Middle-Passage history due to black ancestry. Once more, this connection acts as an unconscious recognition that exposes the repressed personal past of the Ex-Colored Man's time performing within his black identity, as well as a greater tie to the repressed mixed past of the United States. Finally, the last primary color that the Ex-Colored Man unconsciously connects to his future wife is the color red; however, rather than fully disclosing the color, he uses a word associated with red: passion. Describing her singing, he states that she sings with "tones of such passionate color" (Johnson 93). The most fascinating aspect of the omission of the word red arises from the direct repression of violence associated with the color. Naturally, this violence associates with both the general physical violence against black bodies during and after the duration of slavery and the sexual violence initiated against black bodies, male and female, by licentious white figures. Rather than directly engaging with this horrific past, the Ex-Colored Man chooses to ultimately suppress any idea that she could be mixed-race. Therefore, the ultimate uncanniness forms between the dichotomized way that the Ex-Colored Man sees his future wife—a white canvas for a representative pigmented history—and how he refuses to see her—as a mixed-race figure who passes.

Following a similar vein of the racial uncanny, specifically in terms of self-perception, the Ex-Colored Man views himself within the dualistic binary of race traitor versus race deserter.

Interestingly, Johnson defines the Ex-Colored Man's race desertion, stating, "Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people" (99). The desertion that essentially determines the Ex-Colored Man's life converses with ideas of walking away from the binary racialized system in order to escape oppression. This differs greatly from the notion of abandoning the system in favor of a refusal of the system completely. In fact, the Ex-Colored Man admits that he has "never really been a Negro," meaning that for his entire life, he feels a sense of separation from the black community that he deeply wishes to connect with yet cannot (Johnson 99). Further, his identification of a race deserter more deeply aligns with the idea of a race traitor, meaning that he experiences a sense of betrayal towards the black community. Expressing this, he reveals, "I cannot repress the thought, that, after all, I have chosen a lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage" (Johnson 100). Rather than accepting the choice to walk away from the black community after witnessing the dangers of lynching, a result of being black in U.S. society during the early twentieth century, the Ex-Colored Man internalizes his abandonment of the binary racial system as a betrayal (Johnson 91). Johnson utilizes the word "repress" in order to suggest that the Ex-Colored Man continues on with his life, abandoning one duality for another (Johnson 100). This duality, however, creates a much more haunting outlook on the Ex-Colored Man's life, as it suggests that he progresses forward, engaging over and over again with the racial uncanny, which essentially, from an external view, buries him more deeply in white society.

In Search of Her Self: Peola's Internalization of White Supremacy and Damnation Through Passing Against the U.S. Construction of God

Introduction

While *Passing* and the *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* maintain prestigious positions within the canons of African-American Literature and passing narratives, *Imitation of Life* truly dominates U.S. society as a cultural icon in both novel and film. Published in 1933 by Fannie Hurst, *Imitation of Life,* details the lives of, Bea and Delilah, along with their daughters, Jessie and Peola, a white girl and a light-skinned black girl, who essentially enter into a business world segregated by race and gender (Caputi 697). Playing the role of the tragic mulatta figure, Peola spends her entire life aspiring to whiteness until she officially passes over as a young adult, leaving her old life behind in favor of one that she determines. Interestingly, unlike the other works, which were produced by a mixed-race author and a black author, *Imitation of Life* was written by a white woman. Now, as a white author, Hurst, of course, receives more recognition for her work. Jane Caputi reveals that, "Hurst brought politically charged issues of passing and racism to wide public attention," suggesting that the works of other black and mixed-race authors had less of an effect on society (697). The widespread recognition of these issues, as they are presented by a white author, potentially derives from Fannie's whiteness, which adds an atmosphere of sensationalism to her knowledge of racial passing. While Caputi connects Hurst to black figures of the New Negro Movement, like Zora Neale Hurston, through her patronage of artists within the movement, she does not shy away from engaging with the racism expressed by Hurst in her novel (697). Incredibly problematic themes present themselves within Hurst's narrative, such as tropes associated with the "withering mulatress" and the "mammy cultural

image" (Pabst 192 and Jewell 171). As Caputi suggests, Hurst's use of such tropes through Delilah and Peola in association to their "relationship to Bea (the mistress) fostered charges that Hurst was a closet racist, that her identity as a liberal was a fraud" (697). Therefore, the creative choices she makes within this novel, particularly in terms of the representation of the black community through Delilah, the Mammy figure, maintain a lineage of racist ideology. This ideology, of course, is a product of its time; however, it can neither be forgiven nor forgotten in the analysis of the text.

Within this chapter, I will explore the socialization of Peola, the tragic mulatta figure, and how it connects to her relationship with the racial uncanny. As presented in the previous chapter, the socialization of the Ex-Colored Man shapes his perception of himself, as well as other passing figures. Operating in a similar manner, Peola is subjected to an incredibly vehement form of socialization that supports black inferiority and essentially drives her away from the black community. Interestingly, the driving force behind this socialization is her own mother, who, through her deep investment in white supremacy, instills notions of white superiority in Peola. The amalgamation of this socialization and the close proximity to a white companion forces Peola into a position of uncanniness, as she, an individual who can pass is forced into an identity that has been indoctrinated to her as inferior while simultaneously observing the privileges of her white companion. Ultimately, this uncanniness, along with the repression of her black identity, ejects Peola from the black community, which labels her as a race traitor. However, by choosing to abandon the U.S. society as a whole, Peola commits the act of ultimate race desertion, rejecting the system of the racial binary as a whole.

The Socialization of Peola's Racial Identity

Following the analysis of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* in order to fully explore the nature of the racial uncanny in Peola's life, which she, like the Ex-Colored Man, experiences in relation to herself, it is key to dissect the methods of socialization she is subjected to. As a novel written in the early twentieth century, the greatest influence for socialization is white supremacy, which provides a rather heavy curtain over Peola's life for the entirety of *Imitation of Life.* Interestingly, the most feverous propagator of notions of white supremacy is Delilah, who, as her mother, naturally has the greatest involvement in her socialization. Although Peola grows up in close proximity to her white childhood companion, Jessie, and her mother's white employer, Bea, her views on race directly originate from her mother's vehement advocacy for the color line and white supremacy. For instance, Peola's status as her mother's only child suffers beneath the crushing force of having a full-time Mammy as a mother, who essentially adopts three other white folks as her children. Hurst expresses this through Delilah, writing, "'I's got babies, one, two, three of them…besides de one God give me out of mah own flesh'" (215). By adopting the individuals who hire her as her children, Delilah essentially cheapens the relationship she has with her own daughter. Of course, this separation exists as a consequence of the Mammy figure who, according to K. Sue Jewell in her "Mammy" chapter of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, "is devoted to ensuring that all the needs of the family for whom she works are continuously met" and simultaneously "neglects the needs of her own family" (171). Because Delilah "neglects the needs of her own" daughter, Peola's status within the household not only falls to a space of inferiority amongst the white family that her mother cares for, matching the social hierarchy outside the confines of the home, but she essentially becomes a second-class citizen whose personhood is ignored (Jewell 171). According to the narrator, "In every matter of precedence, including teeth, was the priority of Bea's child most

punctiliously observed. The duet of their howling might bring her running intuitively of her own, but the switch was without hesitancy to the white child" (Hurst 83). The focus that Delilah places on her white charge is absent from the attention that she withholds from Peola. Once more, as a consequence of her portrayal as a Mammy, Delilah exists as a pedestal for the white family she serves; however, this consequence extends to her daughter, who is left to the mercy of her own mother's leftover affection. The dichotomy of treatment that exists between Peola and Jessie "adhere[s] rigidly" to a racially hierarchical "order" that determines how Delilah both views and treats them (Hurst 83). Deriving this "order" from the racial hierarchy of the U.S. in the early twentieth century, Delilah, as expressed earlier, places her white charges before Peola in every regard—even punishment (Hurst 83). Following an incident where Jessie and Peola stick pins into the arm of Jessie's grandfather, Delilah threatens the girls, exclaiming, "'Gimme dat white ear, Jessie, for to twist. Gimme dat yaller ear, Peola, for to twist. Stop pushin', Peola. You cain't git your ear twisted befoh white chile has had her'n'" (Hurst 97). Within this passage, Delilah makes the racial separation between Jessie and Peola incredibly clear, stating that Jessie is white and Peola is light-skinned. Thwarting any attempts that Peola makes to disrupt the racial hierarchy by trying to receive her punishment first, Delilah upholds white supremacy by boldly stating that white folks come first in all aspects, including the most miniscule forms of corporal punishment. Reinforcing this idea, upon being the first to apologize for this transgression, Peola is actively chastised by her mother who states, "'Peola, will you stop bein' sorry before Jessie is sorry? Ain't you got no way of keepin' yourself in your place'" (Hurst 100). The "place" that Delilah refers to is one of inferiority—a mere shadow in the perceived superiority of white folks (Hurst 100). By attempting to place herself before Jessie, Peola strives to overturn a racial hierarchy that does not have a set place for her as a light-skinned black individual who can pass.

Her mother's disapproval, however, acts as a means of policing Peola's racial identity and forcing her into a role of submission to white folks. This forcefulness, of course, is incredibly oppressive and from a young age, Peola recognizes this. Furthermore, Peola's attempt to disrupt the racial hierarchy that exists in U.S. society, as well as within her own home, is met by her mother's vehement disapproval, which forces her into a position of outsider within both spheres.

Following the notions of otherness that Delilah subjects Peola to, the language that she uses in order to separate Peola from whiteness and, in particular, notions of racial integration greatly affects the way that Peola views herself as a black individual with the ability to pass. Although white figures live in the household, Delilah acts as the most vehement advocate for racial separation. In fact, in protest of Peola's decision to pass and marry a white man, Delilah proclaims, "'No, no, no! Gawd don't want His rivers to mix!'" (246). These rivers act as representations of the racial binary of U.S. society—white and black. Although this proclamation occurs in reaction to interracial marriage, Delilah exhibits a type of zealotry in terms of instilling a norm of racial separation in Peola. For instance, while relaying an incident in the bathtub to Bea, Delilah states, "'Did mah white chile quit bawlin' 'til I tote her, mah wash a-boilin', every inch of dis mawnin' in mah arms? Did mah black chile make her maw so spankin' mad she spanked her li'l' backside" (Hurst 82). This moment occurs at an incredibly early point in the lives of both Peola and Jessie; however, it sets them apart by classifications of race, as well as by treatment based upon race, which forces Peola into a position of otherness, as expressed through the "aggressiveness" she experiences at the hands of her mother (Jewell 171). Delilah reinforces this sense of otherness by making black synonymous with bad and white synonymous with good. She directly makes this connection, othering Peola, by forcing her to apologize to Jessie for a reason unknown to the reader. Hurst writes, "'Black chile, go over dar as fast as dem laigs will

walk you, and make up wid dat yaller-haired angel-chile'" (119). This statement exposes the investment that Delilah has in white supremacy, suggesting that she views her white charge as an "angel chile" or, more effectively, as a child who can do no wrong, while Peolo, the "black chile" is forced to cater to her (Hurst 119). Reinforcing this ideology, Hurst reveals that Delilah expects Peola to encourage bad behavior in Jessie who, as the "angel-chile," cannot engage in bad behavior of her own fruition and influence (119). She writes, "'Put her up nothin'. Nobody can put mah chile up to a meanness she ain't thought of fust' […] 'Oh, no'm, now, Miss Bea, [Jessie] ain't cru—'" (100-1). For clarification, Delilah's intended word at the end of the last statement is in defense of Jessie, stating that she is not, as Bea exclaims, a "cruel little girl" (Hurst 101). In this passage, Peola is once again constructed as an other by her own mother, who essentially suggests that her own child is not only a mean child, but as a black child, she influences white children to commit cruel acts. Also, within this passage, Delilah makes no attempt to defend her child's potential innocence or influence at the hands of Jessie; rather, she reveals her complacency in white supremacy by implying that her daughter is a bad child due to her blackness.

While Delilah's treatment and verbal expressions uphold a racial divide between Jessie and Peola, her ultimate act of socializing Peola within the barriers of white supremacy is her belief in the naturalization of racism through God. While Hurst portrays Delilah as an individual who spends a great amount of time speaking of God, a majority of these moments of righteousness connect to the justification of racial separation. Further, the justifications of racial separation through God are often directed at Peola, who very openly opposes racial separation and her position, as dictated by U.S. society, within the racial hierarchy. A moment directly associated with this idea occurs when Jessie refers to Peola as "a little nigger" (Hurst 148).

Rather than chastising her white charge and attempting to uplift Peola into a more comfortable position in her black identity, Delilah decides to legitimize Jessie's use of the racial slur, stating, "'Take it standin'. You gotta learn to take it all your life that way…Jessie ain't to blame. God ain't, 'cause He had some good reason for makin' us black and white… and de sooner mah chile learns to agree wid Him the better'" (Hurst 148). Imposing ideas regarding segregation and the constructed racial hierarchy of U.S. society, Delilah attempts to naturalize racism in a way that is fundamentally absolute within Christian theology. The Christian theology that Delilah employs, however, follows the vein of white supremacy that, according to Kelly J. Baker in *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930,* indicates that "Christianity […] is a white man's religion" and is complicit, even, with white supremacy groups, like the Ku Klux Klan that propagates white folks as "the superior race created by God" (178). In fact, Delilah reifies this ideology, preaching that black folks are "de Lawd's low-down ones" and those who pass "pass into damnation" (Hurst 118 and 247). Once more, she reifies the racial hierarchy by directly connecting racial ideology to theology, creating an amalgamation of fundamental societal tenets that are essentially perceived as absolute. Also, by connecting racial passing to the idea of eternal damnation and sin, Delilah, informed by her investment in notions of white supremacy, attempts to strike fear into Peola's racial consciousness for her disobedience to the so-called God-given racial hierarchy.

The Racial Uncanny in Relation to Peola's Racial Identity

In order to converse with the Racial Uncanny and how it affects Peola's self-perception, Peola's "infantile wish" must first be addressed (Freud 141). Ultimately, Peola desires to be seen for what she perceives herself to be: white. Now, within this narrative, Peola does not represent the traditional form of the tragic mulatta as a woman of mixed-race; rather, she is a woman with

two black parents who happens to have fair skin and "slim Caucasian features" that allow her to pass (Hurst 99). Her racial status, as defined through her parents, who, while one parents is described as "a white nigger," are both black, essentially aligns with assumed blackness (Hurst 75). However, as an individual who can pass and grows up in incredibly close proximity with a white companion, Peola chooses to see herself as white rather than black. In fact, this "infantile wish" that Peola has arises from the privileges that she witnesses her white companion taking advantage of while still a child, such as her own mother's attention and cherubim status both within their household and in U.S. society (Freud 141). The desire to see herself as white, then, presents an aggressive conflict within her racial consciousness, for society, represented through the submissive form of her mother, attempts to assign her to a status of blackness. However, through her physical connection to whiteness, Peola recognizes that she can, in fact, act on her "infantile wish" to be white as long as she represses the idea and memory of her ascribed racial identity (Freud 141).

For the entirety of her childhood, extending into adulthood, Peola fights to repress her black identity in order to achieve her "infantile wish" of being perceived as white (Freud 141). Regarding her belief that she is, in fact, white, Peola goes so far as to state, "'If your skin is white like mine and your soul is white—like mine, there is no point to the needless suffering'" and "'I'm as white under my skin as I am on top'" (Hurst 245 and 246). Essentially, Peola recognizes the struggle between her ascribed blackness and performative whiteness, and rather than progressing into "the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread," she chooses to repress the identity that fills her with the most dread, as defined by the vehement racial degradation to which her mother socializes her, in favor of what she deems as most "familiar" to her: whiteness (Freud 124). This familiarity, of course, arises from the fact that Peola bases her

racial performance on Jessie, her closest companion. Regarding this performance, Hurst portrays Peola's emulation of Jessie, writing "'My mamma won't care! My mamma likes for me to stick pins in Grampa'" which Peola mirrors with "'My missy won't care! My missy likes for me to stick pins in Jessie's grampa'" (Hurst 98). Directly following this verbal parallel, Hurst determines that "from her very infancy, Peola, quick as any child to ape, was nevertheless careful to avoid replica of her parent's dictation" (98). The suggestion that Peola rejects her mother's way of speaking, which Hurst portrays through an exaggerated use of Southern dialect, and directly mirrors Jessie's speech indicates Peola's repression of what she identifies as black identity in favor of openly expressing what she determines as white identity. While speech does not determine one's racial identity, Peola's socialization suggests that it does. Another aspect of Peola's repression through performativity arises from the lengths that she goes to in order to conform physically to whiteness. After being referred to as a racial slur by Jessie, Peola, in order to conform to whiteness, attempts "to iron out an imaginary kink in her straight black hair" that results in a "severe scalp operation" (Hurst 144). To reinforce the physical aspects of repression, Hurst also suggests that Peola, after spending years away from the family, either bleaches her skin through the use of bleaching products or uses skin powder in order to hide the "banana-colored mask" (Hurst 242 and 244). However, the ultimate act of physical repression of her black identity occurs when Peola reveals that she, in order to hide her blackness from her white fiancé, voluntarily seeks sterilization. Hurst regards this moment, writing, "'I'm not ashamed. There are millions to populate the world besides me. There is no shame in being sterilized in the name of the happiness of another'" (247). In regards to the significance of Peola's sterilization, this act essentially allows for her to fully pass into the white world without having to worry about exposure through the birth of a child. However, relating Frantz Fanon's argument

addressing romantic interactions between black women and white men, which is incredibly limited in its regard of black figures who choose to pass, the sterilization performed "in the name of the happiness of another" acts as a physical means of allowing Peola to achieve what she defines as true love (Hurst 247). Fanon states, "It is our problem to ascertain to what extent authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority" (28) Thus, by having herself sterilized, a horrific act, Peola rids herself of any traces of the identity that she identifies as the origin of her "feeling of inferiority" (Fanon 28). Further, by agreeing to be sterilized for the purpose of maintaining her passing identity, Peola adheres to an alternative meaning to the word "pass," which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, also means "the action of ceasing to exist." Essentially, any legacy or lineage that Peola has the opportunity to produce or continue loses all viability. In fact, through this act of sterilization, the lineage dies, along with any trace of blackness. Therefore, by engaging with sterilization, Peola removes all stimulus that could potentially disrupt her desires of being white after passing over completely into the white world. By agreeing to be sterilized for the purpose of maintaining a passing identity, Peola removes the possibility of, in a way, passing on her blackness.

In regards to Peola's "infantile belief" that she is white, the dualisms of her life must be addressed (Freud 141). As explored in prior chapters, passing exists as a tradition within the black community; however, in Hurst's narrative of passing, white folks are presented as individuals who not only know about passing, but they quickly recognize the differences between other white folks and individuals who pass. For instance, while discussing Jessie and Peola in their infancy, Hurst notes, "Thus the little nursery up there would come into its own, to be shared, during this period of sublime democracy of childhood, with the dark child, who, except for the contrast of the whiteness of Jessie, might have passed for white herself" (92). In

this passage, Peola's blackness, which is recognized by the narrator, solely presents itself through a direct juxtaposition to whiteness. This dichotomy, while brief, sets the tone for the dualism that Peola experiences between being recognized as black within her household and read as white outside of it. Reinforcing this juxtaposition, Hurst writes, "The small brightly gold Jessie, the small straight-mouthed Peola, whose pallor, the color of a pealed banana, lay over slim Causasian features, coined out of heredity knows where" (99). Once more, Peola's physical appearance is both juxtaposed and compared to Jessie's whiteness. Interestingly, the narrator, who is an omniscient being in the text, only records Peola's appearance when she is in the presence of her household, meaning that her whiteness is constantly placed in a direct parallel with figures who know her true racial identity and essentially, through their whiteness and her mother's blackness, view her in terms of "pale tan" and "banana colored" (Hurst 78 and 241). A break occurs, then, between Peola's identity, which, as Bea corrects a doctor from the outside who reads Peola as white, is "colored" and the way that society reads her identity as white (Hurst 187). Outside of her household, Peola exercises the freedom of moving from one racial identity to another, even going so far as to pass in school for an extended "period of twenty-eight months" while "living within a three-block radius of the public school" (Hurst 184). Hurst reveals that the catalyst for Peola's passing is the fact that Bea "paused long enough in her morning rush to enroll the child," which influences individuals, "school-mates and teachers alike," to read her as white without questioning her racial identity (184). Further, Peola performs the role of a white child in a desegregated school by adopting notions of white supremacy regarding racial separation that are reinforced by her mother and U.S. society. She isolates herself from the black students, "never by word or deed associating herself with the handful of negro pupils in the class," in order to reify her identity in the outside world as a white girl (Hurst

184). Reinforcing the dichotomy between the household and the outside world, Hurst reveals that during her time in Seattle, Peola successfully passes after being read as white by the public population once more (Hurst 244). The uncanniness of this situation, then, presented by the dualism of how Peola's race is read in the household by individuals who recognize her status and how the outside world reads her race, arises from the fact that Peola's "infantile wish," as Freud terms it, cannot be realized within both realms (141). Essentially, the most familiar aspect of her life is the institution of her household; however, the most dreadful or frightening factor of this familiar space arises from the fact that she is constantly met with the stimulus she attempts to desperately repress: her blackness. The fear, as determined by the repression, acts as a constant reminder of her blackness, which she attributes to her mother, exclaiming, "'You're so black! That's what makes me nigger'" (Hurst 148). This moment, explored by Valerie Smith, speaks to a greater desire to oppress the African-American identity, as it relates to the narrative of slavery. As Smith writes, "Of course, her accusations allude to the laws governing slavery, by which the child 'followed the condition' of the mother" (49). Thus, her mother's blackness acts as a reminder of both her own blackness and the history of blackness in the U.S. that maintains an interconnectedness with slavery. Peola desires to be free of them both—her black identity, as well as the bondage of an oppressed past. Further, the socialization that she is subjected to by her mother, who openly states that Peola should be "'proud of bein' a nigger, 'cause it was de Lawd's work'" only provides more negative reinforcement for her desire to repress her black identity. Thus, Peola seeks freedom separate from her household in the openness of the outside world because she gains control of the narrative of her racial identity, experiences a sense of freedom that she has been socialized to attribute to whiteness, and, above all, is able to achieve her "infantile wish" (Freud 141).

The Ideology of the Race Traitor vs. the Race Deserter in Relation to Peola

In defense of Peola's ascribed status as a race traitor, the socialization she experiences, along with the propaganda of white supremacy fed to her through her mother and society, fundamentally forces her into a position of perceived betrayal. Out of the three novels analyzed for this project, the most fervent execution of racial policing short of murder exists in this novel. The vehemence, of course, emerges from the extended period of time that the policing occurs, the closeness in proximity that Peola is to policing forces, and, of course, the intensity associated with the nature of the policing. Now, after exploring the policing of racial identity at the hands of her mother, chiefly in terms of the justifications Delilah gives based off of racist theology, it is key to revisit the subject's relationship with the idea of the race traitor. As the most fleshed-out character who identifies as black, Delilah acts as the most present representative of the black community. While the thought of a Mammy figure representing the entirety of the black community is rather troubling, Hurst reinforces this status by connecting Delilah to a "pastor of her foreordained choice" who speaks of "the goodliness, the churchliness, the holiness, and the righteousness of Sister Delilah Cilla Johnston" at her funeral (271). By attaching Delilah to a pastor, Hurst forges a sense of legitimacy of her beliefs, as the association with a church official suggests that the lineage of her own beliefs stems from a racialized church setting. While Hurst does not specifically describe the racial identity of the pastor, there is sufficient evidence to believe that he is, indeed, a black pastor, as the funeral takes place in Harlem, and Frank experiences, as Pamela L. Caughie expresses, "discomfort in the presence of so many black people" (35). Now, connecting Delilah to the greater parts of the black community grants her with a great amount of power that allows for her idea to be disseminated and shared amongst the community, being the only black character with enough exposure and personality. This means,

then, that her ideas represent those of the black community, as expressed through the amount of respect she maintains in it. In relation to the ideology surrounding race betrayal and how Delilah polices her daughter, she utilizes racist theology in order to dissuade Peola from passing, citing that by passing, she is damned (Hurst 247). Christianity depicts transgressions, like sins, as betrayals against God; therefore, by passing, Peola, in the eyes of the religious black community, commits the treasonous act of lying against God. The lying against God derives from, as explored earlier, Delilah's ideas pertaining to the naturalized notions of race. In fact, when chastising Peola for wanting to permanently pass, Delilah calls upon God, stating that her warnings against passing are "'de law-of-de-Lawd talk,'" a sentiment that mirrors her belief that Peola has a "'sinning little soul'" for wanting to pass (Hurst 247 and 185). Thus, by "'a-cheatin' on color,'" Peola is essentially deemed as a race traitor by the black community (Hurst 184). However, the weight placed upon Peola's expected racial obedience, much like the lessons of submission taught to her during her socialization, only act as ways to force her out of the black community. Rather than admitting to being forced out due to the policing of her identity as a race traitor, though, she leaves on her own terms, becoming a deserter in the process.

While Peola expresses open disdain for the black identity for the greater part of her life, her resignation from the identity as a whole, along with her resignation from U.S. society places her more deeply into the categorization of race deserter than race traitor. In fact, Peola's disdain originates from the amalgamation of her socialization to believe that black is synonymous with inferior and the strict racial binaries woven into the foundation of U.S. society. In an attempt to empower herself through her black identity, Peola reveals that she engages with black history and literature, stating, "'I tell you I've prayed same as you, for the strength to be proud of being black under my white. I've tried to glory in my people. I've drenched myself in the life of

Toussaint L'Ouverture, Booker Washington, and Frederick Douglass. I've tried to catch some of their spark" (245). Rather than accepting the socialization she is subjected to, Peola truly attempts to engulf herself in the world of race pride and empowerment. She tries to conform to her ascribed racial identity independently and upon her own terms; however, her exclamation, "'I haven't pride of race, or love of race,'" echoes the effects of the harsh socialization of racial submission that she is subjected to for her entire life (Hurst 245). This struggle, which includes her active seeking of racial empowerment, indicates that she does, in fact, have some repressed desire, summoning the racial uncanny, to identify with the black community; however, her socialization does not afford her the ability to fully adhere to the identity. Further, the act of seeking racial empowerment does not align her with the ideology of race betrayal. On the contrary, it suggests that she wishes to be a part of the community, but due to the external pressures of society, she is exiled. This exile, forced upon her by society, is part of her decision to pass for the rest of her life. However, rather than exiling herself from the black community, which makes a stronger case for race betrayal, she decides to abandon U.S. society as a whole for Bolivia, a country located in South America, where she is determined to spend the rest of her life with her future husband (Hurst 248). Opting to abandon the U.S. as a whole suggests that, in some regard, Peola recognizes that the issue of race is not a natural occurrence, but a social construction. She states, "'One dares everything when there is nothing to lose and everything to gain'" (Hurst 250). To Peola, the U.S. society stifles her desire and "freedom" to live as a white woman; thus, in order to achieve what she wants, or as Freud states, her "infantile wish," she must abandon the U.S. context completely in favor of another (Hurst 248 and Freud 141). This abandonment, then, of a system that has systematically broken down any potential for racial

empowerment, robbed her of any sense of happiness, and barred her from freedom of choice, makes her a deserter.

Conclusion

Although these passing figures are reduced to the tropes of tragic mulatto and tragic mulatta, their agency against white supremacy deserves recognition. In a society where mixed-race and passing figures are regarded as powerless individuals without any sense of identity due to what U.S. society labels as "racial impurity," these characters represent the power that can be found in one's identity (Gosselin 47). These figures are revolutionary in terms of fiction based upon racial narratives. While their stories and reasons for passing differ, their desires of freedom from a binary racial system create a convergence point that distinguishes their agency from compliance with an oppressive system. In fact, in relation to the tragic mulatto/mulatta figure, their inclination towards freedom directly opposes notions of white supremacy that define mixed-race and passing figures as "weak" (Pabst 192). On the contrary, these figures present an incredible amount of resilience in the face of white supremacy, along with the power to subvert racial stereotypes and racist beliefs.

As explored in each chapter, Clare Kendry, the Ex-Colored Man, and Peola are all considered to be tragic mulatto and mulatta figures; however, in their narratives, they manage to undermine expectations of mixed-race and passing figures that assume a sense of helplessness. For instance, one of the key elements of racial passing is one's ability to perform according to the identity they are masking themselves as. Essentially, the performative aspect of identity, as propagated by U.S. society, aids passing figures in their ventures of racial passing. Therefore, by providing society with notions associated with certain racial identities, U.S. society ultimately creates a vulnerability that passing figures are able to undermine. In fact, the propagation of race as natural, along with the reification of behaviors as determined by racial identity, is such a weak concept that can easily be exploited by those who are essentially cast out of a racial hierarchy

altogether. Although subverting the racial hierarchy does not particularly occupy the minds of every passing figure involved in this survey, it does inspire Clare Kendry and the Ex-Colored Man to continue their racial passing. They share the belief that passing is some type of "capital joke" or "jeer" against the oppressive gaze of U.S. society (Johnson 94 and Larsen 39). By regarding racial passing as a comedy, which completely subverts the tragic connotations of racial passing, these figures acknowledge their agency, as well as their ability to undermine U.S. society. While Peola does not regard her racial passing as a joke on society, her decision to permanently pass and marry a U.S. American white man disturbs U.S. society's racial order. Therefore, passing figures, who disrupt U.S. society's desperate attempts to delete them from the narrative of reality, have an incredible amount of control in the reformation of the U.S.'s racial constructions.

Further, in regards to the power that passing figures have within the U.S.'s social constructions of race, their transportation from the racialized binary system to the system of race traitor versus race deserter provokes a fascinating transition from one's race to their actions. Although the dichotomy of race traitor and race deserter exists as a means of policing racially passing figures, the transition between one's race, as determined by supposed biological markers, and one's actions in a racially fluid identity, as determined by their actions and performance, subverts the systems regarding race. Ultimately, this transition exemplifies the reasons behind why one chooses to pass. The racialized binary system places an individual in a category without recognizing the performativity behind one's identity. Race, in this system, is a notion of simply being. The system of race traitor versus race deserter concerns race; however, rather than relying simply upon notions of race, the system communes around notions of what one does in racial spaces while they are performing fluidly in a particular racial identity. As race deserters, the

figures analyzed all choose to walk away from the binary racial system in order to not only survive, but to live without oppression. Therefore, the act of seeking freedom, a luxury aligned with whiteness, as individuals who are characterized by society as black subverts the racialized binary system.

From a psychological lens, the exposure of passing figures through fiction creates a fascinating connection between individuals in the novel, as well as those in the real world, who uphold notions of white supremacy. By revealing racially passing and mixed-race figures to the public in fiction and reality, the racial uncanny is uncovered. As mentioned before, fiction is often based off of concepts or histories that originate from the real world. By exhibiting passing figures to other individuals in these texts, the narratives essentially introduce their audiences to the experience of the racial uncanny. The recognition of these texts is important, as they force individuals to encounter and re-familiarize themselves with, as Freud asserts "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). In order for the true systems of U.S. society to be changed, the individuals and ideologies associated with it must go through a metamorphosis. The occurrence of such a phenomenon, then, relies upon the remembrance of history. Thus, narratives of racial passing force what has long been repressed to come the forefront of U.S. society's consciousness. While the familiarization of the forgotten "evokes fear and dread," there is nothing more frightening than centuries of repressed history (Freud 123). It is through this repressed history that the gardens of oppression are watered.

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