

Not Black and/or White: Reading Racial Difference in Heliodorus's *Ethiopica* and Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*

In the ancient Greek novel *Ethiopica*, written by Heliodorus sometime in the fourth century A.D., a portrait of the mythical Andromeda figures prominently: When the Ethiopian princess Charicleia is born resembling the white-skinned Andromeda of the portrait, rather than her black parents, the queen, fearful that her husband will think her an adulteress, gives up her infant daughter and tells everyone that she has died.¹ The reader's response to this cover-up is complicated by knowing that Andromeda was herself an Ethiopian princess, and so she, too, should have been black. How are we to interpret her whiteness here? One explanation is that the Andromeda myth has two divergent settings—Asiatic and African.² Thus, the conflicting representations of Andromeda in ancient art and literature—is she black or white?—derive from competing claims about her origin; in a sense, she is both black and white. Charicleia, in turn, is herself defined in terms of apparent oppositions—black/white, princess/slave, sister/wife, woman/goddess, Greek/Ethiopian—her identity a riddle which it is the work of the plot to (re)solve.

Werner Sollors has suggested that Greek tragedy's "themes of obscure origins and interfamilial strife" influenced the interracial literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (244). I want to extend this observation to argue that Heliodorus's account of Charicleia's multiplicity and the interpretive anxiety that it generates both for her fellow characters and for readers finds eloquent resonance in the African-American feminist novel, notably in the fictional representation of the mulatta/o. Embodying racial difference, the mulatta's visible whiteness destabilized categories of white and black by emphasizing that "racial barriers were indeed artificially constructed and imposed" (Brooks 124). After all, observes Elaine Ginsberg, "when 'race' is no longer visible, it is no longer intelligible: if 'white' can be 'black,' what is white?" (16). In a culture obsessed with being able to "tell" one race from another, the mulatta was a source of anxiety, particularly if she chose not to "tell," and to (tres)pass as white. Sollors warns, however, against accepting unquestioningly the fictional stereotype of the "Tragic Mulatto," for by "thus devaluing much nineteenth-century interracial literature we may also be supporting racial essentialism, or advocating as 'normal' a view of the world that divides people first of all into 'black' and 'white'—and hence ridicules intermediary categories as 'unreal' " (242). Furthermore, this liminality may be double-edged, a source of empowerment as well as disempowerment: "In its interrogation of the essentialism that is the foundation of identity politics, passing has the potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency: the opportunity to construct new identities, to experi-

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ment with multiple subject positions, and to cross social and economic boundaries that exclude or oppress" (Ginsberg 16).

One African-American feminist writer who insistently probed "questions of inheritance and heritage" through fictional depictions of mixed-race characters, racial intermarriage, and passing was Pauline Hopkins (Carby 162). A remarkable woman whose talents included theatre and music as well as literature, Hopkins carried on a literary career which took place almost entirely within her brief tenure (1900-1904) at *The Colored American Magazine*. In her capacity as editor and writer, she published four novels, as well as numerous short stories and essays. Hopkins's "agitationist politics" proved, however, too provocative (Gabler-Hover 237). While officially leaving her job for health reasons, she was effectively fired, contends Elizabeth Ammons, because "certain of her literary practices, such as the portrayal of racially mixed marriages, were too radical for white readers and, even more instrumental, because [of] her refusal to endorse Booker T. Washington's accommodationist policies," in the wake of his supporters' takeover of the magazine (Ammons 85).³ Although articles attributed to Hopkins appeared intermittently until 1916, and she launched her own short-lived publishing company and magazine, she worked primarily as a stenographer until her death in 1930.

The details of Hopkins's life went largely unrecorded, as the title of Ann Allen Shockley's pioneering 1972 essay "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: A Biographical Excursion into Obscurity" aptly suggests.⁴ Contributing to that erasure is the fact that her short stories, nonfiction, and serialized novels have often been marginalized as journalism, rather than literature (only her first novel, *Contending Forces*, was published on its own). The collected edition of Hopkins's three serialized novels, for example, employs in its title the

term *magazine novels*, which, while strictly accurate, contributes to the sense that Hopkins's fiction belongs to another category than the novel proper (we do not usually call a canonical writer like Charles Dickens a magazine novelist, although his novels were originally serialized). Her affiliation with specifically black magazines helped place her further outside the white literary mainstream. Ironically not even black women writers of the following generation recognized Hopkins as a kindred spirit, according to Janet Gabler-Hover: "In the Harlem Renaissance, Hopkins was dismissed as a writer of sentimental as opposed to serious fiction" (238). Only in the past decade have her novels found a wider and more receptive readership, as scholars have rediscovered Hopkins as a black woman intellectual, as a domestic novelist, and as a political writer.⁵

It is the last of Hopkins's four novels that interests me here—*Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self*. Appearing in serial form in 1902-03, this unwieldy melodrama begins as social realism and concludes, as Claudia Tate observes, as science fiction. Critics have readily noted the novel's disdain for coherent form, and for realism, but they have not always agreed upon the significance of this, nor whether it is a strength or weakness. Observing that "traditional readings of Hopkins' texts do not generally work" (33), Carol Allen proposes that we understand the novel as a hybrid which draws knowingly upon "popular and established influences including adventure tales, the Bible, slave narratives, and dime store detective potboilers" (23). Not only does *Of One Blood* cross generic boundaries, but it also draws freely upon other disciplines; Thomas J. Otten and Cynthia D. Schrager, for instance, have both pointed out the novel's indebtedness to the psychology of William James and his notion of a hidden self, while Susan Gillman addresses Hopkins's interest in occult aspects of psychology and archaeolo-

gy. For Allen, the intertextuality and interdisciplinary nature of the novel derives from Hopkins's deliberate "search for a form that could reflect an epistemological base broader than the one generally recognized by white, ruling class, mainly male, Americans" (23).

This search led Hopkins not only to the popular writings and emerging sciences of her day, but also to ancient texts, as her explicit references to classical and African mythology within the novel make clear. Whether *Ethiopica* was, in fact, a (re)source for Hopkins is not known, but it is plausible that Hopkins, a well-read writer and journalist living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, knew the story either directly or indirectly. Translated versions of *Ethiopica* had been in print continuously since the seventeenth century; Hopkins could have had access to the 1855 English translation by the Reverend Rowland Smith. Moreover, it had influenced a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels.⁶

As an American woman living nearly two thousand years after Heliodorus, one whose writing is intimately informed by the African-American experience of slavery and Reconstruction, Hopkins held political views that may, at first glance, seem distant from those present in an ancient Greek (and male-authored) novel in which slavery is treated matter-of-factly, although Moses Hadas, a contemporary translator of *Ethiopica*, has speculated that Heliodorus may himself have been black (ix). Whether this is true or not, there are many parallels between the texts. While Heliodorus does not explicitly condemn slavery, he illustrates through the adventures of his protagonists how war, and the enslavement that accompanies it, displaces individuals, and produces a disordered world in which persons readily usurp the roles and identities of others. For Hopkins, it is the American experience of slavery that has dispossessed her characters,

robbing them of their homeland and their family history, bestowing upon them aliases that effectively prevent them from recognizing each other or fully knowing themselves. The oppositions that define Heliodorus's Charicleia are reinscribed within Hopkins's heroine, Dianthe Lusk: black/white, princess/slave, sister/wife, woman/ghost, African/American. In each novel the journey toward self-knowledge draws the hero or heroine from a Eurocentric world toward an Afrocentric one; Ethiopia figures as the literal or metaphorical birthplace where the "white" hero, who bears a black birthmark, is reintegrated into his or her "black" family. Africa, however, is not treated without ambivalence, for in each case the Ethiopians are "civilized" by their contact with the returning Eurocentric hero: In *Ethiopica*, the Ethiopians agree to abolish human sacrifice; in *Of One Blood*, they adopt Christianity.

Let me now return briefly to the plot of *Ethiopica*. The (white) heroine Charicleia, raised as a Greek, discovers at seventeen that she is actually the daughter of the (black) Ethiopian King Hydaspes. Her mother Queen Persinna, fearing that her husband would interpret the child's whiteness as a sign of her adultery and the child's illegitimacy, had given up her daughter at birth. The seer Calasiris has been charged by Persinna with escorting Charicleia home to claim her rightful place but dies before he can do so. Charicleia and her fiancé, the Greek Theagenes, posing as sister and brother, withstand pirates, enslavement, torture, even attempted murder. Her first meeting with her parents occurs when she and Theagenes are brought to Ethiopia as prisoners of war and selected to become human sacrifices. At first Hydaspes is at a loss to recognize her or to treat seriously her claim to be his daughter because he is black and she is white. At long last, after substantive proofs, including her mother's confession, Hydaspes acknowledges

Charicleia as his daughter and endorses her marriage to Theagenes.

Unlike Theagenes and Charicleia, who pretend to be siblings, Reuel Briggs and Dianthe Lusk, the protagonists of *Of One Blood*, actually are brother and sister but, unaware that they share a black mother and white father, they marry one another. The plot is complicated by Dianthe's amnesia—she has forgotten that she sings with a black choir—while Reuel, who consciously passes as white in order to pursue his medical career, renames her Felice Adams and lets her think that she, too, is white. Their sibling, the villainous Aubrey Livingston, believes himself to be an only child, his white father's namesake and heir to a large plantation; in reality his black grandmother switched him at birth with the (dead) legitimate heir. Never suspecting a brotherly bond, Aubrey schemes to have Reuel murdered on an African archaeological expedition so that he can marry Dianthe himself. Although Dianthe later regains her memory, Aubrey blackmails her into marrying him and passing as white. When she learns that Aubrey is her brother, she tries to poison him, but her plot backfires, and she herself drinks the poison. Reuel, meanwhile, stumbles upon Telassar, an ancient Ethiopian city that has survived by going underground. There he is recognized as Ethiopian royalty, despite his apparent whiteness, and weds a black queen, Candace, leaving only briefly to avenge Dianthe's death.

Were *Ethiopica's* fictional premise—a child, stigmatized because of her white skin, is separated from her black family, returns to them as a slave and is nearly killed by her slave-owning black father, who does not recognize her—to appear in a nineteenth- or twentieth-century novel, we might take it to be satire. For modern readers, so

inured to the privileging of whiteness, Heliodorus's account of racial difference, which (unintentionally) turns American racial politics on its head, usefully reminds us that otherness is relative. My contention is that pairing Heliodorus's ancient text with

Hopkins's modern one sets up an intriguing intertextual conversation about the nature of identity and difference. While Hopkins's emphasis is upon interrogating racial categories, Heliodorus's characters not only cross racial boundaries, but also boundaries among ethnic groups, genders, and classes. Moreover, both novelists incorporate the supernatural, foregrounding the fluidity of the border between life and death, reality and unreality through dreams, omens,

and visions. But whereas liminality is a source of potential empowerment for Charicleia, in the utopian vein suggested by Ginsberg, it results in the silencing and death of Dianthe; Charicleia is triumphantly re-placed in her society at novel's end as the genuine princess, while Dianthe is herself replaced by her darker double, the Ethiopian Queen Candace, and is marginalized still further by having her story framed within that of the hero.⁷

Any discussion of racial difference in *Ethiopica* must begin by acknowledging that race prejudice as we know it was unknown to the ancients: " 'Ethiopian,' a color word emphasizing the blackness of peoples so designated . . . carried no stigma of inferiority similar to that associated with color terms in postclassical societies which have subjected black-skinned peoples to discrimination on the basis of the color of their skin," which is not to say that the color of one's skin went unremarked

Hopkins may not have set out to rewrite *Ethiopica* as an African-American romance, but there are parallels of plot and theme.

(Snowden, "Bernal's 'Blacks' " 114). In *Ethiopica* Charicleia's whiteness is a visible sign of difference that sets her apart from her parents and from other Ethiopians, and at the same time renders her anonymous and invisible to her father Hydaspes; while he is prohibited by Ethiopian law (as presented in the novel) from executing a native Ethiopian woman, he may readily sacrifice an alien. Charicleia, after all, looks more like a white slave than a black princess. For Hydaspes the case is truly black and white; because Charicleia's "complexion is totally unlike an Ethiopian's," she is in no way like him or of him (255). Instead she is the embodiment of otherness, as he asks what he thinks is a rhetorical question: " 'What suit can lie between me and this woman?' " (251).

It should be noted that, although interracial relationships were not unknown in classical times, Charicleia's whiteness is presented as anomalous, the consequence of her mother's gazing upon the portrait of a white Andromeda during lovemaking. That such transference is considered unusual may be judged from Persinna's reluctance to confide in Hydaspes; she thinks that he will not believe her. In contrast, the reason for Hopkins's black-and-white characters is far from mysterious, testifying to the history of power relations between the races and the sexes. In Heliodorus's Ethiopia racial categories are, at least in theory, well-defined, but for Hopkins the color line is already blurred. From the opening of her novel, we infer that Aubrey's broad insinuation to Reuel—" 'What do you think of the Negro problem?' "—is a veiled threat to "out" him as black whenever he chooses (449).

The only character in Hopkins's novel deliberately to pass as white, Reuel is racially ambiguous in a way that Charicleia (and, for that matter, Aubrey or Dianthe) is not. His fellow medical students are at a loss to label him: "It was rumored at first that he was of Italian birth, then they 'guessed'

he was a Japanese" (444). What is interesting is that people feel compelled to fix him as ethnically "other," but that the possibility of his being African American is unthinkable. Later Reuel cynically advises his new Ethiopian friends Ai and Abdallah on how best to adapt in the United States: " 'We would simply label you "Arab, Turk, Malay or Filipino," and in that costume you'd slide along all right' " (584). The best way to fit in as an African, according to Reuel's indictment of white hypocrisy, is not to be one; in a culture where racial honesty is stigmatized, lying by passing is the logical alternative.

Nevertheless, Hopkins's creation of black characters who appear to be white has sometimes been interpreted critically as a sign of her ambivalence toward her own race, suggesting that, "except for the stigma of race, genteel Blacks—products of miscegenation—were not unlike genteel Whites" (Lewis 618-19). For instance, when Dianthe prepares to sing at the concert early in the novel, the narrator describes her as "not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro" (453). Given Dianthe's light complexion, this comment could be cited as evidence of Hopkins's internalized racism, but in the context of the whole novel, it might also be read ironically, as a criticism of those readers who subscribe to the notion that there can be a "preconceived idea of a Negro," that all black people look (and think) alike. For Kevin Gaines, Hopkins's separation of color from racial identity has a radical political purpose: "to locate racial identity in one's political consciousness, rather than one's color, and demonstrate to white readers their own moral agency and capacity to take an antiracist stand" (221).

The notion that racial difference is not always transparent was at the heart of the controversial 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* legal case, which, by refusing to allow Homer Plessy to identify himself as white, on account of his possessing one-eighth black blood, insisted

upon making visible (at least in legal terms) something that was empirically invisible. Hopkins herself balances uneasily between endorsing an essentialist position that validates African Americans as separate (and superior) and demonstrating, through her biracial characters, that racial difference is a social construct.⁸ This may, however, be not be so much a contradiction as a double-pronged attack on racism. Eric J. Sundquist notes that the novel's "deliberately paradoxical title allows Hopkins first to invoke a monogenetic argument (because all races are descended from a common ancestry, all are equal) but at the same time to trace the black strand of Briggs's mixed blood to Ethiopian royalty. Hopkins's deployment of black blood is thus a counter to prevailing racist physiology and an inversion of [the] one-drop legal ideology" of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (571-72). Hopkins also attacks the assumption that every light-skinned black would prefer to be white through Dianthe, whose tragedy lies not in her biracialism but rather in the fact that she is forced to pass as white.

Whereas the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling sought to fix racial identity and to keep people in their place, Heliodorus and Hopkins are both more interested in exploring what happens when people are out of place. Heliodorus repeatedly puts the reader in situations where interpretation can only be tentative. The novel opens with a scene for which no immediate context is supplied—Charicleia and Theagenes on a shore surrounded by bodies—is he dead or alive, is she a "ghostly phantom" or a woman (3)? Hopkins also considers the way in which context alters our interpretation of other persons. The public interpretation of Dianthe Lusk's racial identity, for example, depends upon where she appears; performing in the black choir, she is perceived as a light-skinned black, but entertaining in the Vances' parlor, she is seen as unquestionably white.

Moreover not only her racial identity, but even her corporeal identity is repeatedly put into question, as she appears as "a lovely phantom" in Reuel's room, as a ghost on Halloween, and as an apparently dead woman in the hospital (454).⁹ Reuel's resurrection of Dianthe with a mysterious vial in some ways echoes a scene in *Ethiopica* in which Calasiris and Charicleia watch an old woman use magic to bring her son back from death on the battlefield (except that the old woman is sharply criticized for violating nature, while Reuel's awakening of Dianthe is treated as a medical miracle). Hopkins's use of the supernatural has been seen by some as escapist, but, for Otten, it is a deliberate strategy to "render identity itself problematic as a way of countering both racist structurings and black-authored displacements of black identity" (229); if we cannot pin down where individual human identity begins and ends, what does racial identity signify?

As Hopkins's novel problematizes racial identity, so in *Ethiopica* it is not always clear to which class and ethnic group—Greek, Phoenician, Persian, Egyptian, or Ethiopian—persons rightly belong. Although Charicleia and Theagenes are the most obvious exiles, almost all of their fellow characters share their condition, in one way or another. The Greek Cnemon, wrongly banished from his father's house, becomes the slave of Thyamis, whom we first meet as the leader of a pirate gang. Thyamis himself, rightful heir to his father's priesthood in Egypt, has had his place usurped by a younger brother. The fictional characters in *Ethiopica* travel through a world where persons, roles, and land are subject to competing claims: The pirate chief Trachinus and his deputy Pelorus fight for possession of Charicleia, and Thyamis wages a civil war against his brother Petosiris, while in the background a war is brewing between the Persians, who rule Egypt, and the Ethiopians, the result of a territorial dispute over emerald mines.

Not only do Heliodorus's characters cross ethnic borders, but several characters speak more than one language; their multilingualism enables them to negotiate between competing, or warring, perspectives. As interpreter, Cnemon, for instance, mediates between his Egyptian master and his fellow Greek slaves. The Egyptian Calasiris, master of at least three languages, exploits his ability to move among cultures and classes, as he dresses and speaks like a native Greek, and yet is able to decipher Charicleia's ribbon, on which Persinna has written her confession in Ethiopian script. His resistance to being identified exclusively with one culture and one language causes Cnemon to complain that "you are like Proteus of Pharos: you . . . transform yourself into deceptive and fleeting appearances," but his shape-shifting is a source of empowerment (54). Even his own sons do not immediately recognize him out of his Egyptian priestly robes, thinking him "a vagrant or madman," when disguised in a beggar's rags (165).

Charicleia, like her fatherly mentor Calasiris, nimbly manipulates the ambiguity of words and appearances. As a woman, Charicleia has already learned that being seen can be dangerous: "Wherever she appears, in temple, promenade, or public square, she is the cynosure of all eyes and all attention like a model work of art" (63). Her attempt to control how she is interpreted is, therefore, an act of resistance. Insofar as she closely resembles Andromeda, who has been turned into an artifact through the portrait, Charicleia reverses that process of objectification. Much to Theagenes's chagrin, she extends marriage promises to other men that she does not intend to keep, prompting Calasiris to observe that "'you seem very clever at inventing dodges and subterfuges to put off importunate suitors'" (152). Transforming herself into a deformed beggar woman with darkened skin, she controls the perception of her class and even her race:

Charicleia defiled her face by rubbing soot on it and smearing mud over it. On her head she stuck a tattered veil whose hem hung crooked from her brow over one eye. Under her arm hung a wallet which appeared to contain broken victuals and crusts but actually held the Delphian priestess' robe, the fillets, and the jewels and tokens her mother had exposed with her. (153)

Charicleia's identity also is exchanged with that of other persons, beginning with the way in which she serves as an emotional replacement for Charicles's own dead daughter. At another point—in a revision of the Pyramus and Thisbe story—she inadvertently trades places with the slave girl Thisbe when both women have been hidden in a cave by their respective masters. Charicleia's master, Thyamis, wild with jealousy that another man might take her from him, goes to kill her, but stabs Thisbe by mistake; finding the corpse, the distraught Theagenes likewise mistakes Thisbe for Charicleia, and is on the verge of killing himself until he discovers that Charicleia is still alive. Shortly afterwards, Charicleia, taken prisoner yet again, escapes from her new master, the Persian Mitraneas, by pretending to be the now-dead Thisbe. In a final twist, before her murder, the real Thisbe was being sent to Persinna in Ethiopia; at the end of the novel Charicleia, herself enslaved, arrives in her place.

To some extent, there is also an inversion of gender roles in both novels. It is Charicleia who urges Theagenes to act like a man, and she who takes bow and arrow to kill men in the name of self-defense. In fact, before she met Theagenes, she prided herself on her skills as a huntress and on her chastity, dedicating herself to the goddess Artemis; this connection suggests a further bond with Hopkins's Dianthe/Diana. From the first glimpse of Charicleia, tending to a wounded Theagenes, she is a strong, resourceful heroine. Theagenes, for his part, is placed in a more typically feminized and powerless position when, as

the slave of the lusty Arsace, he is tortured as a means of making him more sexually compliant. Later, when he and Charicleia are sentenced to death in Ethiopia, he must rely on her cleverness with words to save him. Significantly, Charicleia chooses Theagenes as her consort, rejecting her father's choice of husband, her black cousin Meroebos, in his favor. Similarly, Reuel, whose relationship with Dianthe exaggerates the cultural roles of the powerful man and the passive woman, finds himself, once he is in Africa, subject to the plotting of others. In a reversal of Reuel's controlling relationship with Dianthe, where he presents her with a new identity after her accident and proposes to her, the Ethiopian Queen Candace calls Reuel by another name, Ergamenes, and claims him as her consort.

As Charicleia, Theagenes, Thyamis, Cnemon, and Calasiris have known exile, so, for Hopkins, slaves and their African-American descendants are the ultimate displaced persons, having been forcibly evicted from their home continent of Africa. Like Heliodorus's exiles, Hopkins's orphaned characters both consciously and unconsciously reinvent themselves; Dianthe's amnesia mimics Reuel's deliberate forgetting of his black past, and aligns her with Aubrey, who is ignorant of his heritage. Hopkins seeks to demonstrate how the history of race relations under slavery has made black identity (and by implication white identity as well) problematic, by stripping persons of their pasts, their families, and their names. Thus Hopkins's fictional trio of siblings—Reuel Briggs, Dianthe Lusk, and Aubrey Livingston—possess three different "family" names that belie the kinship among them.

By revealing each of her characters to have limited self-knowledge, particularly as regards their own family history, Hopkins undermines racism, which depends upon the notion that one can possess full knowledge of oneself and others, and that racial identity

or otherness is detectable. Slavery, Hopkins argues, has turned genealogy into fiction; Aubrey Livingston, Jr., is not, after all, the "white" heir but an illegitimate "black" son, having been exchanged at birth. The family of which he believes himself a part is inauthentic. But such misrepresentation is not wholly the stuff of melodramatic fiction; as the twentieth-century philosopher and artist Adrian Piper observes about her own genealogical odyssey, the official records may be a cover story:

For just as white Americans are largely ignorant of their African—usually maternal—ancestry, we blacks are often ignorant of our European—usually paternal—ancestry. That's the way our slave-master forebears wanted it, and that's the way it is. Our names are systematically missing from the genealogies and public records of most white families, and crucial information—for example, the family name or name of the child's father—is often missing from our black ancestors' birth certificates, when they exist at all. (247)

Hopkins likewise interrogates how familial relationships have been demeaned or, more accurately, emptied of meaning. In *Ethiopica* the discovery of family brings resolution, but in *Of One Blood* the notion of family reunion is mocked by the characters' discovery that their family is the result of incest. Consequently, the boundaries between persons and roles within the family—"mother," "father," "sister," and "brother"—have been blurred. In *Ethiopica*, we encounter a father who does not know his daughter; in *Of One Blood*, brothers who do not know their sister, a father who does not know his children, and children who do not know their mother. Even Dianthe's grandmother, who reveals to Dianthe her place in the Livingstone genealogy, is masked as "Aunt Hannah," an elderly voodoo woman whom Dianthe meets in the woods. The designation *aunt* here serves as a general term of respect and age, bestowed perhaps by her former owners. It hardly reflects her status within a black family, for in

fact Hannah has none, her children having been "sold away to raise de mor'gage off de propr'ty" (605). Whereas Charicleia pretends to be Theagenes's sister as a means of protecting herself among strangers, *sister* in Hopkins's nuanced vocabulary takes on sinister connotations. Being a sister does not save Dianthe, as it did not help her mother Mira, both women having been coerced into sexual relationships with their brothers.

If *sister* is a tainted term, *brotherhood* is even more so. When Charlie, who is white, and Jim, who is black, find themselves "alone" in Africa, Charlie concludes that racial boundaries are meaningless: "Where was the color line now? Jim was a brother; the nearness of their desolation in this uncanny land, left nothing but a feeling of brotherhood" (590). But Charlie's epiphany of racial harmony is compromised by virtue of the fact that he and Jim are at that moment attempting to steal treasure from their black Ethiopian hosts; theirs is but a brotherhood of thieves. Jim, who has accompanied Reuel to Africa at Aubrey's bidding, declares that "'Aubrey Livingston was my foster brother, and I could deny him nothing'" (593). This admission, which appears to celebrate interracial fraternal friendship between Aubrey and Jim, is again deflated by its context, since what Jim agreed to was the murder of Reuel. Instead, the unequal relationship between Aubrey as master and Jim as loyal servant replicates the inequalities of master-slave relationships.

Having begun this essay by commenting on the role of Andromeda, I would like to return now to the ways in which both Hopkins and Heliodorus make use of mythological allusion. J. R. Morgan has argued that ancient Greek novelists like Heliodorus sought not only to "claim a classical pedigree for themselves by exploiting and absorbing the

whole range of classical literature" but also to bring about a "Greek renaissance, to recreate . . . the golden age of the Greek past" ("Introduction" xxi). Thus Heliodorus, who draws from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as from Greek tragedy, writes for a reader, observes Morgan, who is highly literate, "capable not just of recognizing tags from the great classics of Greek literature but of appreciating the resonances and associations of quite subtle allusions" (xxi). If the memory of the relatively recent Civil War haunts Hopkins and her characters, it is another war—the Trojan War—that informs Heliodorus's fiction and inspires the genealogies of his characters. Charicleia counts among her forebears not only Andromeda but also the Ethiopian king Memnon, who came to help the Trojans but was killed by Achilles; Theagenes, we learn, traces his ancestry back to Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, notorious for enslaving Hector's widow Andromache. Their marriage, therefore, might be read as a symbolic reconciliation between the warring sides.

But there are resemblances to other literary and mythological characters, too. For example, Charicleia is like Helen, at least from her adoptive father Charicles's point of view; Theagenes is a guest in his house, as Paris was in Menelaus's palace, although Theagenes abducts his daughter, not his wife. Men constantly fight for possession of Charicleia, as men fight over Helen, but those men are robbers and thieves, more akin to Penelope's unwelcome suitors in the *Odyssey* than to the *Iliad's* warriors. Charicleia's near-sacrifice to the gods by Hydaspes recalls the tragedy of Iphigenia, but in this case (at least at first) her father does not know that she is his daughter. Finally, although Charicleia's story parallels that of Andromeda, rescued by and subsequently engaged to a foreigner, the Greek Perseus, against the wishes of her parents, who want her to marry an Ethiopian, Charicleia's resourceful-

ness rewrites Andromeda's helplessness.

Like Heliodorus, Hopkins incorporates classical mythology into her novel as a means of situating herself within a high-culture literary tradition, but given her gender and race, this legacy is more attenuated. Not only does she implicitly assert her right to a cultural inheritance more often considered the property of white, educated males, but she assumes an equally literate black readership. At the same time she seems to mock her white characters' glib swapping of mythological allusions, which they parade as evidence of their elite insider status in American society. Since one of Hopkins's aims in the novel is to "prove" (through Reuel's fictional expedition) that both Greek and Egyptian cultures actually derived from Ethiopian civilization, she means to critique the grounds on which white Americans base their claims to cultural superiority.

The setting of *Of One Blood* in Boston, "the Athens of America," immediately establishes a connection between America and ancient Greece, locating America as the inheritor of Greek culture. In the opening pages of the novel Aubrey interrupts Reuel's suicidal musings: "'Son of Erebus, indeed, you ungrateful man. It's as black as Hades in this room'" (446). What seems at first an overly hearty greeting gathers significance through the novel, underscoring Reuel's identification with the underworld. In his windowless room Reuel sees shadowy visions of Dianthe, and later he mistakes her for a ghost. As a doctor he presides over the boundary between life and death, bringing Dianthe back from her deathlike mesmeric trance, and helping to bring about Aubrey's death near the end of the novel. By the book's close, Reuel becomes the king of an African underworld whose survival depends, paradoxically, upon maintaining the fiction that its inhabitants and culture are dead. Reuel's Egyptian name also suggests a connection with Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead,

who, like Reuel, married his sister, and was the object of a murder plot by his brother.

Through Charlie Vance's nickname of Adonis, an apparently innocuous comment on his good looks, Hopkins proceeds to build up another cluster of associations, this time around the theme of incest, which will play so important a role in the dénouement of her novel. Invoking the mythical Adonis, the product of incest between a father and his daughter Mirra (or Myrrha), Hopkins prepares us for her Mira, the mother of Aubrey, Reuel, and Dianthe in *Of One Blood*. Unlike the Myrrha of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, whose lust for her father leads her to trick him into sex, Hopkins's Mira is raped by her white master/brother. In the process of rewriting the male-authored story as a feminist and interracial one, Hopkins not only shifts the blame from women to men, but she also critiques self-serving white-male attitudes about black female sexuality that displaced male desire onto black women. Mira has other counterparts, notably the Trojan princess Cassandra, with whom she shares a history of enslavement and rape as well as a subversive gift of prophecy; in one of Mira's mesmeric trances she foretells the bloodshed of the Civil War, much to the dismay of her Southern audience. Hopkins thereby rewrites the sexual content of the Ovidian story, recasting "desire" and "lust" as desire for vengeance and lust for blood.

The allusions surrounding Dianthe's name provide one more example of the way in which Hopkins brings multiple layers of reference to bear in her characterization. Dianthe seems to derive from *dianthus*, meaning 'flower of Zeus,' but we hear an echo of Diana, the Roman goddess, one of whose roles was to protect female slaves; the existence of Dianthe herself testifies to the absence of any such protector. Dianthe Lusk is also the name of an historical white woman, the ill-fated first wife of the militant abolitionist John Brown, a comment, perhaps, on

the intersection of sexual and racial politics outside the novel.¹⁰ Apparently an emotionally fragile woman suspected of insanity, the real Dianthe Lusk was an obedient wife who sacrificed a close relationship with her brother to appease her husband, bore him numerous children, and died young (Oates 15-26). Like her namesake, Hopkins's Dianthe risks losing her identity to the controlling men around her. Even when she steels herself to action by offering Aubrey a glass of poison, she is forced to drink the fatal draught herself in a scene that resonates with a passage from *Ethiopica* in which Arsace's loyal slave Cybele, plotting to poison Charicleia, accidentally drinks from the cup.

Not only does Hopkins blend fact with fiction by introducing an historical character like Dianthe Lusk, but she undermines the boundaries between history and story: What passes for official history in her novel turns out to be little more than fiction, and at the same time what has passed for myth—the existence of Telassar—is granted the status of historical reality. Whether or not Hopkins had access to Heliodorus, there seems no doubt that she would have been receptive and sympathetic to the Afrocentrism that marks his work, and which marked hers, for they both challenge the received version of history that proclaims the West to be the origin of civilization, while suppressing or delegitimizing the role of Africa. To modern readers of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, the claims that Heliodorus makes for Egypt, and those that Hopkins makes for Ethiopia, as the source of Greek civilization and, therefore, the basis of Western civilization, will seem familiar.¹¹ But it is worth remembering, as John Gruesser points out, that Hopkins's novel "espoused an Afrocentric world view more than eighty years before the unfolding of the current debate over the origins of Western civilization" ("Pauline" 80).

The last part of Heliodorus's *Ethiopica* takes place in Meroe, Ethiopia, caught in a moment of high

military triumph. The way in which King Hydaspes is shown presiding over a jubilant crowd of citizens and accepting lavish tributes from a parade of foreign ambassadors makes Ethiopia seem the center of the civilized world. At the same time there is a fairy-tale air about Theagenes's wrestling a "giant" and subduing runaway bulls and horses, and Charicleia's trial by fire as proof of her chastity. Like the elephant, the giraffe, the giant, and Hydaspes himself, everything in Meroe seems larger than life.

Greeted by his people "as a god," Hydaspes turns a deaf ear to Persinna's emotional pleas to save Charicleia before either knows of her true identity (246). When she presses him, "Would, my husband, that it were somehow possible to save this girl," he responds in absolute terms that admit of no compromise or negotiation: "To deliver her from the sacrifice is impossible" (248). He cloaks his absolutism in appeals to immutable laws: "You know that the law prescribes that a male be offered and sacrificed to the Sun and a female to the Moon" (248). However, the gymnosophists at his court, led by Sisimithres, who brought Charicleia out of Ethiopia into Greece as a young girl, believe otherwise: "Carry out this unhallowed sacrifice which the ancestral usages of Ethiopian custom make inevitable. But afterward you will require purification" (251). The law on which Hydaspes stands so firmly is revealed to result from "the ancestral usages of Ethiopian custom" rather than from divine decree. By resorting to legal language in her paternity suit, Charicleia confronts Hydaspes on his own terms: "Every suit and every case at law, your majesty, recognized [sic] two principal kinds of proof, written affidavits and the oral testimony of witnesses. I shall advance both kinds to prove that I am your daughter" (253). Her affidavit—Persinna's writing on the ribbon—not only belies her father's assumption that he can "tell" an alien from a native, for he and Charicleia are "of one blood" after all, but it also chal-

lenges his implicit claim that his man-made laws and those of the gods are identical; maternal words in *Ethiopica* threaten paternal law by supplying a supplement to "official" history.

In contrast to Heliodorus's depiction of Meroe at its height, Hopkins's Meroe lies in ruins, although early twentieth-century Ethiopia could still lay claim to a military reputation. Among African countries, Ethiopia occupied a special place in the African-American imagination as "a symbolic homeland . . . derived principally at the turn of the century from the idealized history of Ethiopia itself, a Christian state that had retained its sovereignty during the African scramble and achieved a surprising military victory over Italy in 1896" (Sundquist 554). Like Heliodorus's Ethiopia, Hopkins's version—"the first fictional account of Africa by a black American writer" (Gruesser 80)—is fantastic in its own way. But her readers would immediately have appreciated its challenge to standard "white" historiography: "to make civilization a racially inclusive, universal concept by calling attention to its origins in ancient African societies. This knowledge would at once be a source of race pride for blacks and a rebuke to racial prejudice" (Gaines 111). Furthermore, the mention of Ethiopia in the Bible, in Psalms 68:31, had sparked a nineteenth-century political and spiritual movement dubbed Ethiopianism, which prophesied the coming of a black Christian millenium (by novel's end, Reuel is greeted virtually as a black Messiah). What better ideal to summon as a counterpoint to the second-class-citizen status that American blacks continued to experience?

In imagining the lost Ethiopian city of Telassar, Hopkins borrows not only from contemporary debates about African history, but also from recent archaeology and literature. Although the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum had been excavated over a century earlier, the nineteenth century witnessed a succession of important

archaeological events, which appeared to lend historical credibility to what previously were thought to be myths or fictions: Karl Richard Lepsius's excavations at Meroe, Heinrich Schliemann's discovery of Troy, Sir Arthur Evans's finds at Knossos, and Karl Gottlieb Mauch's purported locating of King Solomon's Mines in Zimbabwe. In the popular fiction of the later nineteenth century, too, Hopkins would have found the "lost civilization" theme widely deployed by writers like H. G. Wells, A. Conan Doyle, and H. Rider Haggard. Allen has argued that *Of One Blood* is in part a rewriting of Haggard's popular novels—*She*, *Allen Quatermain*, and *King Solomon's Mines*—which feature the motif of a hidden city in Africa ruled by a powerful queen, but significantly both Haggard's explorer and queen are white (41).

At the same time, the "real" world was being explored and exploited, mapped in the name of empire. The ostensibly disinterested and altruistic pursuit of archaeology was often compromised by racist attitudes and imperialist motives; in describing the route of Reuel's fictional expedition along "the natural road by which Africa has been attacked by many illustrious explorers," Hopkins exposes the benign and non-threatening term *exploration* as a euphemism for violation and assault (512). Like the robbers in *Ethiopica*, Reuel and his fellow explorers are compared to pirates, and Professor Stone's ancient Arabic parchment to a treasure map. Even the expedition's more lofty scientific purpose is suspect; the removal of native artifacts from Africa to be displayed and exhibited in Western museums reproduces the removal and appropriation of persons in centuries past. Charlie compares Africa to a ragtag traveling circus, with himself as impresario: "Arabs, camels, stray lions, panthers, scorpions, serpents, explorers, etc., with a few remarks by yours truly . . . would make an interesting show—a sort of combination of Barnum and

Kiralfy. . . . There's money in it' " (514).¹² The Telassarians, however, reverse this Western gaze through their magic disk, whereby they act as unseen spectators, keeping a surveillance on the outside world.

While Africa itself is an exotic Other, ripe for commodification, African-American women are themselves in danger of being objectified in Hopkins's novel. Reuel's dramatic awakening of a comatose Dianthe before an admiring crowd of fellow doctors is a kind of performance, not entirely unlike the way in which Reuel's father put his mother Mira's hypnotized body on display. And, as Reuel's father incorporated Mira into his medical books, so Dianthe is turned into text, for "the scientific journals of the next month contained wonderful and *wondering* (?) accounts of the now celebrated case" (472).

But Mira resisted becoming a prop in Aubrey Livingston, Sr.'s sadistic theatre, exchanging the role of glorified court jester for that of subversive sibyl. She appears in the novel as a mute, shadowy figure—the implication is that she is now dead—who, although she does not literally speak, communicates with Reuel and Dianthe through Jim's letter and Dianthe's Bible, actively intervening in the reading and interpreting of texts. Jennie Kassanoff argues that, "if Dianthe represents a seemingly blank text upon which the novel's male characters can inscribe a submissive identity, then Mira articulates an alternative possibility." Kassanoff points to Mira's ghostly signature in the margins of the Bible as evidence that "the text, quite literally, cannot contain the renegade mother, whose utterances destabilize the social order" (174). Nor is she the only mother to pose a threat to the status quo. Just as the confession of Charicleia's mother Persinna serves to undercut Hydaspes's arrogant absolutism, so grandmother Hannah's twisted tale of incest, miscegenation, and switched babies undermines the foundations of

the Southern aristocracy to which Aubrey belongs.

With the installation of both Candace and Hannah in Telassar at the end, it looks as though Telassar will be a space that will accommodate the black mother in a more positive way than has been allowed in the American part of the novel. But despite its matriarchal symbolism, the Ethiopian section of the book is neither as feminist nor as Afrocentric as it appears to be. Hopkins's elaborate underground city beneath the pyramids could be read as a revision of the manmade pirate treasure cave in *Ethiopica* in which Thyamis places Charicleia for safe-keeping; Candace, too, is waiting, but for a prince to father a black dynasty, not for a robber chieftain. Her name, given to one woman in every generation, suggests a continuity with the past bordering on immortality, but also emphasizes her replaceability—the feminine equivalent of the replicated android of late-twentieth-century science fiction.

Moreover Candace's position recedes in importance once Reuel appears. Gaines contends that "Briggs's restoration to the Ethiopian monarchy carried Hopkins's assumptions of Western cultural superiority. Hopkins also effected a similar restoration of patriarchal authority" (111). Western cultural superiority is embedded in Reuel's new name; Ergamenes was an historical character best known for challenging the authority of the Ethiopian priests of Meroe, who took it upon themselves to set term limitations for the kings (by sentencing them to death): "Having received a Greek education which emancipated him from the superstitions of his countrymen, Ergamenes ventured to disregard the command of the priests" (Frazer 218). Reuel, like Ergamenes, is a product of both Africa and the West, and as with Ergamenes, he privileges his Western beliefs over the "superstitions" of the Telassarians. The final image of Reuel, "teaching his people all that he has learned in years of contact with mod-

ern culture," provides not so much an alternative to Western patriarchy but a continuation in a benign form of the paternalism of white slave-owners and missionaries (621).

Hopkins may not have set out to rewrite *Ethiopica* as an African-American romance, but if only because she and Heliodorus draw on a shared literary tradition, there are parallels of plot and theme. Both writers also incorporate elements that have come to be identified with "romance," as opposed to "novel"—an aristocratic or royal hero in disguise, tell-tale birthmarks, switched identities, and supernatural events. One of the influences common to both is the *Odyssey*, with which *Ethiopica* has frequently been compared: "The whole structure of the novel . . . is modeled on that of the *Odyssey*. Like that epic, this is the story of a journey home ending in marriage and parental recognition, rather than simply of separation, reunion and resumption of interrupted happiness as if nothing had happened" (Morgan, "Introduction" xxii). While Hopkins undeniably draws on Biblical imagery of the Israelites leaving Egypt for the Promised Land (Ethiopia, not Israel, in her version), I think that it is not far-fetched to suggest that she also has in mind the *Odyssey*. For African Americans looking back to an history punctuated by the Middle Passage and

the Civil War, the Odyssean plot of a royal hero's return from lengthy exile in a foreign land following a devastating war holds considerable appeal as a fantasy of homecoming.

Unlike Odysseus, however, both Charicleia and Reuel return to a place they never knew; in Ethiopia, they are native and alien at the same time. Torn between who they seem to be and who they are, both lay claim to a dual racial/ethnic inheritance. Charicleia has to prove that, despite appearances to the contrary, she is the Ethiopian princess, but Reuel must learn of his true identity—as an Ethiopian prince—from others. The multicultural marriages that conclude both novels may be read as conciliatory, but like most fictional endings, they leave unanswered questions and ambivalent messages.

Ironically, the ending of *Of One Blood*, in which Reuel is encrypted (as well as enthroned) in Telassar, proved oddly prophetic for the future of Hopkins's own writing voice. Whether thwarted by a potent mix of racial and gender politics, or driven by unromantic economic necessity, she gave up her highly visible writing career and the opportunity to address a wide audience for the more private and, from the standpoint of history, invisible vocation of stenographer. Like her heroine Mira, Hopkins ultimately turned away from making prophecies in her own words to making a space for herself in the words and texts of others.

Notes

1. Like the heroine that he created, Heliodorus is himself a mystery, as critics cannot agree definitively whether he was black or white, Christian or pagan, or even in which century he lived. *Ethiopica* (or *Aithiopika*), as the work is usually called, has itself received much recent critical attention. See, for instance, John R. Morgan, for a discussion of the text's hermeneutic difficulties.

2. Frank M. Snowden, Jr., addresses the role of race in extant versions of the Andromeda myth in *Blacks in Antiquity* (153-58).

3. Dorothy B. Porter observes that Hopkins's leaving coincided with the magazine's purchase by a Washington supporter, reputed to have been subsidized by Washington himself (325-26). In *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Kevin Gaines points out that intermarriage, a favorite theme of Hopkins, was a sensitive topic not just for white readers, but also for black readers, who "equated intermarriage with the miscegenation that preyed on black women. . . . Moreover, the prevalence of intermarriage involving black men restricted matrimonial options for elite black women, for whom marriage with white men was seldom a possibility" (125).

4. For other biographical sources, see Barbara McCaskill and Mary Helen Washington.
5. Carol Allen places Hopkins within her contemporary community of educated black women; Claudia Tate explores her relation to the genre of domestic fiction; and Eric Sundquist addresses her achievement and influence as a political writer.
6. For *Ethiopica's* influence upon fiction, especially on the eighteenth-century novel, see Margaret Doody's *The True History of the Novel*; countering a lengthy literary critical tradition that has dismissed ancient fictions pejoratively as romance, Doody argues persuasively that *Ethiopica* and other Greek romances contain all the elements that we claim for the modern novel.
7. Queen Candace is arguably Dianthe's alter ego or a reincarnation, but she is not the same American girl from Fisk University. Interestingly, the paperback edition of the novel (London: X Press, 1996), reproduces the marginalization of Dianthe, both in its cover design and its book jacket blurb. The front cover features a young, shirtless black man holding an African carving of a stylized woman, while the synopsis on back wildly distorts the story: "Medical student Reuel Briggs doesn't give a damn about being black and cares less for African history. When he arrives in Ethiopia on an archaeological trip, his only interest is to raid as much of the country's lost treasures as possible so that he can make big bucks on his return to the States." Furthermore, this edition shortens the title to the more compact and forceful (but inauthentic) *One Blood*, omitting the subtitle's haunting allusion to "the hidden self."
8. For examples of how the tension in Hopkins's novel, between locating racial identity in the literal body and reading race as metaphor, continues to be played out in contemporary feminist theory, see Margaret Homans.
9. One wonders if Hopkins knew Wilkie Collins's sensation novel *Woman in White* (1860), in which Anne Catherick is incarcerated in an insane asylum to prevent her revealing that Sir Percival Glyde (like Aubrey) is illegitimate and therefore not the true heir to his estate. As the woman in white, Anne hovers in the novel like Hopkins's Dianthe and Mira: Is she a ghost or woman, dead or alive, mad or sane?
10. Martha H. Patterson has pointed out the origin of Dianthe Lusk's name.
11. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* has spawned many impassioned responses, notably the anthology *Black Athena Revisited*, edited by Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers.
12. Charlie's imagery here reflects the historical reality that such exhibits were popular at the time, whether the "natives" on display were native American Indians in Wild West shows or native Africans. See Adam Hochschild's description of a world's fair in Brussels, Belgium, in 1897 for which King Leopold had constructed a series of African villages, complete with inhabitants—"The most extraordinary tableau, however, was a living one: 267 black men, women, and children imported from the Congo" (176).

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