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The Emergence of a Pioneer: The Manipulation of Hagar in Nineteenth-century American Women's Novels

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THE EMERGENCE OF A PIONEER: THE MANIPULATION OF HAGAR IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S NOVELS

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In nineteenth-century America, the Biblical figure of Hagar appears frequently, in both art and literature. In literature, Hagar serves as the main character in many sentimental or domestic novels written by and/or about women of the South during the mid-nineteenth-century, where the racial climate from the 1830s through the 1850s became extremely tense over the institution of slavery, as evidenced in many sentimental novels from the 1850s to the latter part of the century. This study will focus on the depiction of Hagar in E.D.E.N. Southworth's The Deserted Wife (1855) and H. Marion Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr (1855), and the Hagarian figure in Harriet Wilson's Our Nig (1859) and Frances E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy (1892). I assert that biblical Hagar is ultimately transformed from Hagar proper, as found in the sentimental novels of Southworth and Stephens, into an African American Hagarian figure in the works of Wilson and Harper.

More specifically, in The Deserted Wife, I focus my analysis on the postcolonial term, the Other, and on the discourse of darkness within the text. In Stephen's Hagar, the Martyr I concentrate on what Julia Kristeva calls the abject, as well as elements of minstrelsy, found in the novel. In Wilson's Our Nig, which

represents a racial manipulation of the Biblical Hagar by an African American female novelist, I examine the context of Wilson's life as a pioneering peddler of hair tonic and her ability, as novelist, to manipulate Biblical Hagar's story into one of the survival of African American women during the mid-nineteenth century. Finally, in Harper's novel, Iola Leroy, I examine how the author seals Hagar's destiny as an African American woman with an African American-centered consciousness, thereby transforming her into the pioneering Hagar found in the the Islamic tradition. Ultimately, this study reveals a nineteenth century manipulated Hagar who, by the turn of the twentieth century, serves as a foundational character who challenges the normative images of the tragic mulatta as a way to combat racial stagnancy.

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CHAPTER ONE – THE RACIALIZATION OF HAGAR AND MISCEGENATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

We live in the twenty-first century, a time when men and women share the running of the country and children have ipods and gaming systems. But when we examine the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, America looks incredibly different – with men essentially running the country during the first half of the twentieth century and definitely during the nineteenth century. Women, for the most part, were relegated to the domestic realm, raising children, attending to church business, and, for the literate ones, reading and writing. In antebellum America, for example, women wrote cookbooks and advice books, journals and poems, fiction, and religious pamphlets. Some women even supported themselves by their writing. Women wrote a myriad of books on a myriad of subjects, and eventually they composed works that included religious or Biblical figures, thereby immersing such figures in nineteenth-century American culture.

One Biblical figure that appears frequently in both art and literature is Hagar. Her story is that of an Egyptian slave who is cast into the wilderness after she gives birth to Abraham's first born son, Ishmael. In Dreaming Black/Writing White Janet Gabler-Hover explores several nineteenth-century paintings of Hagar, such as Benjamin West's 1803 Hagar and Ishmael, a painting of a white woman and child with an angel in the upper right-hand corner who seems to counsel them. West's painting was on display at the

Philadelphia Academy of Art from 1851 through 1864. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's painting, the 1835 Hagar in the Wilderness, is a landscape portrait which depicts a woman agonizing over a young boy who lies in the shade on the desert floor. In the distance, an angel soars over a barren, rocky, hilly land and appears to fly in the direction of the woman and child, unbeknownst to them. A final example of Hagar art is Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's painting that was published in the Christian Parlor Magazine in 1844. The caption reads, "And the Angel of God called to Hagar out of Heaven," while the depiction of Hagar is that of a woman on her knees, looking toward the sky, as a young boy lies on the ground a few inches from her. Behind the dark trees, a light illuminates the sky: an indication that hope lingers in the distance. The pattern that develops out of nineteenth-century Hagar lithographs and portraits reflects the well-known characters and elements of the biblical story – Hagar, her son Ishmael, and the desert.

I will examine such issues in two white women novelists of domestic fiction that utilizes the Biblical Hagar as the foundation character and two African American novelists who utilize a version of that Hagarian figure in their fiction. And while there are numerous women novelists of nineteenth-century domestic fiction, I chose one very popular and one fairly obscure novelist, which demonstrates the Hagarian influence throughout the culture. More specifically, I will explore the Hagarian protagonists in the works of E.D.E.N. Southworth's The Deserted Wife, H. Marion Stephens Hagar, the Martyr and the Hagarian figures found in the novels of Harriet Wilson's Our

Nig and Frances E.W. Harper's Iola Leroy. In The Deserted Wife, I focus my analysis on the postcolonial term, the Other, in the discourse of darkness within the novel and in Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr I concentrate on what Julia Kristeva calls the abject within the novel. In Harriet Wilson's Our Nig I examine the novel in the context of Wilson's life as a peddler of hair tonic and how she manipulates the Hagarian figure into that of the survival of an African American woman. Finally, in Frances E.W. Harper's novel, Iola Leroy, I compare the manipulated Hagarian protagonist as a tragic mulatta to that of a pioneering African American woman found in the Islamic story of Hagar.

In literature, Hagar appears in several sentimental or domestic novels written by and/or about oppressed women of the South, where the racial climate grew tense over the institution of slavery. For example, according to Gabler-Hover, Harriett Beecher Stowe, in her 1852 novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, utilizes "the first overt representation in Anglo-American literary history of Hagar as African American" by indirectly linking Hagar and Eliza, the novel's desexualized primary heroine, when another character sympathizes with Eliza about the loss of her child, calling Eliza an "outcast wanderer" (26). Additionally, one of Stowe's minor characters, named Hagar, appears twice at slave auctions, lamenting over the loss (or sale) of her sons. Gabler-Hover asserts that in those scenes "Stowe's conflation of Hagar's African ethnicity and her self-sacrificial motherhood is a potent rhetorical attempt to transfer onto African American women the empathy and adulation accorded ideal womanhood in Anglo American culture" (27). In other words, Stowe's

manipulation of the representation of Hagar from that of Anglo-American woman/mother (as depicted in the lithographs, engravings, and portraits popular in nineteenth–century culture) to that of African American woman/mother in literature casts her differently, as having human qualities, thereby challenging society's notions of the hyper-sexualized female African American slave who represents a threat to all Anglo American women.

Because of Hagar's Egyptian origins, she becomes a character whose race, at least in nineteenth-century American culture, can be transformed and interpreted into whatever ethnicity best serves the purpose of the story that the painter or author wishes to convey. Additionally, her social class and status, that of slave or maidservant, make her situation equivalent to what ultimately becomes the tragedy of the life of the mulatta–a female of both black and white parentage. In other words, the tragedy is that the mulatta belongs to neither the ruling nor subordinate groups. And since she is a Biblical figure, Hagar is a safe figure for writers, as they can project their fears, desires, passions, and interpretation of societal issues on her. Because of the aforementioned factors, this study will map how biblical Hagar is portrayed in E.D.E.N. Southworth's The Deserted Wife (1849) and H. Marion Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr (1855) and how Hagar is eventually manipulated into a mulatta in the works of African American women authors, specifically Harriet Wilson's Our Nig (1859) and Frances E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy (1892). I conclude, however, that Harper manipulates her mulatta character even further, changing her from a tragic figure to a pioneering

Hagar, who closely resembles the pioneering figure of Hagar found in the Islamic tradition.

According to the Biblical story, Sarah and Abraham were man and wife, with Hagar serving as Sarah's maidservant. Delores S. Williams, in Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk, writes that Sarah was barren and therefore could not bear Abraham's children; however, "she had an Eygptian slave-girl called Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, 'Listen, now! Since Yahweh has kept me from having children, go to my slave-girl. Perhaps I shall get children through her.' And Abram took Sarai's advice (Genesis 16:1-2)"[1] (15). Hagar ran away into the desert; but, unbeknownst to her, Abraham impregnated her before her departure. While in the desert, God made her a promise:

> Now, you have conceived and will bear a son, / and you shall name him Ishmael, / for Yahweh has heard your cries of distress. / A wild donkey of a man he will be, / his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him, / living his life in defiance of all his kinsmen. (Genesis 16:11-12; qtd. in Williams 22)

Hagar returned to Abraham's home and ultimately bears a male child from him, whom she indeed names Ishmael. But Sarah later has her own male child, Isaac, causing great tension in the household, for, according to Sarah,

[1] Williams uses the Yahwist translation believed to be written from the eighth century. In the Yahwist tradition, after Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, Sarai becomes Sarah and Abram becomes Abraham. After the birth of Ishmael, God enters into a covenant with the Sarai and Abram, and then he changes their names.

Hagar no longer respected her (Sarah) as her mistress. As a result, “Sarai accordingly treated her so badly that she ran away from her (Genesis 16:6b)” (Williams 19). Hagar, with her son in tow, left again.

Gaps appear as relates to the return of Hagar into the home of Abraham and Sarah in that the circumstances of her return are unclear, even though in Genesis 16:9, the angel Yahweh appears and tells Hagar, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her” (21). Later, in Genesis 21:9-10, the text claims, “Now Sarah watched the son that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ‘Drive away that slave-girl and her son,’ she said to [Abraham], ‘this slave-girl’s son is not to share the inheritance with my son Isaac’” (27). This represents the beginning of the permanent end of Hagar and Ishmael in the house of Abraham:

> This greatly distressed Abraham, because the slave-girl’s child too was his son, but God said to him, “Do not distress yourself on account of the boy and your slave-girl. Do whatever Sarah says, for Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. But the slave-girl’s son I shall also make into a great nation, for he too is your child.” (Genesis 21:11-13; qtd. in Williams 29)

Hagar the Egyptian slave-girl is banished into the wilderness, never to return to the house of Abraham. She becomes nomadic in the wilderness of the desert, caring for her offspring as best she can.

When Hagar becomes free, she roams the desert; but history shows us that nineteenth-century American female slaves' freedom occurred through a more complex process, beginning with the relationship between the slave and her owners. In Sisters in the Wilderness, Williams contends that "the slave woman's story is and unavoidably has been shaped by the problems and desires of her owners" (15). Again, American history documents well the plight of female slaves who served at the behest of their male and female owners, as Hagar served Sarah and ultimately Abraham. Like Hagar, many American female slaves liberated themselves from the oppression of slave life by running away into the wilderness of America. And because Hagar is Egyptian, she is therefore Other, what Barbara Christian contends serves as the representation of "the enslaved African woman," who also serves as "the basis for the definition of Other in the United States" (qtd. in Collins 70). In other words, since binary thinking "categorizes people, things and ideas in terms of their difference from one another," it also "shapes understandings of human difference." Christian explains that

> [i]n such thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its "other." Whites and Blacks, males and females, thought and feeling are not complementary counterparts–they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites. (qtd. in Collins 70)

As a result of the opposition, one part of the equation is necessarily more powerful than the other. And it is the placement of those parts which determines which one represents power/authority/supremacy and which represents powerlessness/subordination/defenselessness. Once one element has been identified as Other, it "is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (70). In the Hagar/Sarah binary, Hagar is Other because she is the servant/slave. In the American female slave/mistress binary, the female slave is Other because she is the slave, like Hagar, to be manipulated and controlled by her mistress (and society). As a result, Hagar and the American female slave are one. Here it becomes important to understand the Hagar/American female slave experience, from the naming of the female slave and her children to the way society viewed the bondwoman. The resultant societal views, as we shall see, become reflected in the literature of nineteenth-century America.

In nineteenth-century America, the Hagarian figure and the American female slave are equivalents; since they are Other (than male, than white), their lowly status becomes even more inferior when interracial sex and their offspring enter the equation. In other words, sex, as well as the resultant offspring, becomes racialized. While today we call the offspring of interracial sex biracial human beings, in nineteenth-century America, when the tension between the races peaked, not only did society characterize the offspring as "mulattoes," they named the sexual act between the races and racialized it, calling it miscegenation. According to Debra Rosenthal, in Race Mixture in

Nineteenth-Century U.S. and Spanish American Fictions, "the Oxford Dictionary traces the word 'miscegenation' back to the Latin roots miscere, meaning to mix, and genus, meaning race, and defines the term as a 'mixture of races; esp. the sexual union of whites with Negroes'" (4). Technically, Rosenthal continues, the term miscegenation did not appear until 1864 in a "pamphlet intended to incite racial hatred," entitled "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro," written by David Croly. It is no coincidence that the term gained popularity amid the tumultuous debate surrounding slavery and the Civil War and remained in the vernacular for many subsequent years, at least through the early twentieth century. Rosenthal notes, too, that because the term "did not appear until relatively late in the history of interracial sex, [it] suggests the power of words to ossify reality or to organize hatred into a neatly quasi-scientific phrase." And that "quasi-scientific phrase" resulted in the quasi-science of race or scientific racism. In order to explore scientific racism of the nineteenth century, it is important to examine the roots of such science in the eighteenth century.

In the early eighteenth century, the scientific community questioned whether the Negro was man or beast or a combination of the two.[2] In Winthrop Jordan's The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States, a great deal of what we would consider today as irrational beliefs and irrational science are explored in order to explain the differences

[2] When referring to African Americans, I will use the vernacular of the time period which I am covering. In eighteenth century America, the commonly used term for an African American person was "negro."

and relationship between the races in America in earlier centuries. For example, Jordan contends that the eighteenth-century scientific community believed that there was "a pronounced dividing line between man and animals," and that "the best test of [whether or not an animal was a] species was interfertility. If union between two creatures could produce fertile offspring, then those two creatures belonged to the same species" (106). As far as the Negro was concerned, then, there was "no doubt that the Negro could mate with other varieties of mankind and that the offspring were themselves fertile." There is nothing irrational about that theory. But eighteenth-century scientists did not stop there. They expanded the theory for Negroes– wondering if Negroes could also mate with other species, such as monkeys and orangutans. Unfortunately, the reports from European scientists about their exploits in Africa, continues Winthrop Jordan, served as the foundation of American scientists' beliefs that associated Negroes with the ape: "One normally sensible naturalist casually referred to the orang-outang as 'equally ardent for women as for its own females,' and to Negresses who had forced or voluntary intercourse with apes" (106). Hence, the beginning of the idea of "beastly copulation" and "unnatural mixture" in America (107).

By the early nineteenth century, science moved from a biological to an anthropological emphasis focusing on statistical information. For example, Cathy Boeckmann, in A Question of Character, notes that in 1839 Dr. Samuel George Morton published Crania Americana in which he

> described the results of his measurements of the cranial capacity of skulls from a sampling of human races and populations. He claimed that if the skulls were ranked in descending order of brain size, Caucasian skulls could be placed at the top and the "Ethiopian" at the bottom; and since he assumed that brain size was a determinant of intelligence, his ranking was of the relative mental superiority and inferiority of the races represented in his study. (16)

Ultimately, according to Boekmann, Dr. Morton's theory, that "the sizes of different skulls suggested that the human races had no common ancestry, and had been created separately . . . became the dominant biological theory of racial difference by the 1860s" (19).

Because the aim of anthropology, according to nineteenth-century scientist Daniel G. Brinton, was "the collection of statistical data" that measure "human physical characteristics relevant to making racial distinctions," researchers, sociologists, and writers began to include those statistical data (which many have since disputed and disproved) in newspapers and magazines, such as Science, North American Review and Atlantic Monthly, which the American populace believed. In 1896, for example, statistician Frederick Hoffman extended his earlier 1892 study that attempted to collect factual data that would lead to the solution of the race problem in America. In Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro, Hoffman concluded (after interpreting hundreds of tables and texts that compared "lung capacity

and rates of respiratory, venereal and other diseases for black and white populations") that

> since in each case the black groups were more unhealthy, [there existed] "a most severe condemnation of modern attempts of superior races to lift inferior races to their own elevated position.". . . In the plain language of the facts brought together the colored race is shown to be on the downward grade, tending toward a condition in which matters will be worse than they are now." (17)

Hoffman's position, then, summarizes nineteenth-century America's reasoning of why the African American holds such a lowly physical, social, and moral status.

The most debatable scientific theory concerning the Negro became popular during the mid-nineteenth-century—that of evolution. Boeckmann writes that "the scientific turn to accept evolution was not accomplished without a fight, and the struggle over its theoretical validity is visible in the popular imagination and popular press," especially from 1860 to 1870 (19). The question of evolution and the Negro seeks to determine the Negro's rung on the ladder of human civilization. Nathaniel Shaler's summation reflects nineteenth-century American beliefs:

> The negro is not as yet intellectually so far up in the scale of development as he appears to be; <u>in him the great virtues of the superior race, though implanted, have not yet taken firm root</u>,

> and are in need of constant tillage, lest the old *savage* weeds overcome the tender shoots of the new and unnatural culture. To those who believe that the negro is only a black white man, who only needs a fair chance to become all that the white man is, these pages are not addressed. (23; emphasis added)

The underlined words represent the initial characterizations of biracial women in nineteenth-century America, which I will discuss later. But by the nineteenth century, racial scientists "prove" the inferiority of the Negro.

While "proving" the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the black race, however, the scientific discourse surrounding race began to shift from the outward, physical appearance to the internal question of character, just as the discourse surrounding the legality and morality of slavery began to shift from guaranteed to questionable. Eventually, contends Cathy Boeckmann,

> the question of which race was superior [would] be settled on the basis of character. Since the white race was assumed to have achieved greater self-mastery and to have produced more individuals of exceptional character, its supremacy was clear. And since the black race was assumed to be ruled by the lower instincts and generally speaking less possessed of high character, its inferiority was also clear. In this respect, the surface of the body counted for very little. (43)

And here we are again – a discussion of the superiority/inferiority of black/white, with no room in the binary for the mixed races, as mixed-race individuals challenge and "[put] pressure on race theory implicitly – inspiring scientific [and cultural] discourse to explore the depths of racial character and its invisible organs rather than skin-level features" (61). The mulatta is the definite Other. And because "American literature formed the basis for discussions of racial difference and of how various races should be characterized" (Boeckmann 49), domestic fiction writers like E.D.E.N. Southworth and H. Marion Stephens, I contend, surreptitiously explore racial characterizations, creating main characters–specifically, Hagar– who represents the Other.

There is no question that race and biology, biology and science, science and morality, morality and culture ran together in nineteenth-century America. Within this scientific/moral/cultural equation arose what Rosenthal calls "the anxiety of miscegenation," a societal concept that becomes evident, however, only in women's bodies because the women have the babies (11). This anxiety heightens during the nineteenth century because the debate surrounding slavery peaks–as mentioned above. In other words, not only must racial scientists prove that the Negro is physically and mentally inferior (and therefore not able to care for himself or herself, ultimately relying on the institution of slavery for his or her well-being), society must preserve the purity of bloodlines. For nineteenth-century Americans, the mixing of races results in biracial human beings who will not fit in the neat box of either "black"

(inferior slave) or “white” (superior person). As a result, according to Marouf Hasian, Jr., in “Critical Legal Theorizing, Rhetorical Intersectionalities, and the Multiple Transgressions of the ‘Tragic Mulatta,’ Anastasie Desarzant,” “a variety of American jurists, politicians, scientists, literary authors and lay persons were obsessed with studying the pleasures and perils of those who crossed [white/black] . . . blood lines” (125). Because notions of scientific (biological) racism functioned to substantiate the system of slavery, laws were enacted to reinforce the importance of unadulterated blood – both black and white. And those laws based on racial categorization “differentiated between the rights and duties of ‘whites,’ ‘blacks,’ and [ultimately] ‘mulattoas/oes’” (120). In nineteenth-century America, mulattas/oes were defined, according to Judith Berzon in Neither White Nor Black, as “all mixed bloods – quadroons, octoroons, and indistinguishable mixtures [whose] . . . position in society [allowed them to] reap certain advantages and disadvantages in his/her interaction with both blacks and whites . . . which [were] a direct result of his/her mixed racial heritage” (8).

One law that society enacted is known as the hypo-descent law, which technically remains in existence. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in “Racial Formations,” open their article with an explanation of the 1982-83 legal case of Susie Guillory Phipps, who “unsuccessfully sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records to change her racial classification from black to white,” reinforcing question of mixed-race heritage. In the article, Omi and Winant quote Marvin Harris’s Patterns of Race in the Americas: hypo-descent

> requires Americans to believe that anyone who is known to have had a Negro ancestor is a Negro. . . . [It] means affiliation with the subordinate rather than the superordinate group in order to avoid the ambiguity of intermediate identity. . . . [It] is, therefore, an invention, which we in the United States have made in order to keep biological facts from intruding into our collective racist fantasies. (20)

In nineteenth-century America, biological facts supported the need for the hypo-descent law, for it had already been "proven" that negroes were inferior. Logically, then, the offspring of interracial sex remained biologically inferior. As noted above, the offspring of interracial sex, known as mulattoes,[3] were not simply "black white [women]" because the "savage" in the black blood could potentially resurface, an idea which I will address in Chapter Two. In reference to binaries, the mulatto, the product of the mixing of (usually) black and white races in America, represents, once again, Other – the subordinate in the white/black/biracial equation because she is not purely black or purely white. As a result, her position or social status in nineteenth-century America (North or South) ranges from ambiguous to rigid, from safe to precarious. Initially, though, the mulatta's status was tragic – not necessarily in the sense that she was an unfortunate or wretched creature but in the sense that she was in between the two dominant races in nineteenth-century America, a place where to have no racial identity could force one to have no identity at

[3] While I believe the term "mulatto/a" is offensive and derogatory, I use it to reflect social discourse of the time period. Additionally, I use the feminine form of "mulatta" to remain consistent throughout my study.

all–the lack of identity resonating throughout African American culture as explored in Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, Invisible Man.

The mythology of the "tragic mulatta" actually began in the mid-nineteenth century with a series of legal cases in Louisiana, beginning with the 1858-59 previously mentioned case of Anatasie Desarzant, who sued two of her neighbors for spreading rumors about her race (Hasian 121). According to Marouf Hasian, Jr., Desarzant said that her neighbors "were purportedly trying to 'destroy' Desarzant's position in 'society as a white person.'" The neighbors, Pierre Le Blanc and Eglantine Le Maizzilier, responded that Desarzant "was trying to pass as white, and . . . they were justified in having characterized [her] as an opportunist who was trying to take advantage of her light complexion." Desarzant claimed that she was a pure Caucasian who originated from Europe and whose parents "'were of the pure Caucasian race, without the slightest mixture of African blood in their veins'" (136). But the defense replied by questioning her witness's racial identity, providing legal documents, such as marriage and baptism certificates, and providing witnesses (ranging from a white half-sister to friends of Desarzant's mother Justine) who recalled that it was well known in the community that Justine Bacquie was a "'colored woman, fair, with blue eyes, and stout'" (132). Biologically, regardless of Desarzant's appearance, her "outward appearance couldn't hide her hidden racial origins" (136). Ultimately, Desarzant lost her case at both the district and appellate court levels. The catch, however, is that Desarzant was what nineteenth-century America

labeled an “octoroon,” defined as a person with one-eighth Negro blood and seven-eighths Caucasian blood. In the nineteenth century, African Americans were racially classified according to their bloodlines. For example, a mulatta is the term for a child who comes from the union between a black and a white person; a quadroon is the child of a mulatta and a white person; an octoroon is the child of a quadroon and a white person. So Anatasie Desarzant’s Negro blood began four generations prior to her birth and, as a result of having one great-grandparent who was legally designated “negro,” regardless of the great-grandparent’s complexion, Anatasie Desarzant was a *negro*, despite the fact that her complexion and features appeared Caucasian. In other words, she passed or–according to the results of her lawsuit–tried to pass for Caucasian (136).

We have seen how race, science and culture become amalgamated; it is almost impossible for one to separate them. Suzanne Bost, in “Fluidity with Postmodernism: Michelle Cliff and the ‘Tragic Mulatta’ Tradition,” notes that the amalgamation of race, science and culture constitutes a “racial fluidity, which often allows the biracial subject an opportunity to ‘pass’ and choose a racial identity. . . . [B]iracial figures have always possessed decentered identities forced upon them by the historical circumstances, politics, and racial dynamics of their times” (136). But in the case of Desarzant and others like her in the nineteenth century, the plight of the “black” white woman represented a complicated and complex negotiation of place/status in society (136). While it seems fairly romantic to “choose a

racial identity," for the quadroons and octoroons of nineteenth-century America, few options existed because there was no place for them – they had no racial designation and as a result fit nowhere (136). Especially in Virginia, South Carolina, Louisiana, and other southern states with a large quadroon population, according to Monique Guillory in "Under One Roof," "the most a mulatto mother and quadroon daughter could hope to attain in the rigid confines of the black/white world was some semblance of economic independence and social distinction from slaves and other blacks" (83). She quotes Stephen Longstreet in Sportin' House: New Orleans and the Jazz Story:

> The half-white mother told her near-white daughter to latch onto the white massa and make him a slave to her body; to ask for earring [sic] and doodads, to hold back a bit and then enflame. It was deadly serious warfare, and the Negro fought it. He slowly saw himself diluted; red hair, blue eyes, different features began to appear in the slave quarter. (83)

Guillory continues, "[N]early everyone who encountered quadroon and [octoroon] women commented on their beauty as well as their striking whiteness. Thus, the fear, the threat and the unease the quadroon instilled into white families" placed her in a dangerous position (87). And the tragedy of the mulatta, says Hasian, occurs when she is caught "traversing the segregated worlds of black and white America" (142). In the case of Anatasie Desarzant, for example, after living as a white person for many years, once

she lost her case regarding her legal racial (and thereby social) designation and status, she faced rejection from both the white and black communities. She was rejected out of hand by whites and rejected due to her betrayal of the race by her own community. Her story became lore in Louisiana, used to underscore the consequences of attempting to "[usurp] . . . white reputations and social positions" (Hasian 142). So in examining nineteenth-century views surrounding race mixing and the results thereof, it becomes apparent why the life of the mulatta is considered tragic: her legal, social, and political identities fluctuate, leaving her in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The Mulatta and American Literature

Art reflects life. And since the mulatta's place in nineteenth-century American society was ambiguous, so was her place in the literature of that time. The mid-nineteenth century signifies a busy time for literary writers, especially those interested in issues that revolve around American culture, from slavery to romance. For example, in 1853, William Wells Brown published the first novel written by an African American abolitionist–Clotel, whose main character is a mulatta who ultimately jumps to her death. Briefly summarized, Clotel's story begins in Richmond, Virginia, where she is a member of the bourgeois mulatta caste. By the end of the novel, she has been sold to New Orleans, has escaped to Canada (by means of a disguise that transforms her race and gender), and left Canada (again in disguise) in order to reclaim her children that were taken from her in Richmond. On the

way to Richmond, however, her disguise is discovered, and she is chased like a fugitive slave and jumps to her death to avoid a life of imprisonment. A year earlier, in 1852, Harriett Beecher Stowe published Uncle Tom's Cabin, an anti-slavery novel which stirred fury and abhorrence among those who supported slavery and empathy from those who did not. Stowe's use of enslaved blacks, white owners, and mulatta characters served as a propaganda tool against the institution of slavery; like other anti-slavery novels, its purpose

> was to arouse pity for the oppressed slave: floggings, the separation of families, the cruelty of ruthless traders, the squalor and misery of the slave huts that contrasted sharply from the gaiety and luxury of the "big house" were all stock elements of this genre. (Berzon 55)

At the same time, to paraphrase Nina Baym, domestic (or sentimental) fiction writers focused their subject matter on the plight of a woman who is "deprived of the emotional and/or financial support that had sustained her, forcing her to make her own way in the world," or the plight of a female character who is "orphaned or friendless" and who is rescued through some "reversal of fortune." In either case, the heroine of such domestic novels withstands numerous trials as she discovers her identity and worth. On the surface, it appears that domestic fiction does not explore slavery or racial issues at all. However, when one considers the popularity of a Hagar figure as the heroine in literary works of nineteenth-century female authors, it becomes apparent

that she represents an imagined resistance to the nineteenth-century patriarchal society, yet an acceptance of the institution of slavery. In Dreaming Black/Writing White, Janet Gabler-Hover argues that

> the idea that blackness could empower a woman to transform the universe reveals at least two things. First, white authors of Hagar novels imagined black women archetypally in uneasy juxtaposition with the real-life historical situation of black women's enslavement. Second, Hagar fictions were essentially absurd and ideologically convoluted; they contained complicated narrative mechanisms by which a proslavery author could fictively stage the redemption of the old proslavery South by imagining herself to be black! (10)

Hagar, the heroine, is the perfect vehicle for authors such as E.D.E.N. Southworth and H. Marion Stephens to examine the plight of women while simultaneously arguing the moral implications of slavery via a racist stereotyping of the mulatta based on the hypo-descent (or one-drop of black blood) law. Since Hagar becomes whitewashed in the literature, she easily crosses the black/white divide, allowing the authors to explore issues of race in the nineteenth century.

The following chapters will explore aspects of the mulatta and how she is depicted as the biblical figure of Hagar, her relationship to the social discourse of darkness and slavery, and her transformation in African American literature. Utilizing the foundation of the Africanist presence in

American culture and literature, Chapter Two takes a postcolonial approach to how Southworth's 1849 novel, The Deserted Wife, uses the discourse of darkness and a proslavery coded discourse to reflect the emerging attitudes of nineteenth-century American society about the institution of slavery, the fear of freeschools and fugitive slaves and freedmen, and mixed-race people. Chapter two also explores the binary relationships between Africans and African Americans, as well as females and males in plantation society.

While Southworth uses her Hagarian heroine to reinforce cultural beliefs about darkness, in Chapter Three I will explore H. Marion Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr, published in 1855 and, more specifically, I assert that her novel illustrates how darkness, even in the mulatta, represents the abject, an object that society finds both identifying and repulsive. This chapter also compares Stephens's language and characterization of darkness to another art form with which many in the nineteenth century were familiar–that of the minstrel show. Through an examination of the social discourse and "black" characterizations, and the influence of the minstrel, Chapter Three concludes with how the literary figure of Hagar transforms from the whitewashed version explored in Chapter Two to the "black" mulatta found in African American literature.

Chapter Four shifts from the Hagarian trope in domestic fiction to the Hagarian trope in African American fiction, specifically the works of Hariett Wilson and Frances E.W. Harper. I define the Hagarian trope in African American literature as a shift in thought about the biblical Hagar and the

images and thoughts that a manipulated Hagar evokes. The manipulated Hagar represents the change of the biblical Hagar from middle-class white women to a figure representative of oppressed women of mixed race in America. Within the Hagarian trope, then, the figure of Hagar changes from one literally cast into the wilderness of the Southern lifestyle to one figuratively cast into unimaginable circumstances within contemporary nineteenth-century society due to her social status and race. For example, unlike Stephens's Hagar, who dies under all of the burdens she is forced to carry, Wilson's main character, Frado, in Our Nig, published in 1859, triumphs as she endures the wrath of her mistress who savagely beats and emotionally abuses her. And while Frado is not named Hagar, she embodies identical characteristics found in the domestic Hagar fiction of Southworth and Stephens.

Chapter Five concludes this study by moving into the late nineteenth century and evaluating Frances E.W. Harper's Iola Leroy, published in 1892. By the time her novel was written, African American writers had adopted the tragic mulatta character – a replica of Hagar, as I contend throughout chapters four and five. Harper's Hagarian figure, Iola, is different, however, because through her Harper rejects the tragic mulatta or Hagarian trope by reconstructing her identity into that of a pioneering woman of color. Harper's Iola, in other words, overcomes all of her tragic circumstances and by so doing removes the mulatta/mixed race people from the abject into the realm of acceptance in American society. Finally, what differentiates my work from

earlier critics is that I trace the Biblical figure of Hagar across cultures; I explore her transformations and interpretations as novelists of different races present her; I conclude that the literary figure of Hagar is more than either a white or black woman. I conclude that she transcends race by serving as a model for the uplifting of all women.

CHAPTER TWO – DISCOURSE OF DARKNESS IN E.D.E.N. SOUTHWORTH'S THE DESERTED WIFE

While some of E.D.E.N. Southworth's friends included well-known abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and poet John Greenleaf Whittier, Southworth herself does not fall into that category, according to Janet Gabler-Hover in Dreaming Black/Writing White (38). But while she had abolitionist friends, critics seem to disagree about Southworth's attitudes toward slavery. Nina Baym, in Woman's Fiction, for example, contends that Southworth was "especially praised for her [positive] depiction of slaves," while Gabler-Hover maintains that Southworth's fiction contains "proslavery dimensions," especially her use of Hagar in what I believe is one of her most pronounced proslavery novels, The Deserted Wife, published in 1849 (117, 39). Gabler-Hover writes that Southworth "argue[s] in her Hagar fiction . . . that proslavery agrarian idealism was morally superior to northern urban capitalism" by changing her from an innocent victim to a woman of dark moral character (38). Whether agrarian or urban, Southworth's language, I contend, is influenced by the institution of slavery, allowing her to manipulate her heroine. According to Vincent B. Leitch, "language itself constitutes reality; it also produces distortions" (6). In keeping with the idea that language represents reality but also produces distortion, I argue that Southworth falls victim to nineteenth-century mimesis in that she utilizes a social language of darkness, or discourse of darkness, because she is a part of the society that

produced and benefitted from the institution of slavery. Because nineteenth-century American culture did not exist separate and apart from the institution of slavery, Southworth, like all human beings of the nineteenth century and today, is "situated historically in contentious social spheres that are regulated by powerful institutions," such as marriage, slavery, education and mass media. She reflects those conflicting "social spheres" in her writing by "creatively mixing and matching cultural codes derived from her . . . situation, community, and tradition." (Leitch 6) As a result, she, like all artists, creates a type of "archive of historical words, symbols, codes, instincts, wishes and conflicts characteristic of a people and its era" (Lietch 6). And during her era, the institution of slavery, its subjects and beneficiaries, hovered within each and every social sphere, thereby influencing all of society. Because such a spherical mixing affects society as a whole, I will address how the attitudes expressed in E.D.E.N. Southworth's 1849 Hagarian novel, The Deserted Wife, direct and implied, reflect the attitudes of nineteenth-century American society toward the institution of slavery – from fugitive slaves to the coded discourse of blackness – allowing her to manipulate the Biblical character of Hagar, upon whom she bases her heroine.

During the nineteenth century, America experienced the most dramatic change that could ever be imagined. The shift in ideology–that of slavery as absolute and inevitable to that of slavery as immoral and unjust–marked a national debate surrounding slavery in America that would lead to a war between the North and South. According to Winthorp Jordan in White Over

Black, the Federal government legally prohibited the importation of slaves as of January 1, 1808, but slave smuggling continued in the South. The North, however, not only banned the import of slaves prior to the Federal act of 1808, but many northern states began to free slaves after the Revolutionary War. James Horton and Lois Horton, in In Hope of Liberty, write that "within a few years of the Revolution, all New England States took steps to free their slaves. By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, only a few hundred blacks remained in bondage." However, "emancipation was delayed in New York and New Jersey, mainly because slavery was more important economically and slaveholding was more widespread in [those] states than in the rest of the North" (73). It is important to note that while northern states abolished slavery, they continued to benefit from the institution of slavery in that many northern states manufactured the ships, insured those ships, and generally profited from the entities that transported southern goods (i.e., tobacco, cotton, human beings, etc.) to and from Europe and the Carribean, especially prior to the nineteenth century.

The South was different, as the livelihood of the slaveholders depended upon slave labor. John Hope Franklin, in From Slavery to Freedom, points out, though, that "three-fourths of the white people of the South had neither slaves nor an immediate economic interest in the maintenance of slavery or the plantation system" (123). Moreover, Franklin contends that "the institution [of slavery] came to dominate the political and economic thinking of the entire South and to shape its social patterns" for two

reasons: "[T]he great majority of the staple crops were produced on plantations employing slave labor, thus giving the owners an influence out of proportion to their number," and "there was the hope on the part of most nonslaveholders that they would some day become owners of slaves" so "they took on the habits and patterns of thought of slaveholders before they actually joined that select class" (123). As a result, many southerners supported the institution and the culture that it produced, from insulated plantation life to rigid slave codes, which were created, according to Winthrop Jordan, to "prevent and deter slave insurrection" and reduce the fear of a freed slave populace (111).

It becomes apparent, therefore, that both the North and South benefitted from the institution of slavery. In all areas cultural, political, economic, and social, slavery and slaves impacted American society–whether nineteenth-century Americans were considered the institution a problem or a solution. In other words, the institution of slavery and the slaves represented American norms. We know this because we see direct and implied references to the institution of slavery not only in our history but also in American music, art, and literature of the nineteenth century. As early as the 1820s, for example, northern cities, such as Cleveland, Ohio, became places that served as a refuge for freed and runaway slaves. And in certain parts of cities like Cleveland, blacks and whites socialized together in dance halls. According to Horton and Horton, within those dance halls the development of American popular music became manifest in other areas "like Almack's in

New York's Five Points" and "Philadelphia's Dandy Hall, where European visitors and well-to-do whites indulged in what a century later [especially during the Harlem Renaissance] would be referred to as slumming" (161). Songs such as "Cooney in de Holler, a favorite with the dance crowd, and Opossum Up a Gum Stump" were popular among both white and black music lovers. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, art depicting Hagar and based on the biblical story became popular in the 1840s. Gabler-Hover contends that many painters portrayed Hagar as "white, an exemplary visual analogue to the eventual 'whitewashing' of the Hagar heroine," even though "both nineteenth-century African and Anglo Americans knew . . . the black ethnicity of Hagar and her son Ishmael in the Bible" (10, 7). Additionally, there existed a plethora of Hagarian literature, so that "at least thirteen Hagar novels were published in America between 1850 and 1913" (Gabler-Hover 8).

While a debate brewed regarding the abolition of slavery, during the mid-nineteenth century many women authors avoided the issue of slavery by concentrating their writings on an issue that interested and affected them: the legal rights and status of women. Many women authors wrote to express their opinions about what was often referred to as the "woman question"; surprisingly, however, one of the reasons that middle-class American women of the nineteenth century wrote books was that they needed money. Nina Baym asserts that "as a general rule . . . only middle-class women had sufficient education to know how to write books, and only those who needed money attempted it" (30). E.D.E.N. Southworth was one of them. Born in

Washington, D.C., in 1819, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte was educated by her stepfather, Joshua L. Henshaw, who served as secretary to Daniel Webster; ultimately, she taught school until she married Frederick Southworth in 1840 (110-11). They moved to Wisconsin, but she returned to Washington four years later – the mother of a small child, pregnant, and without her husband. She supported herself and two children by teaching in the Washington, D.C., public school system. Insufficient pay from the school system forced her to look for other income, and writing and publishing stories was her choice. According to Baym, "Between 1849 and 1860, Southworth wrote eighteen novels," indicating either the necessity for her to write or her success in the field (111).

Southworth's novels represent a popular genre during the nineteenth century–domestic fiction. In general, Baym states, the storyline of domestic fiction "tells about a young woman who has lost the emotional and financial support of her legal guardians–indeed who is often subject to their abuse and neglect – but who nevertheless goes on to win her own way in the world" (ix). Lucinda McKethan, in "Genres of Southern Literature," notes that "the labeling of women's fiction as 'domestic' reflects the idea that women belonged in the home, that politics and public life were inappropriate for women, and that their natural 'sphere' was to inculcate, in their children, the morals needed for gendered roles in society" (111). Southworth's female characters, according to Baym, while "all shapes, sizes . . . colors . . . [and] beautiful," are relegated to the domestic sphere, with her major storylines revolving around "the

struggle of good women against the oppressions and cruelties, covert and blatant, of men" (115). Additionally, McKethan suggests many domestic fiction writers "were interested in southern white upper-class women's experience within [the] ideal of planter society . . . privilege[ing] the lives of slaveholders, even if the plantation settings and slaves are seldom center-stage". Southworth's work differs from other writers of domestic fiction in that it focuses on middle-class white women, but it is similar to works in the "domestic" genre in that it minimizes the slave.

Many of Southworth's novels are set in the South; however, she does not fit the criteria by which southern writers are identified. Her novels do not focus on the South per se, important because most nineteenth-century southern literature, according to McKethan, contains at least two of the following elements: a focus on community (personal or social), religion and/or family, a sense of place, and use of southern dialect. McKethan also asserts that southern literature is a "conjunction of the U.S. South and an expressive art – texts are identified as belonging to a particular history, social organization and cultural imaginary" (115). Baym notes that Southworth did place many of her novels in

> rural Virginia and Maryland and embellished [them] with highly wrought descriptions of landscape. She set forth the manners of a rude aristocracy and the traditions of a rough society down to poor white and slave. She depicted magnificent plantations and log cabins and the kinds of life lived in each. (117)

But, Baym also states, the themes of Southworth's novels include "daughters [who are] disinherited by jealous or materialistic fathers; hasty, secret, and disastrous marriages into which inexperienced girls are forced by importunate suitors; misunderstood wives abused, harassed, or abandoned by self-righteous but deluded husbands" (115). Southworth's novels are set in the South but center on marital issues. In The Deserted Wife, for example, the heroine, born Agatha but nicknamed Hagar due to her "wild, dark beauty," is left alone in the world when her parents both die; then marries, and is ultimately deserted by, a wicked minister (35). But eventually overcomes all obstacles to live happily ever after. Among all the marital issues treated in the novel, The Deserted Wife reinforces nineteenth-century America's discourse of blackness within white middle-class plantation society, allowing Southworth to manipulate Hagar via race-based characteristics, which I shall discuss below.

Darkness, Discourse and Hagar in The Deserted Wife

Toni Morrison, author of Playing in the Dark, argues that within the canon of American literature, there exists an Africanist presence, shaped "by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States" (5). She maintains that this presence "shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture," yet had absolutely no "significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture's literature" (5). Morrison's groundbreaking

work continues with an analysis of the Africanist presence in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, and Willa Cather. While my study does not strictly focus on the Africanist presence in Southworth's The Deserted Wife, that presence serves as the foundation of my thesis–that Southworth's work mirrored the proverbial blind-eye that nineteenth-century America turned regarding the humanity of the slaves because of the discourse surrounding African Americans. For example, Southworth begins chapter one with approximately fives pages of in-depth description of the setting – five hundred acres on Maryland's eastern shore. Within the first few chapters, she portrays the area as "half-savage" (33). Which half is savage remains unclear until two pages later when the narrator implies that it is the "orphan heiress," Agatha (nicknamed Hagar as mentioned above), who is savage (35). From the outset, then, Southworth sets the stage for a story with underlying racial connotations, using the social discourse of "savage" and "Hagar" to simultaneously escape and embrace racial implications of nineteenth-century society. The term "savage" creates a distance between the kinds of major characters traditionally found in domestic fiction (downtrodden upper-class white wives and at least one abusive husband, for example) and other minor characters, such as servants and field hands. Additionally, by nicknaming the main character Hagar, the author is able to make reference to the biblical character who, as indicated above, was in the process of having her darkness erased in the art and literature of the time period. And it is the name itself – Hagar – that allows Southworth to maintain such an ambiguous position

about those racial implications, i.e., the important role of African Americans in America. Hagar can represent good or evil depending on the caprice of the narrator.

Upon close examination of the 1849 edition of The Deserted Wife, we learn that it contains 48 chapters, divided into three sections, and consists of 577 pages. Chapters One through Four focus upon one central issue of the Antebellum South – the danger of the fugitive slave. One of the characters introduced early in the novel, besides Hagar and Sophie, the orphaned seventeen-year-old cousin who ultimately raises Hagar, is Cumbo, a "pure Guinea negress . . . nearly eighty years old . . . with the strong tenacity of life distinguishing the native African" (36). Already Southworth demonstrates a binary relationship--that of the African in opposition to his African American counterpart, with Cumbo's native African-ness a seemingly constructive trait. Scholars of postcolonial literature commonly examine such binary relationships.

Binary relationships have been explored at great length in the field of cultural studies, beginning with the work of Franz Fanon's 1952 novel, Black Skin, White Masks, and his 1961 work, The Wretched of the Earth, culminating in what David Lloyd and Abdul JanMohomed labeled minority discourse in their 1990 text, The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse. In binary analysis, according to Timothy Powell in "Re-Thinking Cultural Identity," scholars "delineate the inner workings of oppression [in order to] establish a critical paradigm that would allow minority voices not only to be

heard but to be esteemed as a critically important point of view" (1). Vincent Leitch writes that binary analysis, arising from postcolonial theory and studies, "points out the unbalanced power relations that typically shape the production of knowledge" (25). Generally, postcolonial theory, an off-shoot of cultural studies, "examines the global impact of European colonialism, from its beginnings in the fifteenth century up to the present." Such examination argues that "the West has constructed the third world as 'Other,'" thereby "projecting . . . negative terms of binary oppositions in which the positive terms are normative representations of the West" that "circulate through anthropological, historical, and literary texts, as well as mass media such as newspapers, television, and cinema" (Lietch 25). Additionally, postcolonial studies uncover a pattern of an "entrenched ethnocentrism that privileged the elite, white, heterosexual, abled, male, European perspective" (Powell 1). So while the plight of slaves in America occurred in the West, the examination of the relationship developed between slaveowner and slave illustrates a analogous relationship with the Other in this society.

Briefly summarized, the plot of The Deserted Wife centers around Agatha, nicknamed Hagar, who is orphaned as a young girl and lives under the guardianship of her older cousin, Sophie. As Hagar grows into adolescence, Sophie marries Rev. Withers, who despises Hagar because she distracts Sophie attention from him. As Hagar grows into a young woman, she marries Rev. Withers' son, Raymond, who is actually in love with Sophie. When his father dies, Raymond leaves Hagar for her cousin Sophie.

Meantime, Hagar and Raymond have had a set of twins. Ultimately, then, Hagar is left alone to raise her children. Throughout the novel, Hagar and Sophie reign over a handful of slaves who help both women cope with their tragic circumstances.

In The Deserted Wife, the narrator privileges native Africans over their African American relatives, indicating that, if one must construct such an oppositional relationship between distant relations, in the binary relationship of African/African American, the African American's voice and identity remained negative and unaccepted within American society while African-ness, or African characteristics of blood purity, become the norm, the standard representation of acceptable darkness. However, what I call the ideology of acceptable darkness includes not only pure Africans, like Cumbo, but some complacent African American slaves, like Jim Hice before he sought his freedom, whom the narrator also places in a binary relationship with Cumbo. As mentioned above, Cumbo is pure Guinea, pure African. Her cousins, however, the maroon colony of fugitive slaves who live in the woods, are a different matter: because the fugitive slaves have adulterated blood coursing through their viens, the narrator paints them as dangerous. The narrator reveals that Cumbo tells Sophie about the fugitive slave who is thought to be in the woods behind Heath Hall, which, as noted above, is located on 500 acres. Before Cumbo reveals Jim's story, however, Sophie, with woman's intuition, feels a "vague terror that had fallen upon her spirits as soon as she was left alone" (62). According to the narrator, "the most

heinous crimes were perpetrated by fugitive slaves in their desperation; their motives--revenge, impending starvation, or a passionate desire for liberty" (63). Thus, the social language surrounding the fugitive slave is necessarily that of danger and fear.

Historically–and generally speaking–fugitive slaves were not necessarily violent, per se; they just wanted freedom–a life free from extreme physical toil, emotional abuse, abject living conditions, and desperation. For example, Franklin assert that some slaves "organized themselves into groups called Maroons" and lived in communities deep in the woods, while others disguised themselves or used free passes to escape (143). Additionally, others attempted unsuccessfully to escape numerous times, an indication that slaves recognized their primary tool of resistance against the institution of slavery – running away. The instance of the "North Carolina woman who fled from her master's plantation no less than sixteen times" proves at least one slave's personal resolve for resistance and freedom (Franklin and Moss 143). The rare occasions when slaves would resort to an extreme process of gaining their freedom–insurrection–encouraged, supported, and reinforced the discourse of fear and danger in American society.

The question, then, becomes why did Anglo-Americans feel so threatened by fugitive slaves and freedmen, such as the woman in North Carolina who merely walked off her plantation at least sixteen times? Was she expected to walk from one plantation to another to exact revenge? Did slave revolts and insurrections occur so frequently that all Anglo Americans in

the South were in danger of physical attacks at the caprice of each and every African American in their sight? Certainly, while the news of slave revolts, like those led by Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner, spread quickly, so did the consequences of such actions. Jordan Winthrop, in White over Black, maintains that as early as the eighteenth century, slaves who offered resistance were severely and swiftly punished. In an effort to warn slaves, for example, the bodies of defiant slaves "were sometimes hanged in chains, or the severed head impaled upon a pole in some public place as a gruesome reminder to all passers-by that black hands must never be raised against white" (112). Winthrop explains that skewering a head was not uncommon in England, the native land of the newly emigrated inhabitants of the American colonies. In 1800, "General" Gabriel, a slave, planned a rebellion in the city of Richmond, Virginia, wherein slaves gathered arms and weapons. According to Jordan, "[T]hey hoped that the capture of key points in the city would trigger a general revolt throughout the state and beyond" (393). Of course, a slave revealed the plot and the rebellion was averted. As a result, "within six weeks the affair was officially closed by thirty to forty hangings, Gabriel, 'the main spring and chief mover,' on October 7, 1800." Later, in 1831, news of insurgents' failed attempts at freedom spawned news of equally hideous consequences, like the infamous Nat Turner revolt in North Carolina and Virginia. Turner's well-known demise included hanging, followed by the beheading and quartering of his body. Such extreme responses to slaves' attempts at freedom indicate the nineteenth-century American South's

obsession with the maintenance of a way of life that provided their livelihood and customs, a way of life that reinforced racist notions and norms as relates to the subordination of blacks to whites. In The Deserted Wife, the idea of the fugitive slave, then, represents a type of human desperation that includes the slaves' revenge upon a people who held them captive in order to preserve a way of life.

Southworth creates an atmosphere of fear surrounding, not only fugitive slaves, but the issue of freedom for African Americans. Even though some of her contemporaries considered her writings anti-slavery, in the The Deserted Wife, the narrator's tone reinforces society's trepidation about African Americans with freedom, regardless of how it was granted. Michael Cassity, in Legacy of Fear, for example, writes that, for nineteenth-century Americans, the abolition of slavery would necessarily result in a transition "from the traditional status, or even paternalistic society that slavery represented, to a competitive, possessive market society characterized by larger numbers of landless blacks and whites competing for both economic rewards and the social and psychic symbols of dignity and sources of self respect" (125). He continues that because the institution of slavery employed a "system of mirrors and projections and self-serving illusions," it afforded whites the opportunity to suppress such fears and doubts about the realities of the social conditions that slavery produced (124).

For Southworth, the story of fugitive slave Jim Hice, his capture, and his demise in Chapter Four (entitled "The Evil Eye") serves as a

representation of white society's fear of free African Americans. Susan Gillman, in "The Mulatto, Tragic or Triumphant," writes that the notion of "negro supremacy . . . the threat of the absolute exchange of power from white to black" becomes the dominant society's "nightmare" (231). Southworth's fugitive slave betrays a "friend" who tries to help him by giving him "a can of whiskey . . . which immediately intoxicated him; and then [the friend] offered him a hunk of corn pone and a herring, which he began to devour like a wild beast" (Southworth 63). The "friend" leaves and the overseer enters. They struggle:

> Soon the gigantic negro had hugged his captor to his breast with one strong arm, while with the other hand he drew from his pocket a butcher knife and plunged it to the handle into his chest--then dropping him, sprang over his body, cleared the door, and fled to the woods. (63)

Here we have the makings of the nightmare of white society–an African American male who has both (unnatural) physical power over the "friend"/overseer he betrayed and a weapon. Considering that the Underground Railroad was in full operation combined with the rare killings of innocent slaveowners in slave revolts and insurrections, the fear of the fugitive was real for many white Southerners. Clearly Jim, the fugitive slave who missed the underground train to freedom, had the physical strength and power to conquer the overseer; however, the overseer and "friend" represent the resources and legal power of American society to punish Jim for killing a

white man and running from his owner. Jim, who has twice resisted the institution of slavery, immediately has “a price . . . set upon his head” with “volunteering parties” hunting him with “horses and hounds” (63). A week passes and it is the beloved Cumbo who relays the information to her darling mistress, Sophie, that Jim continues to roam the woods behind the house. Cumbo, the loyal house slave, becomes a type of heroine, saving Sophie and Heath Hall from the evil fugitive slave and proving herself worthy of membership in the circle of accepted darkness.

Needless to say, the reader can assume that Jim’s darkness will never become acceptable as long as he is free. Frightened by Cumbo’s news, Sophie holds little Hagar in her arms when she opens a door, finding “the gigantic negro, with wild, haggard face and bloodshot eye” standing before her (64). Of course, Sophie drops Hagar and faints. When she awakes, Jim is standing over her, “extending one talon-like hand,” explaining that he is not going to hurt her; he just wants some food. “His eyes were hollow and fiery, and his giant frame was trembling in every limb” (65). He begs Sophie for food, pleading that she not “be scared at me – not at me – who used to ride you on my shoulder when you were a baby – how could I hurt you?” Sophie remains frozen until the door swings open and Cumbo appears (along with the pastor) and saves the day (65)! Sophie “flew into the arms of old Cumbo and fainted” – again.

This scene exemplifies the complicated and complex binary relationship between slave and owner. One cannot exist without the other;

however, there are degrees of dependency. Sophie inherited Cumbo, the maidservant who raised Sophie and her parents. Cumbo is passive, loyal, gentle. Jim, too, had an owner/servant relationship with Sophie, but once he crossed the boundary into (illegal) freedom, no longer a "slave," he no longer resembles a human being to both the narrator and Sophie. Portrayed as no longer humble and passive, he is no longer under the control of the whites, and is thereby a threat. Rather, his eyes are "bloodshot, hollow and fiery," his limbs "tremble," his overall demeanor is "wild" and beastly (65).

Here Southworth paints a picture of an uncontrollable monster – the same picture that southern society painted about fugitive slaves and freedmen. In a letter written in 1865, for example, James Beasley, of Memphis, Tennessee, inquires of D.L. Swain, of North Carolina, about how "the freedmen [are] getting along in North Carolina" (qtd. in Cassity 124). In the letter, Beasley writes that in Memphis, they are "anticipating some trouble" because "yesterday and a day before two white men were murdered by [the freedmen] without provocation. One killed in his house and the other taken from his house and carried beyond the city limits." He continues that such an insurrection represents "a foretaste of what we may expect" and that "[he does] not think they [freedmen] would be half as bad were it not for the Yankees that are here urging them on" (125). While the letter is written well after the publication of the novel, the tone of the letter is similar to the tone of the first four chapters of The Deserted Wife – that of fear surrounding issues of freedom for African Americans. As noted above, Sophie's intuition keeps

her alert to some invisible menacing force until Cumbo tells her about Jim, and then her fears are confirmed. It is also interesting to note that both Cumbo and Jim are slaves, existing only in opposition to their owners, but Southworth transforms Jim from slave to demon, a monster-like figure, through her description of him both physically and behaviorally. It seems that for Southworth, as long as slaves behave like Cumbo, they are trusted (to have their own freedom one day at the discretion of white society), but once freedom is demanded they are seen as threats to the social order and the American way of life that depended upon the repression of African Americans. And it is the gentle Cumbo who taunts her fellow slave once he is subdued and awaiting the authorities:

> "[Y]ou ready trussed for a hanging up now, ain't ya? Kik-kik-kik-kik! How you feel when git rope roun' neck, hey? Mind, I gwine see you hang, hear?" . . . The old woman did not move nor take off her eyes from her fallen foe. . . . "Oh, he one gran' rascal, Missy, one gallows faced vilyun as eber lib – used to drive me 'bout 'mong corn-hills, when he great man, when he Massa Churhill oberseer – *black* oberseer – <u>black</u> gemmun – <u>black</u> Massa! Kik-kik-kik!" (66-67)

This passage represents one of Cumbo's limited exchanges throughout the novel. Her voice is marginalized throughout the remainder of the text until near the very end. This passage also represents Cumbo's extended voice because we have here the complicated issues of gender

stratification within the slave community as accurately perceived by a white female author. In a binary relationship or the dichotomization of gender, men are ranked above women in the same class and race. Building upon Simone Beauvoir's concept of Other, Judith Lorber, in "The Social Construction of Gender," asserts "that which is defined, separated out, isolated from all else is A and pure. Not-A is necessarily impure, a random catchall, to which nothing is external except A and the principle of order that separates it from Not-A" (109). Thus, whichever gender or race is A, the other is necessarily Not-A. In the case of Cumbo and Jim, because they are of the same race, African American men are A; Jim symbolizes A with Cumbo representing the lowest level of the stratum – that of Not-A, who wields no power. Though she will always remain Not-A, Jim's imminent hanging, in Cumbo's mind, places her in a higher position in that she now has more power than the overbearing "black" overseer. The black man, in the slave's plantation environment, the A, must be eliminated before the woman, Not-A, can become A with the power – at least enough power to taunt the former A. In other words, in order for the black woman to have power, become A, the black male must necessarily disappear, become extinct. In reality, however, Cumbo does not represent the dominating A because she remains Not-Not-A (in planter society) and Not-A (in the plantation environment). Even if Jim is hanged, gender norms and expectations will not change for Cumbo. She will continue to do the dirty work (read domestic work) of plantation life, cleaning, caretaking, and cooking, work that many male slaves avoid and elude due to the very nature

of the gendered structure within that community. While the discourse of darkness prevails within the plantation society, so does the stratification of gender prevail, even within the darkness of that society, i.e., race does not matter.

In the end, after Jim is bound by the Reverend Withers, he is left alone with Sophie, during which time Sophie lectures Jim as she "looked at the poor wretch tied like a beast for slaughter" (67). She informs Jim that the overseer is not dead, so Jim is "free from blood-guitiness," but she chastises him about breaking into houses and running away. Eventually, she asks him what he would do if she unbound his extremities, to which he replies, "I would go down on my knees and bless you; I'd learn to pray, so I could pray for you" (68). Sophie agrees to let him go: "I don't know whether I am doing right or wrong, but I cannot bear the thought of your wretched condition, and the awful fate that too surely awaits you, if you are imprisoned tonight" (68). She even tells Jim where he can find a strong sail boat so that he can escape to Pennsylvania and "be safe." She "trembl[ed] at the responsibility she was assuming" (68). Now Southworth furtively addresses the issue of slavery in that she allows Sophie to free Jim, yet paints him as a beast when he attempts to gain his own freedom, when he attempts to empower himself. Southworth and Sophie have both circumvented the nightmare of "negro supremacy" by anointing Jim with his freedom because the fact that they are the ones to anoint necessarily means that they are the ones with the power –

still. Using Judith Lorber's theory of A and Not-A, A represents the equivalent of whiteness, white people, power, Sophie.

In addition to the discourse of darkness, Southworth makes use of nineteenth-century coded language. As mentioned above, the novel begins with a detailed description of a half-savage southern landscape. For Southworth, then, the signifiers (or words) – half-savage southern landscape – summon the image of the signified (or concept), an intimidating and menacing place overpopulated with slaves. The referent (the thing), of course, is the South. Again, in setting the scene, the narrator's discourse of darkness summons negative images by using such coded terminology as "savage" and "southern" in the same phrase. In utilizing such language, the narrator alerts the reader that trouble awaits. Such language was used to hook nineteenth-century readers of domestic fiction into turning the next page. Another example of proslavery coded discourse occurs just two chapters later, in Chapter Six, when Rev. Withers tells Sophie that "[w]e are very much in need of a parish-school. . . . I do not mean by that a free-school, but a school for the instruction of the younger children connected with the congregation" (80). The term, or signifier, "free-school" denotes the signified education for and of slaves and freedmen during the nineteenth century. One historically recognized free school, a place of learning for black children and illiterate adults, was the African Free School, opened by the New York Manumission society in 1787 for the principal purpose of being "an argument for emancipation" (Horton 152). Eventually, the mid-1800s saw the

establishment of numerous free schools for blacks in both the North and South, founded mainly by white churches and religious societies. Nonetheless, the signifier “free school” conjures two images that bothered many proslavery supporters – that of African Americans who have freedom, and a lack of control over them. The referent schoolhouse concretely reinforces the fear of educated freed slaves. In the North, for instance, separate schools were built for the children of freedmen and for white children. Nonetheless, W.E.B. DuBois, in The Souls of Black Folk, writes that “[t]he opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter, and showed itself in ashes, insult and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro” (23). And DuBois is right. Not that the “danger” in the Negro is innate, as proslavery believers advocated; rather the danger is that “education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent [because] . . . men [and women] strive to know” (DuBois 23). All human beings of intelligence strive to know more and do better – a scary proposition for the advocates of slavery. And Rev. Withers’s brief mention of opposing a free school supports the idea that free schools were unwelcomed not only in the community surrounding Heath Hall but also in the South in general. Again, the free school is mentioned in passing in the novel, as is its negative subtext. If the fugitive slaves are dangerous, it seems that for the narrator the slightest inkling of an educated freedman represents a threat too

ominous to utter. And in nearly six hundred pages, “free-school,” which appears in Chapter Six, is never referred to again.

As discussed above, Southworth begins The Deserted Wife with a coded social language of darkness – the “savage” forest, the fugitive slave Jim Hice and the fear surrounding him, the “free-school,” and, the main character of the story, the “wild, dark” beautiful child Hagar. In the biblical story of Hagar, she is Egyptian; however, writers of domestic fiction changed her ethnicity from Egyptian to white, embracing her as a sympathetic heroine who is ruthlessly and intolerantly judged at the caprice of the authors. Apparently, it was not uncommon for writers and artists to alter the ethnicity of people with brown skin. Gabler-Hover maintains that “[T]he Gypsy, the Native American, and the Egyptian are notable standins for African American ethnicity in nineteenth-century America . . . [with] Egypt [having] tremendous power over the minds of Anglo Americans in the nineteenth century because it had been discovered by scientists to be the originative seat of civilization” (40-41). Hagar’s Egyptian ethnicity is important because, as noted earlier, the nineteenth century was a time when American and European scientists were looking for a scientific or biological reason to justify enslaving Africans or African Americans. However, Southworth avoids the scientific racism trap early in the novel by explaining Agatha’s orphaned origins but (re)naming her Hagar as an indication of her true nature, implying–and thereby warning the reader–that her true, internal self contains a hint of Egyptian/African blood and, as a result, she is unpredictable, in need of control, even though society

privileges the pure African over the African American. The narrator, for example, explains that Hagar's adventurous spirit

> would lead her down a darksome forest-path, into the deepest dells, and most tangled thickets; . . . and the close hiss of a serpent, or the distant growl of a wolf, would only send color to the lips and cheeks, and light the eyes of the girl, whose ardent soul panted for excitement. Do you ask where she got her fiery blood from? I do not know exactly, perhaps the spark was transmitted from some Egyptian long since. (Southworth 148)

Hagar's adventurous spirit, which seems intolerable to the society in which she lives, leads the narrator to repeatedly refer to that untamed spirit, that piece of Hagar that is so unlike the majority of nineteenth-century women–in terms of their ability to act in an untamed manner in nineteenth-century America – that it must be contained and controlled. Additionally, the narrator associates Hagar's adventurous spirit with the serpent, archetypal evil, rendering her character dangerous and scary as well.

Hagar remains very close to Sophie, the older cousin who raised her. They are always in each other's presence until the Reverend John Withers begins to court Sophie. Eventually, Sophie and John marry, with John and his son Raymond joining the homestead of Sophie and Hagar. In one of the first interchanges between Raymond and the child Hagar, he says,

> "You look so like a playful, spiteful, black kitten, that I am almost afraid of your teeth and claws. . . . I think you are a jealous little

> girl." . . . [After bringing her cookies Raymond] caressed her straight black hair, adjusted her somewhat disordered dress. . . . [h]ow beautifully broke the glad smile over her dark, wild countenance, as she looked up in his face. (137-38)

Even in the description of Hagar as a child, her dark features and spirit seem to warrant a type of pity and a hint of danger – her "teeth and claws" as opposed to her mouth and hands – rather than love, for her. Later, when John attempts to choke Raymond after an argument, Hagar moves to protect him: "'Let him go, I say! You old Satan, you. I – I'll kill you – I'll scratch your eyes out,'" and "clambering upon a chair, and then upon a table, she sprang cat-like upon the back of his neck . . . . John [shook] her off, hurled her flying through the open window" (141-42). The narrator describes Hagar in animalistic terms in that she becomes the predatory "cat" and John treats her as such, physically abusing her by throwing her through the air rather than telling the child to stop her antics. In this scene, all of Hagar's Egyptian–read negative–attributes emerge. She cannot control her anger, she physically attacks those whom she perceives as threatening, and she is willing to kill, even a Right Reverend.

After temporarily freeing themselves from the insane father, Raymond warns Hagar never to go near his father, to which Hagar responds, "I am not afraid of him." Raymond tells her that she has "the fire and courage of a young tigress" (142). Eventually, the time comes for Raymond to leave for college, in effect leaving Hagar to fend for herself in a home with a weak

guardian (Sophie) and insane step-guardian (Rev. John Withers). Raymond's departure early in the novel foreshadows the cycles of acceptance and rejection, love and abandonment that Hagar suffers throughout the story, conforming to the role of the heroine in domestic fiction. In Southworth's novel, as is common, Hagar is abandoned. The gentle language of acceptance and love characterizes her cultivated whiteness–her beautiful smile, her slightly wrinkled dress indicating innocence, her undeveloped courage–while the harsh language of rejection and abandonment evokes strong negative images–the "black" kitten which will grow, of course, into the black cat that (some believe) brings bad luck if it crosses one's path, the savage wildcat image, jealousy. Again, Southworth's signs, signifiers, and referents evoke negative attributes of the Africanist presence in America, leading to the conclusion that Southworth absorbed the negative stereotypes of darkness prevalent in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century America privileged self-control and self-discipline over fervor and enthusiasm; stoic behavior symbolized civility and represented normative behavior. According to Michael Cassity, "restraint, order and decorum were the watchwords for whites," while "belief, passion, sincerity and the fullest expression of commitment [to God] guided the blacks" through life. (91) Through a binary analysis, then, African Americans' zeal for life, when afforded the opportunity to experience and exhibit it – usually in church settings – necessarily represents that which is uncontrollable and unaccepted.

Toward the middle of the novel, Hagar has grown into a young woman, and the author continues to describe her in binary terms, as refined yet uncouth, tame yet wild. Again, Hagar continues to serve as a walking example of contradictions, just as her implied bloodline represents a mixture of black and white. Up to this point, however, the overwhelming images of Hagar speak for themselves: "[S]ome of the evil fruits of mal-education" forced "jealousy and suspicion of the few she loved, scorn and contempt for the opinions of others" into her heart (156); the "wild child" laughed (169); she possessed "varying moods, [one] dark and dreamy, [the other] free, wild" (186). On the one hand, Hagar is a "wild girl" whose "dark eyes flash under their long lashes," while on the other she is "a slight, dark girl, looking so elegant in her graceful black habit, her shining blue-black ringlets glittering down her crimson cheek; her gleaming eyes and teeth . . . how gentle she seemed now, gentle as the half-dozing leopardess, with her tusks and claws covered with the softest fur" (208, 216). It is important to note that Hagar's gentleness comes as she begins to curtail her wild and savage ways for the love of a man. Before attempting to become domesticated, Hagar must bury her Egyptian self, that free-spirited part of herself that the narrator deems dangerous. Hagar remains a "leopardess" who has only recently concealed her "tusks and claws." Once she has buried her savage nature, Hagar professes her love to Raymond, one summer when he returns from school, and he immediately tells her that he wants to marry her. But marriage for Hagar symbolizes the end of her freedom, her spirit. Raymond agrees to wait

and in the meantime is introduced to Hagar's distant cousin, Rosalia, with whom Raymond eventually falls in love. In an argument with Raymond, Hagar admits that

> "[Rosalia] is fair, full formed. I am small, thin and dark. She is soft, gentle, sensitive. I am wild, fierce, and proud;. . . she is tender. I am hard. She is graceful. I am rude. She is all that is lovely, fascinating in form, features, temper and manners. I am all that is repellent in person, character, and deportment – everyone loves her – all dislike me." (281)

Through the characterization of Rosalia, this powerful passage fortifies Southworth's mimetic expression of beauty and character of the nineteenth-century black/white binary. Not only are Rosalia's physical features preferred, but so are the superior qualities of her moral fiber, important to nineteenth-century readers because the scientific debate over the humanity of African Americans continued. According to Cathy Boeckman in The Question of Character, "[T]he white race was assumed to have achieved greater self-mastery and to have produced more individuals of exceptional character" so that "its supremacy was clear," while "the black race was assumed to be ruled by the lower instincts and generally speaking less possessed of high character" so that their "inferiority was also clear" (43). Southworth's privileging of Rosalia as the standard of beauty and character over Hagar mirrors nineteenth-century societal views of white supremacy over black

inferiority. For example, John H. Van Evrie, in his 1868 book entitled publication of Anti-Black Thought, writes,

> The face of the Caucasian reflects the character, the emotions, the instincts, to a certain extent the intellectual forces, and even the acquired habits, the virtues or vices of the individual. . . . [W]ithout our color, the expression would be very imperfect, and the face wholly incapable of expressing the inner nature and specific character of the race. For example, What [sic] is there at the same time so charming and so indicative of inner purity and innocence as the blush of maiden modesty? For an instant the face is scarlet, then, perhaps, paler than ever in its delicate transparency; and these physical changes, beautiful as they may be to the eye, are rendered a thousand times more so by our consciousness that they reflect moral emotions infinitely more beautiful. Can any one suppose such a thing possible to a black face? (89)

First, the answer to Van Evrie's question, for nineteenth-century America at least, is NO – one could not expect beauty in a "black face." Second, I quote this passage at length to provide a sample of such thoughts and beliefs prevalent during the nineteenth century. The narrator of the novel confirms such ideologies surrounding beauty, character, and whiteness through the voice of Hagar, quoted above, who analyzes herself in "black face" terminology, equating her beauty – or lack thereof – to her equally lacking

character. Throughout the novel the narrator reminds the reader of Hagar's "wildness" and "savagery"; using Van Evrie's logic, then, Hagar's whiteness becomes translated into blackness. As a result, Southworth successfully manipulates Hagar from the white face or whitewashed Hagar found in the art of the period into something more sinister – an African American woman.

In conclusion, then, a casual reading of The Deserted Wife would not necessarily reveal Southworth's use of a discourse of darkness; however, a careful review of the text reveals a subtle but distinct viewpoint regarding the Africanist presence in the nineteenth century, which allows Southworth to become one of the first writers of domestic fiction to begin Hagar's transformation in to darkness, as opposed to, what Gabler-Hover calls, "whitewashing" her (10). Gabler-Hover writes that visual artists of the nineteenth century depicted Hagar as a white woman, as opposed to an Egyptian woman, thereby "whitewashing" her in order to "remove the power of Hagar's sexuality" (10). The practice of painting Hagar as a white woman continues in domestic fiction as well. And Southworth's unique position lies in the fact that she begins Hagar's transformation within the confines of domestic fiction, a fiction that typically embodies the lifestyle of middle-class, white women within the home, by incorporating the African/African American binary. This binary relationship allows her to explore the unbalanced association between native African slaves and slaves born in America, ultimately concluding that pure Africans represent normative and accepted darkness because they have not been polluted with the blood of America's

vile institution of terroristic slavery. Additionally, the language that the narrator uses surrounding Cumbo versus the fugitive slave Jim reflects the way that all spheres of society impact her views as a writer in that her language supports the notion that African Americans who wanted – some demanded – their freedom, like Jim, represent a threat to the society at large. And it is because of her language that I do not agree with many critics who consider Southworth as sympathetic toward slavery. For example, just as Southworth manipulates Jim from loyal and docile to untrustworthy and menacing when he wants his freedom, so does she transform the whitewashed Hagar into a person with split personalities, if you will, into another character with darker features and lower moral character. At this point, then, Hagar is not the African American female slave proper; rather she becomes the mulatta – a female with both white and black blood, hence white and black physical and moral features. In the nineteenth-century, the mulatta, or what Van Evrie terms "girls almost white," remained indistinguishable from their African American slave counterparts. That Southworth uses a discourse of darkness to manipulate a biblical figure, such as Hagar, into a mulatta implies that, in effect, African American women are worthy of a lifestyle such as that of Southworth and her contempories. And in subsequent works of domestic Hagarian literature, such as H. Marion Stephen's 1855 Hagar, the Martyr, we find a discourse of darkness that is not subtle, like Southworth's, but very dogmatic and daunting when one considers how such a powerful

biblical symbol of womanhood, like Hagar, develops into an exaggerated, negative depiction of the mulatta and African American women at large.

CHAPTER THREE – ABJECT DARKNESS AND THE QUADROON IN H. MARION STEPHENS' HAGAR, THE MARTYR

E.D.E.N. Southworth begins her 1849 Hagarian novel, The Deserted Wife, with a description of savage woods, laying the foundation for a discourse of darkness throughout the text, and seeking to control darkness– read blackness and the presence of African Americans - via diluted blood and domestication. Like Southworth, H. Marion Stephens also utilizes a discourse of darkness in reference to her main character in the 1855 work Hagar, the Martyr. Unlike Southworth, however, Stephens's harsh language reflects more than generalized nineteenth-century views about darkness and African Americans; rather it indicates a sensational loathing of the subject, as evidenced in her domesticated Hagarian fiction. Janet Gabler-Hover writes that many authors attempted to capitalize on the text of Hagar after Southworth's success (77). Harriet Marion Stephens was no different in attempting to gain financial and artistic success, but her only semi-autobiographical novel received almost as much critical attention as her acting, that is, very little. Gabler-Hover calls Stephens "an unexceptional actress" who offensively "exploit[s] Hagar's sexuality and insinuated blackness to sell books through the titillating medium of 'scandal' based on the 'exposure' of hidden blackness" (77). Taking Gabler-Hover's thesis a step further, it seems that Stephens's "exploit[ation of] Hagar's sexuality and insinuated blackness" serves as what Julia Kristeva calls the abject. I

contend, therefore, that through Stephen's discourse of blackness, she reveals nineteenth-century American society's process of identification with and desired separation from, or abjection of, African Americans and their culture. I apply Kristeva's theory of abjection to my analysis of Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr because it applies to Stephens's treatment of the image and fear of black people.

Julia Kristeva, French philosopher and psychologist, gained critical acclaim during the 1980s by introducing Mikhail Bakhtin to the Western world, expanding upon his notion of inter-textuality. In time Kristeva developed her own terms and ideas, most derivatives of other philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. One such term that she developed is an expansion of Lacan's mirror stage into that of abjection. Noelle McAfee, in Julia Kristeva, summarizes Lacan's mirror-stage, or the point in which subjectivity begins in infants: "[B]etween six and eighteen months of age [the infant] catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror (or some equivalent) and takes the image to be himself. . . . this identification helps the infant develop a sense of unity in himself." (46) Kristeva, however, contends that the initial image of the infant, while important, is a false image because the infant and the image are not one in the same. According to McAfee, Kristeva argues that "even before [the mirror stage], the infant begins to separate itself from others in order to develop borders between 'I' and other" – a process she calls abjection, "a process of jettisoning what seems to be

part of oneself." Kristeva, in the essay, "Powers of Horror," writes about the abject and abjection:

> The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I . . . . It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the [master's – here, the superego's] rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master . . . . It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object . . . [I]it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us . . . . abjection disturbs identity, system, and order. (231-32)

Kristeva's notion of the abject applies not only to psychoanalysis but also to literary analysis in one of the roles the literary scholar which is to analyze and interpret how a story, poem, or play fits within the society which produced it. Hence, the literary scholar, like the psychologist, delves into issues such as "identity, system and order." In summarizing Kristeva's idea of abjection and the abject in less technical and abstract terms, McAfee writes that

> the abject is what one spits out, rejects, almost violently excludes from oneself: sour milk, excrement, even a mother's engulfing embrace. What is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether. It hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's own tenuous borders of selfhood. What makes something abject . . . is that it does not

> entirely disappear from consciousness. It remains as both an unconscious and a conscious threat to one's own clean and proper self. The abject is what does not respect boundaries. (46)

The abject appears when one considers nineteenth-century America's relationship with her Africanist presence, black people, slaves and other foreigners, such as the Irish, Italians and Germans – who are not a part of this discussion but very much applicable. During the nineteenth century, African American culture existed separate and apart from the mainstream and dominant culture. African Americans remained at the border of American society, never completely disappearing from that society because they were a part of that society, albeit a rejected portion of the amalgamation of American society. In fact, during that era, America considered her African American brothers and sisters three-fifths of a human being, constitutionally, at least. Abjected darkness, then, is not the repressed, for to repress something is to have it disappear from consciousness. Darkness, or African American-ness, is repressed when it emigrates to Liberia with the country's blessing, i.e. Thomas Jefferson's support of a separation of the races via the creation of new homeland for former American slaves. Otherwise, abjected darkness remains, showing itself in all aspects of American culture, from art to politics to literature.

Before moving into a discussion of Hagar, the Martyr, however, I will discuss a popular form of entertainment during the time that Stephens wrote

her novel which I mentioned above – the minstrel show because her novel contains exaggerations of blackness and black people as found in such productions of entertainment. Because many consider Stephens a failed actress, it stands to reason that she attended and played in theatrical productions and could have been quite familiar with the content and form of the minstrel show, as were many of her contemporaries in the urban North. According to Eric Lott, in Love and Theft, minstrel shows were "organized around the quite explicit 'borrowing' of black cultural materials for white dissemination, a borrowing that ultimately depended on the material relations of slavery that obscured [American] relations by pretending that slavery was amusing, right and natural" (3). He continues, suggesting that minstrel shows "arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies" and that the shows "disavowed [their] fleshly investments [black male bodies] through ridicule and racist lampoon." Beginning in the 1830s, the makeup of the minstrel show included "four or five or sometimes more white male performers made up with facial blacking of greasepaint or burnt cork and adorned in outrageously oversized and/or ragged 'Negro' costumes" (5). The show would include music and song – with the use of the banjo, fiddle, tambourine, etc. – performances that included "comic dialogues, 'stump speeches,' and cross-dressed 'wench' performances" (5). Such a description of a minstrel show is important here because Stephens utilizes minstrel-like elements in her depiction of her main character and her antics. While earlier in the nineteenth century artists of all types whitewashed the character of Hagar, as mentioned

in Chapter 2, Stephens follows Southworth's lead by transforming her racial idenitity even further, an indication of the issue of race as paramount at the time. For example, in 1855 the New York Tribune published an article that referred to one of the earliest popular minstrel performers, T.D. Rice, who made famous the song and character "Jim Crow" in 1830:

> Never was there such an excitement in the musical or dramatic world; nothing was talked of, nothing written of, and nothing dreamed of, but 'Jim Crow.' The most sober citizens began to 'wheel about, and turn about, and jump Jim Crow.' It seemed as though the entire population had been bitten by the tarantula; in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the shop and in the street, Jim Crow monopolized public attention. It must have been a species of insanity, though of a gentle and pleasing kind . . . . (quoted in Cassity 3)

This passage confirms the prevalence of the minstrel show in American society. And whether the main characters were plantation "darkies" or urban "dandies" or "coons," these characters exhibited "exaggerated strength and overwhelming power," resembling Stephens's major male character, Laird, whom I discuss in more detail below. (23)

My analysis of Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr through the lens of the minstrel show and abjection within American society stems from biographical information regarding Stephens and her acting career: that is, according to Janet Gabler-Hover, in 1851, Stephens acted "for the Boston Athenaeum

Company, which had the lowest cultural status of the three Boston theatre companies at the time," and as a "stock actress" she was therefore "equated . . . with sexual impropriety" (76-77). From the 1850s through the 1860s, "the infamous third tier in the American theatre" was "reserved for the service of prostitutes, who often concluded transactions in the theatre itself" (77). Of course, I am in no way insinuating that Stephens was a prostitute, but I do suggest that since she knew the culture of the theatre, she also knew what occurred in lower ranked companies such as the one to which she belonged. Therefore, considering the popularity of the minstrel and Stephens's involvement with the theatre, it seems that the juncture of the two art forms would influence her–that combination coming alive in her literature.

Briefly, the plot of Hagar, the Martyr entails a heroine, Hagar, who, as a child, discovers that her mother is actually the quadroon slave, Minnie. Once Hagar's father decides to remarry after his white wife dies, Hagar runs away with her biological mother, Minnie. Minnie decides to return to the plantation, leaving Hagar to her own devices. While on her own in Charleston, South Carolina, she mysteriously finds herself in a brothel after she has given birth to an illegitimate child. Hagar is considered a martyr because she returns north with her illegitimate child, facing her family and peers.. But the child dies and Hagar is able to continue her life as a child-free woman who ultimately becomes a revered actress.

The novel, Hagar, the Martyr begins with the main character lamenting the loss of a lover and cursing the dark blood that courses through her veins: "O,

the blood of my race – the cruel, deadly burning blood!" (Stephens 11). The narrator inserts a flashback wherein the communal voice characterizes Hagar's name as one "only for the crushed, the bewildered, the broken-hearted," and poses the question, "[D]id they who stamped upon her infant brow that bitter name know how surely she would work out its destiny in sorrow and in despair[?]" (19). The neighbors wonder "from whence she got her fiery blood, from what source she inherited her rambling, restless disposition, or from whose milk she drank in that fierce, invincible, almost fiendish recognition of insult" (29). They questioned her father as to where her "wild, and fierce and invincible" elements originated. ("He only sighed" (29)). Like Southworth, Stephens creates a character whose parentage is in question and whose bloodline is unmistakably impure; but unlike Southworth's character who is dark and savage or uncontrollable, Stephens describes her Hagar as dark and "fiendish." From the outset, then, Hagar is wretched and evil, completely contrary to the biblical derivative upon which she is based. Her dark and "burning" blood seems to represent the intersection of both the black and white cultures that ban sexual contact, with the resultant offspring, or mixed race people like Hagar, caught between two opposing societal spheres. Since the blood is impure, one must infer that the amalgamation makes for an inferior being, inferior because of her inherent dark nature – "restless" or wicked, destined for "sorrow" and "despair," a condition easily recognizable as slavish. Stephens' separation from darkness begins in the bloodline, not in the woods, as with Southworth. Stephens

separates Hagar's darkness internally, with her physical qualities and moral character manifesting themselves externally. In other words, because Hagar's dark blood does not reveal itself through her skin color, Stephens exposes it through her actions and moral character. In that regard, Stephens's approach to the emotional aspect of African American people is similar to the minstrel in that it draws upon exaggerated descriptions of the actions and condition of black male and female slaves, ignoring the poignant aspect of life nineteenth-century African Americans, especially women.

Stephens's exaggeration of Hagar's actions stands in direct opposition to her depiction of another important female character in the novel. Though exploiting Hagar's internal darkness, the narrator introduces the "slave woman and personal attendant of Hagar Martin" – Minnie Claire, a quadroon (21). Minnie is described as "gorgeous," and the narrator tells us, "Only those who have noted the perfection of beauty to which the negro blood just merging into whiteness aspires can imagine for a moment the extraordinary beauty of this white slave of Carolina." (20-21) Now the narrator accepts and identifies with impure blood because it has produced the "beauty" of "white[ness]." In nineteenth-century American terms, a quadroon has one-fourth black blood, as per the hypo-descent rule discussed in Chapter Two, meaning that Minnie has at least one African American grandparent. And for some of that era, the mulatta or quadroon represented the height of beauty. In Miscegenation, written by David Croly, he describes the mulatta as having

> cheeks rounded, and hav[ing] a tint of the sun, her lips pouting, her teeth white and regular, her eyes large and bright; her hair must curl about her head, or descend in crinkling waves; she must be merry, gay . . . . the 'happy mean' between the physical characteristics of white and black, forms the nearest approach to the perfect type of beauty in womanhood. (36, 37)

It appears, then, that the mulatta's beauty is somehow connected to her place and social and legal status in society. As a legally denoted black woman, though not necessarily a slave, and following the hypo-descent law mentioned above, the mulatta's physical attributes translate into beauty in American society. Contrarily, a normal "white" woman, with one little secret and who enjoys a life of liberty, like Hagar, but has one drop of black blood coursing through her veins, is less than beautiful–at least in society's eyes. The implication, of course, is that sexual intercourse between a white male slaveowner and one of his black female slaves is accepted as normative behavior with the resultant offspring of such behavior–mixed-race children–accepted as a natural order or element of society. On the other hand, the offspring of interracial sex who assumes a white identity becomes ostracized, i.e. expelled, from the white community if the secret of darkness becomes common knowledge.

And a person's expulsion from the white community is the process of abjection. In the novel, then, abjection occurs first within the human form as well as outside of it. What becomes the abject is a portion of a human being–

what W.E.B. DuBois describes in The Souls of Black Folk as a “twoness. . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body” (3). While DuBois refers to abstract ideas and issues common to African Americans in the nineteenth century, Stephens’s Hagar curses the literal “blackness” in her, her blood, her constitution, thereby cursing herself. She can neither repress nor expel the impurity in her blood because she cannot jettison it from her body, nor can she accept or identify with it. In Hagar’s eyes, she is not the beautiful quadroon, like Minnie; rather she is the “dark” white child because of her status in society–she is dark and free, not dark and enslaved. What we eventually learn, however, is that the beautiful Minnie, who looks after Hagar all of her life, is actually her mother–the secret that damns Hagar forever and forces her to identify with her blackness because she identified with–indeed loved–her maid servant/mother who nursed her.

The source of Hagar’s secret and torment begins with male figures in the story and her relationships with them, as foreshadowed by the narrator in her description of Laird. As the novel continues, Hagar falls in love with Walter while Laird falls in love with Hagar. The narrator describes Laird as having a disturbing “forehead, low, broad, and massive, [that] glittered out from kinks of yellowish-brown hair; cheek bones high and rugged; a firm, square-set mouth closed habitually with an expression of determination; lips full and prominent” (47). Stephens’s description represents nineteenth-century America’s scientific picture and minstrelized caricature of the black

man. Technically white, Laird's facial features are unmistakably black, important because, according to Cathy Boeckmann, "Facial and other physical characteristics were used to signal racial difference in scientific discourse, [translating into] physical descriptions of African Americans in popular culture [that] can implicitly carry scientific messages about the black race" (29). By giving Laird black features, Stephens foreshadows his negative role in Hagar's life because, in nineteenth-century America, dark features also represent a dark moral character. Additionally, her description of Laird caricatures African American males. She describes him as a black man in white face, if you will. John Van Evrie supports such caricaturing of the "negro" male when he writes that "the negro head [is] radically and widely different from that of the white man" in that the negro's head is "thrown upwards and backwards, showing a certain though remote approximation to the quadruped [or ourang-outang] in its actual formation and the manner in which it is set on his shoulders" (94). Regarding the hair, Van Evrie continues: "[T]he popular notion that the negro skull is much thicker than that of the white man originated from this peculiarity of the covering of the negro head. The hair is so dense, so curled and twisted together, and forms such a complete mat or net work as to be wholly impenetrable to the rays of the vertical sun . . . . [I]t is so hard and wiry" (106-107). Van Evrie's description specifies Stephen's one word adjective of "kinky," a common term used to this day to illustrate the texture of African Americans' hair (Stephens 47).

In addition to the hair, the narrator continues to describe this white black man, Laird, as “dark and glittering, and solemn; so profound, and silent, and convincing . . . [with a] wondrous smile!–still, gentle, smooth and seductive, [the smile] crept from feature to feature, lighting up that otherwise repulsive face with a radiance at once fascinating and fearful” (Stephens 47-48). Here Stephens employs the hyperbole of the minstrel show by exaggerating Laird’s smile as beckoning to the beholder, similar to the way that the characters of such shows drew in their audiences. The darkness of the “repulsive face” cannot be separated from the “radiance” of his smile, yet the narrator admires the beauty of the radiant smile, two warring ideals that the narrator cannot reconcile.

Hagar and Laird talk incessantly during their introduction about his facial features: he says to Hagar, “You are taking your time over my face; I hope you like it,” to which she replies, “I have seldom seen a face I like less . . . [for] I see sincerity overshadowed by cruelty. I see a devil’s frown under an angel’s smile. I see a will, a purpose and a determination in the corners of your mouth, and I pray God that I may never be so unfortunate as to attract you” (48). But it is too late; her attraction to him overtakes her, just as the minstrel show takes over as a popular genre that both attracted and repelled its audiences with its stereotypical characters with exaggerated features such as big, red lips that were typically shaped in the form of a broad smile, almost reaching just below the lower corner of the eye. Additionally, asserts Eric Lott, overall, “In blackface minstrelsy’s audiences there were in fact

contradictory racial impulses at work, impulses based in the everyday lives and racial negotiations of the minstrel show's working-class partisans" and within the medium itself, "blackface acts and words [and symbols] figured significantly in the white Imaginary of the United States" (4, 5). One can consider such "contradictory racial impulses" as abjection at work–the pulling and pushing of emotional and intellectual feelings that left the audience confused then relieved, as they watch the stage.

It appears, then, that Stephens' Hagar, the Martyr continues in that vein by painting Laird, physically and behaviorally, in a manner that corresponds to minstrel characters. Cathy Boeckmann contends that "popular visual representations [such as minstrel shows and literary representations] were themselves part of the discourse that established black racial inferiority" (50). She quotes Henry Louis Gates, Jr.:

> [T]he features of the race – its collective mouth shape and lip size, the shape of its head (which especially concerned phrenologists at the turn of the century), its black skin color, its kinky hair – had been caricatured and stereotyped . . severely in popular American art. (50)

Not only did scientific racialists seek to prove the physical inferiority of African Americans, they necessarily sought to prove the inferior character of them as well because, for scientific racialists, the "growth of character is analogous to, and evidence for, the evolution of the human race" (43). As a result, popular culture perpetuates the ideology of the status quo – equating physical

characteristics with morality. Even Thomas Jefferson, in the previous century, wrote about the morality of the slaves in his 1787 Notes on the State of Virginia: "I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments of both body and mind" (192-193). He continues, "[C]omparing them by their faculties of memory, reason and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to whites; in reason much inferior, . . . and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (188). By the nineteenth century, then, blacks had become caricatures, categorized into "stock patterns – the passive slave, the buffoon, the brute" (Boeckmann 52). Necessarily, Stephens's characters with impure blood or impure physical features embody one of the three caricatures. Hagar epitomizes the passivity of African Americans while Laird symbolizes the brute.

Caricatures aside, Laird's abjected darkness is revealed via the physicality of his head and face as well as Hagar's attraction to him. He tells her, "I repel you, that is evident; you recoil from me! Take care! There is an instinct – a natural enough instinct – implanted in every heart to hunt that which flies from us. The excitement of the chase you know" (Stephens 48). Here Stephens touches upon the abject itself – that internal instinct to resist that which is a part of us, as Laird's dark features represent the impurity or darkness in Hagar herself. That same "instinct implanted in every heart" also materializes in the audiences of minstrel shows. Eric Lott quotes Fredric

Jameson, writing about fear and pleasure: "'[T]he aesthetic reception of fear . . . the enjoyment of the shock and commotion fear brings to the human organism' is well-nigh central to the experience of pleasure" (147). Lott continues,

> Whites' own "innermost relationship with enjoyment," writes Slavoj Zizek, is expressed in their fascination with the Other;[4] it is through this very displacement that desire is constituted. Because one is so ambivalent about and represses one's own pleasure, one imagines the Other to have stolen it or taken it away, and "fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment" allow that pleasure to return. Whites get satisfaction in supposing the "racial" Other enjoys in ways unavailable to them – through exotic food, strange and noisy music, outlandish bodily exhibitions, or unremitting sexual appetite. (148)

I quote the above passage at length because, in terms of abjected darkness, nineteenth-century American society's repressed obsession with African American culture allows it to obtain pleasure, through mockery, of an integral part of itself. Through her portrayal of Laird, Stephens mocks, if you will, that part of African American culture that intrigues but repulses her reading audience.

I would not go so far as to label Laird a scapegoat for the narrator's interest and fear of African Americans, but the narrator's depiction of him is such that Laird clearly evolves into a white black man – unthreatening on the

[4] The Other is found in the discussion of binary analysis in Chapter 2.

surface with evil bubbling underneath. For example, later in the novel, when he tells Hagar that he plans to marry her, the narrator describes him as "a handsome fiend" whom Hagar admits she had "seen [in] the time when there was a fascination in the dark, strange men that get into the world by chance," that she had "even dreamed of the sensation it would be to tame one – to subdue one by force of affection – to remove the monster's claws, and play with it" (91). We see the beginning of a love/hate relationship between Hagar and Laird, again, the same type of relationship with which Hagar has internally struggled from the beginning of her birth. And it is here that the narrator entwines and implies a type of sexual tension between Hagar and Laird, as the subject of interracial sex and relationships in the nineteenth century were taboo. She refers to Laird's "monster claw" and how she wants to "play with it." On the one hand, Hagar represents what Croly calls the "love of the blonde for the black," wherein white women's love of the black man is a "sympathetic love," a "love of race," because "in the nature of things . . . we love our opposites . . . [The opposite] is not something we possess ourselves, it is something different, something new, something capable of exciting, which is sought for" (27, 29). On the other hand, Eric Lott, in referencing "prostitution in the theatre's third tier," of which Stephens had first-hand knowledge, contends that in the convention of the minstrel, the hyperbolic black male character on stage "was the penis, that organ returning in a variety of contexts," illustrating white America's fascination with African American sexuality (27, 25). I interpret Hagar's phallic reference to Laird as a

fascination with African American men because she specifically wants to "play" with "it," not "play with him," dismembering Laird as a means to wield sexual power and control over him. Additionally, her presumed knowledge of the jaunts of the "theatre's third tier" places her in the curious position of revealing such low-brow behavior and language which she includes in Hagar, the Martyr.

Stephens confirms the appropriateness of such low-brow language and imagery toward Laird when he reveals his true dark nature and low character, as he is the one who exposes Hagar's secret. He draws attention to Hagar's physical features, forcing Hagar to admit her darkness:

> "Lift up the drooping fringes of those proud eyes, and see there the rim of opaque blackness, indigenous alone to the slave . . . raise that mass of curly jet, and trace there the short crisp wave of hair that separates the negro from the white; then, if that suffice not, go to your mirror, girl. Take feature after feature of that superb face. Examine them individually – the luscious lips, the high cheek bone, the broad, low forehead, the unshapely nose – all bright, gorgeous, and fascinating together, but apart and distinct, undeniably African." (95)

Overwhelmed, Hagar sinks into a chair. I quote this passage at length in order to demonstrate how Hagar's features are described in marked detail, like Laird's earlier, revealing her beauty – "bright, gorgeous and fascinating" – and unsuspected internal ugliness, her "African[ess]." It seems, however, that

when impure blood courses through the veins of women, they become exceptionally beautiful, but the impure blood that flows in men designates them as evil, representing nineteenth-century America's fear of miscegenation or the mixing of the races. Stephens gives us no history about the relationship between Minnie the quadroon and Hagar's father. It is a secret. But that secret produced a child, our main character. The racialized act of sex, then, miscegenation, becomes another abjection in Stephens's novel, even though black sexuality beckons her. And that black sexuality symbolized by Laird earlier in the novel enables Stephens to explore the social aftermath, the physical offspring of interracial sex–mixed race people. Socially, for Stephens, mixed-race people belong in neither the sphere of whiteness nor darkness, even though they remain a part of society's overall sphere. As she reveals later in the text, they live just over the border of whiteness, in plain sight.

Because of the hypo-descent law, Hagar immediately places herself in the social sphere of blackness. Rather than become Laird's wife or his slave, as he put it, Hagar convinces the quadroon Minnie, her mother, to "escape" with her. They dress alike, in Hagar's clothes, and set off. True to form, the runaways are pursued. Now, Stephens has pushed Hagar's identity into the opposite direction. She becomes the abject – Hagar is that thing, that object, that piece of her self and society, that she previously expelled from herself. She must now embrace that thing – her black blood, her blackness – in order to repel the whiteness in her, that piece of her that refuses to become Laird's–

white–wife with a horrible secret. She has reconciled her two warring souls, to a certain degree, by crossing the border of race, crossing into a world with which she is not familiar.

Because Stephens allows Hagar to move into blackness, into black society proper, as a result of interracial sexual relationships, she opens to discussion an issue of interest about African American women for quite some time–that of sexuality. Utilizing the biblical figure of Hagar, many nineteenth century artists took liberties with the character, including sexualizing her in domestic fiction. According to Gabler-Hover, Hagar evolves into three differing variations:

> the prebiblical reconstruction of Hagar as an African woman who is sexual in a positive and powerful way, a biblical African Hagar who is sexual by virtue of oppression forced upon her (although she 'survives'), and the hyperbolically sexualized black woman stereotyped by racist white America as an apology for black women's sexual and social oppression. (24)

I do not agree that the Hagarian figure is sexualized as an "apology for black women's sexual and social oppression" because white women were sexually and socially oppressed as well. I do agree with Janet Gabler-Hover's observation that Hagar does become hyperbolically sexualized–but her sexualization, for Stephens at least, has more to do with selling books than anything else, based on her somewhat tainted reputation and career (77). For example, Southworth's Hagar, in The Deserted Wife, symbolizes female

sexual repression and oppression–she magically bears a set of twins after her marriage to her husband. They literally appear in a later chapter of the novel, leaving the reader to infer that the heroine did, indeed, have sex with her husband, but her sexuality remains invisible.

Stephens's Hagar, on the other hand, differs by representing the hyperbolic sexual woman that Gabler-Hover mentions above. We are introduced to Hagar's burgeoning sexuality early in the novel, when the narrator reveals the fourteen-year-old's passion for Walter, six years her senior: she was

> [o]ne who had always been allowed the rein of her impulses. . . [with] Walter [not] judging of her the womanly little thing she was. . . Of the passion of love she knew nothing, although the tinge of wild, warm blood swelling her veins predisposed her to enthusiastic demonstration in her own childlike way; but of its purity she was imbued – soul, sense and nature. (35-36)

With Walter, then, Hagar begins to experience the physical sensations that accompany sexual desire, spurred by what one can infer as her internal darkness. At fourteen, in the nineteenth century, Hagar's tingling blood may be regarded as an innocent feeling, but because she is of mixed blood, half black, her physical sensations represent that which simultaneously beguiles and repulses Stephens's intended audience, just as one purpose of the minstrel show was to titillate its audiences. Hagar's sexuality, a natural part of her overall being, also becomes the abject, but Stephens attempts to

separate Hagar's sexuality in terms of its desires by racializing its objects. In other words, when Hagar desires Walter, of pure white blood, the narrator regards it as innocent; but when she desires Laird, the white black man, her sexuality becomes foul and dirty.

As a product of miscegenation, Hagar symbolizes one of the antebellum South's most dangerous secrets for white males–interracial sex. Gabler-Hover explains that "[a]n abolitionist of the time wrote that 'miscegenation is already the irreversible fact of Southern society in everything but the recognition of it'. . . . [T]he fact that black-white coupling takes place 'outside the law' renders it sexually racy, 'a sign of an absence of control or rationality,' which. . elicits both desire and disgust from the audience" (78). In writing about pre-sex sensations, Stephens again reveals the uncontrollable nature of those with mixed or tainted blood, for, according to Kristeva, "Sensation, which cannot be reduced to ideas even though it is intrinsically dependent on them, can never be equivalent to intelligence (because intelligence is, after all, paramount)" (Portable Kristeva 122). The sex act itself–between black and white people–is also the abject. It crosses the border of righteous and moral sexuality between a man and a woman of the same race. Expelled from society's pure mind, abjected miscegenation hovers in the realm of evil – that same evil that beckons, then engulfs a part of society.

The result of abjected miscegenation becomes evident in the status of mixed-race white people, like Hagar, placing them outside the realm of

acceptable white society. Once Laird exposes Hagar's secret of impurity to the world, she leaves town, eventually finding her way from Boston to Charleston, South Carolina. The narrator discloses that during a year of "quiet, harmless insanity" Hagar lives in a brothel and has a baby out of wedlock (Stephens 116). Yes, a baby appears, but because it materializes in a "house of hell, where the weakest of [the female] sex and the worst of the other congregate to break every law of God and man," the reader must infer that because Hagar lived in a brothel, she has subsequently participated in sexual activity that necessarily produces a child (116). Hagar falls from grace, having her darkness revealed even further, and, as a result, she lands in a very dark place–the same dark place in society that produced her, the dark place of interracial sex or abjected miscegenation. In other words, as a product of abjected miscegenation, her journey into a house of prostitution reflects the plight and justifiable low status in society of mixed-race people like her. Mixed-race people both tantalize and disgust–likewise, prostitutes lure their clients with their beauty and sexuality, then expel them into the streets and into the homes of their wives. Hagar's expulsion resembles the expulsion of the Biblical Hagar who, along with her son Ishmael, was forced into the wilderness.

But the madam tells Hagar to take her child and go, that she does not belong in such a place. When Hagar awakens from a dream state–remember, the narrator tells us that she had been quietly insane for the past year–she asks the madam, "[T]ell me what it is, and why I am here." Hagar

wonders of the madam, “[I]s your mother dead, too? And did the one you love desert you?” (116). Until this point, the reader remains uninformed about Minnie’s death. As a result, it becomes questionable as to whether Hagar’s insanity is the result of her mother’s death or the revelation of her black blood. Either way, “insanity provides a kind of failsafe for white women . . . they are out of their mind – in other words, not white – when possessed by deep emotion” (Gabler-Hover 88). Hagar’s consent to live and work in a brothel necessarily means that the trauma she experienced due to the death of her mother and/or the knowledge about her true heritage so overwhelmed her that she suffered a psychotic break of some sort. Her ability to reason and her emotions separate from her intellect, causing her to subject herself to, what many would call, the lowliest and dirtiest places in society. The resultant baby, which forces her gradual assent into sanity, begins the process of redemption for Hagar. But that Stephens would have her character descend to the lowest rung on society’s ladder supports the notion that nineteenth-century America’s discourse of/about darkness (pure or impure) leads to the inferior space—or place—of darkness.

As providence would have it, when Hagar returns to Boston, the baby mysteriously dies: “‘O that I had died with thee, my child! O that I had died with thee!. . .No hope! No light!’” (160). She says that “even . . [prison] inmates were less wretched than she!” (159). It seems, then, that social mores dictate one of two truths: having a child out of wedlock shames both the mother and the child, and having a child out of wedlock that is of mixed

blood is worse than having a child out of wedlock. For Stephens, the double negative (mixed child and out of wedlock) definitely has no place in nineteenth-century society, resulting in the death of the child.[5] Gabler-Hover's interpretation of the deceased child reflects proslavery views of miscegenation. She writes that "the death of the baby suggests the antimiscegenist theory that a child of black/white sexuality will be diseased, that miscegenation will produce a degenerate race and finally death" (88). While that sentiment may seem disturbing by today's standards, the earlier discussion of scientific racism supports the position that many people in the nineteenth century held strong feelings about what and how a mixed-race group of people would contribute to, but most importantly affect, society. For Stephens, the answer is easy – they don't; mixed-race children die, thereby never coming into existence.

But what of Hagar, the mother who must now mourn her deceased child? She buries the baby in Boston, and while visiting the grave, a strange man approaches. Based on their conversation, the narrator implies that the stranger had impregnated Hagar and now wants to marry her. But she rejects him:

> "you made me abhor and shrink from myself as from some polluted thing; you made me bear with me, through all these long years, a hidden stain; a stain that has eaten into my soul; that has cankered my best impulses; that has risen up before

[5] Stephens never informs the reader of the child's sex.

me at all times, in all places, under all circumstances, till I loathe myself for the crime you won me to perpetrate." (161)

No longer concerned with her dark secret, she laments her soul, her body, and her baby. Now abjectified, her body has been defiled, as has her character. She speaks as though she had absolutely no control over her body – just as she had no control over her mixed blood. When the stranger asks her to marry him, she refuses, stating, "No, no! it cannot be; it is impossible. If I sinned then, when I did not know, as I know now, how wicked it was, think how much greater would be the sin of giving myself to you" (162). She has become what Julia Kristeva calls autoerotic – she makes a "cold, set and somewhat false complaint . . . that [s]he is unable to love . . . . the autoerotic person cannot allow [herself] to be 'loved' (no more than [she] can let [herself] be lovable)" (Portable Kristeva 148). Hagar has now moved from the abject to the autoerotic, to a place where her emotional borders have permanently closed. By the time Walter (her first love at age fourteen) re-enters the story, when he attempts to befriend her, she refuses him as well, thereby becoming her own self-fulfilling prophecy – unloved and unlovable.

Like many nineteenth-century writers of domestic fiction, Stephens introduces numerous characters throughout her novel of 36 chapters and 360 pages. Many of those characters add nothing to Hagar's story rather they circulate at the periphery. Toward the end of the story, however, Hagar becomes physically ill when Walter becomes engaged to her nemesis, Anna; ultimately, Hagar's "sun [goes] down into a night of insanity" – again (257).

This time her second bout with insanity is temporary – it lasts about two days rather than a year plus. During this time, Hagar is psychotic; she is pitiful – and that is what garners Walter's love for her. He must care for her, even though the secret of her deceased mixed-race out-of-wedlock child has been revealed to her peers in Boston. In order to win him back, Anna concocts a plan to destroy Hagar. She plans to reveal to the world Hagar's true disgrace – her race. Now, inverted societal mores dictate that the impurity of one's blood becomes America's lowest rung rather than having a mixed-race child out of wedlock. At this point, Stephens has taken us full circle, back to the minstrel and abjected blackness in that, just as Laird represents the white black man, by the end of the novel, Hagar Martin embodies the white black woman. In this regard, Stephens transforms the biblical character, upon which she bases the heroine, from a stereotypical fallen and ostracized woman to a black woman in white face, if you will. While women did not perform on the minstrel stage, even though numerous "female" characters appeared in the shows, Hagar's hyperbolic story mimics the hyperbolic nature of minstrel shows. Just as minstrel performers, asserts Lott, "intuited and formalized the white male fascination with the turn to black," so does Stephens, it seems, direct society's fascination with the black woman onto her Hagarian heroine. Fortunately, her tainted darkness sustains Hagar throughout the novel because, in overcoming a series of traumatic events, her psychological and emotional strengths surface, just as black (and mulatta) women have survived.

In conclusion, I have explored H. Marion Stephens' Hagar via the abject, utilizing the analogy of the minstrel show. The novel begins with the abjection of darkness and the Africanist presence through Hagar's and Laird's purported bloodlines. Abject miscegenation, that outlawed yet titillating act, produces people like Hagar, forcing them to live outside of the American society with which they have the most familiarity. The hyperbolic sexualization of Hagar resulted in an abject sexuality of black women or mixed-race women, coercing them into lifestyles and circumstances at the underbelly of American society. In sum, all that is Hagar, her person and her spirit, her energy and soul, is expelled yet, contradictorily, accepted by society and her peers. In such a state, the development of the autoerotic mind becomes inevitable. She grows into an unlovable woman who dies surrounded by those who indeed loved her. But the question becomes why nineteenth-century women authors chose the Hagarian trope in the first place? What was so compelling and attractive about Hagar as to use her in numerous works of art – from sculpture to paintings to literature? In Chapter 1, I tell Hagar's biblical story and the connection to the African American female slave experience. But neither Southworth nor Stephens' Hagarian heroine is or becomes a slave. Again, why the attraction? I also explore nineteenth-century America's views regarding race, miscegenation, and the impact of the minstrel show on nineteenth-century society. That blacks were considered inferior takes no one by surprise and that the mixing of an inferior race with a superior race was an abomination also does not shock the reader.

So that we see in both works that Hagar's station in life directly reflects the consequence of mixed blood. From miscegenation, I move into the offspring of such an act, the mulatta and her tragic station in mimetic nineteenth-century American literature. But the question remains, what was Hagar's attraction as artistic trope?

Some critics believe that "antebellum white feminists used the African heroine Hagar as a means to empower white rather than black women" (Gabler-Hover 36). Other critics contend that Hagar's ethnic ambiguity allowed white women authors to covertly espouse their proslavery views – demonizing Hagar's blackness and sexuality. Delores Williams, in Sisters in the Wilderness, argues that the Hagarian figure represents "the uncanny resilience of the mothering/nurturing/caring/enduring and resistance capacities of Hagar" (235). My research leaves me to believe that, for writers of domestic fiction such as Stephens and Southworth, the struggles, the fall from grace socially and monetarily, the beliefs regarding slavery–pro or con–, the issues regarding race and ethnicity in nineteenth century America and the (sometimes unrequited) love stories combine to make Hagar an intriguing figure whom the writers shape into a symbol of strength and weakness in a society that did not necessarily view women in high regard. Hagar represents a way for writers of domestic fiction to earn a living and reinterpret themselves. They had "the opportunity and responsibility to change their situation by changing their personalities" (Baym 19).

During the same period that women like Stephens and Southworth (attempted to) cash in on Hagar, other women wrote stories that, though they did not utilize Hagar proper, employed an Hagarian figure as well. Writers such as Harriet Wilson and Frances E.W. Harper develop female characters who are racially ambiguous, or mulatta, and who ultimately encounter and overcome many of the same struggles of Stephens and Southworth's Hagar – a fall from grace, the institution of slavery, racial implications of the nineteenth century. Many consider Harriet Wilson and Frances E.W. Harper as foremothers of the tradition of the mulatta novel, which replicates both the story line and character of Hagar via their mulatta characters. In other words, domestic fiction and mulatta literature tell similar stories, according to Baym: "In essence, it is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (11). The social settings, however, differ in that main characters in domestic fiction begin their journey within a wealthy, plantation society, but the mulatta characters are born on the other side of the fence on that plantation, if you will. Main characters in Hagarian domestic literature are subjected to and (sometimes) subjects of plantation life or a plantation-like environment, especially those stories set in the North, such as Harriet Wilson's 1859 novel, Our Nig.

CHAPTER FOUR – EXPANDING SENTIMENTALITY: THE HAGARIAN FIGURE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

"Lonely Mag Smith! See her as she walks with downcast eyes and heavy heart. It was not always thus. She *had* a loving, trusting heart"–these are the first few lines of Harriet Wilson's Our Nig (1). Published in 1859, approximately ten years after E.D.E.N. Southworth's The Deserted Wife and four years after Marion Stephens' Hagar, The Martyr, Harriet Wilson's novel marks a variation in American literature, from sentimental fiction written by predominantly middle-class white women to fiction written by northern black women, such as Frances E.W. Harper and Pauline Hopkins. It is well documented that Henry Louis Gates, Jr., rediscovered and recovered Wilson's text in 1981-82. In his 1983 introduction to the facsimile edition of Wilson's 1859 novel, Gates notes that "Harriet Wilson became most probably the first Afro-American to publish a novel in the United States, the fifth Afro-American to publish fiction in English (after Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Frank J. Webb and Martin R. Delany), and along with Maria F. dos Reis, who published a novel called Ursula in Brazil in 1859, one of the first two black women to publish a novel in any language" (xiii). Thus begins the genesis of African American women novelists.

During the time that Wilson wrote Our Nig, sentimental fiction remained the dominant literary form for women writers and a nineteenth century female audience. Wilson's novel follows in that vein, save that her mixed-race protagonist, Frado, is a mixed-race female who lives in indentured servitude

in New England, as opposed to the white female protagonist who grows up in a middle-class existence found in sentimental fiction written by white female authors. Because the figure of Hagar appears frequently in nineteenth-century art and literature, as indicated in Chapter One, Wilson's protagonist, while not named or nicknamed Hagar per se, exemplifies another change to the Hagarian figure of that period. In other words, Our Nig reflects and absorbs a Hagarian figure which stems from sentimental fiction, thereby manipulating even further the characterization of the Biblical figure depicted as white to mixed-race or mulatta–a highly risky proposition considering Wilson's locale and clientele.

Because Wilson wrote during the mid-nineteenth century in the New England village of Milford, New Hampshire, one can surmise that most of her audience did not look like her or understand the protagonist's, Frado's, status as an indentured servant. Eric Gardner, in "Of Bottles and Books," argues that Harriet Wilson sold her book in the same manner in which she sold her hair care tonic–by peddling it throughout the region, which includes "southern New Hampshire and west-central Massachusetts"[6] (6). In fact, Gardner continues, "'Allida,' in her letter in Our Nig's appendix, notes that '[T]he heart of a stranger was moved with compassion, and bestowed a recipe upon' Wilson 'for restoring gray hair to its former color'" (4). And because

[6] Eric Gardner's "Of Bottles and Books: Reconsidering the Readers of Harriet Wilson's Our Nig," updates his groundbreaking 1993 study about Wilson's experience as a peddler and the original owners of copies of Wilson's nineteenth-century text. After more research, he discovered an additional eight owners of the text, bringing the total number of extant copies of the text with ownership markings to thirteen. Twenty-nine extant copies without ownership markings are catalogued in libraries and collections throughout the country, according to Gardner.

"antebellum white American culture was fascinated with hair," Wilson found a few customers and "established some connections among area whites" (7). As a peddler of hair tonic, Wilson "had to go to her customers – the very circumstance that proved so liberating [and profitable] for young, white unmarried male peddlers" (8). Such peddling would presumably prove more difficult for Wilson because she was a woman, making her more vulnerable to physical and emotional threats. Unfortunately, within the region which Wilson travelled, "racial prejudice would have limited not only her customer base, but also her choices for travel, lodging, and a host of daily living issues – and so probably forced her into a fairly regular circuit of customers who, if the product failed, would have been none too happy (8)." And just as Wilson peddled her hair tonic, so did she peddle Our Nig.

Since the re-discovery of Our Nig in the early 1980s, numerous critics agree that the text resembles the sentimental novel as opposed to the tragic mulatta theme found in African American literature which developed toward the end of the nineteenth century. As the originator of the comparison between Wilson's work and sentimental literature, Gates discerns that "it is a rewarding exercise to compare the plot structure of Our Nig to the 'overplot' of nineteenth-century women's fiction identified by Nina Baym in her study, Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870" (xli). He continues by summarizing fifteen factors inherent in sentimental literature and examining how "many of [those] fifteen elements of the overplot of woman's fiction occur almost exactly in Our Nig" (xliii).

Frances Smith Foster, in her 1985 essay "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraitures," notes that "Wilson utilizes the patterns of the sentimental novel for her own purposes" (27). In 1989, Claudia Tate writes in "Allegories of Black Female Desire" that in Our Nig there exists a "complex antebellum, autobiographical novel that utilizes conventions of nineteenth-century white women's sentimental fiction in order to protest racial oppression by focusing on the moral sanctity of maternity through its denial and subsequent affirmation" (111). R.J. Ellis, in his 2003 book, Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, writes that the novel "displays several motifs characteristic of the sentimental novel" (76). Finally, Lisa Green, in "The Disorderly Girl in Harriett Wilson's Our Nig," opens her 2007 article by noting that "Wilson borrowed from one of the most popular fictional genres of the nineteenth century–the sentimental novel" (139). There is no question, then, that we can classify Our Nig as a novel written in the sentimental tradition.

However, a sub-genre of the sentimental literary tradition, which I call Hagarian sentimental literature or Hagarian sentimentality, as discussed in earlier chapters, contains five common characteristics that manipulate the Biblical Hagar. Summarizing those characteristics found in Hagarian literature, as I do below, enables us to pinpoint features of Hagarian literature that differentiate and distance it from sentimental fiction proper: (1) the protagonist is portrayed as a member of middle-class, white America with African American physical and emotive features; (2) the heroine has a difficult childhood or loss of childhood, for whatever reasons; (3) she is sexually

nonthreatening and a social outcast; (4) she maintains an ambiguous social, legal and economic status; and (5) in extreme cases, she becomes abjectified.

Wilson, in characterizing her heroine as a mixed-race girl who serves as an indentured servant, drastically challenges the first characteristic of the manipulated Hagarian figure in sentimental fiction by altering her name, class and race. Wilson creates Frado as a Hagarian figure in that she has a definite change in name from the usual pattern of having a formal name or nickname of Hagar. Additionally, Wilson's Hagarian figure falls from the middle class to the servant class, which was, in general, the class of a majority of African Americans in New England states. In "New Hampshire Forgot," Valerie Cunningham writes,

> [A]s slave labor was routinely replaced by low-wage white workers, former slaves and their descendants in New Hampshire were perceived by non-blacks to be part of the social and economic servant class that would eventually include all black Americans. White America defined servants as Negroes and Negroes as servants. This attitude continued for at least a century after Harriet Wilson wrote Our Nig. (99)

The class change, then, corresponds to Wilson's life experience in that African American women were not members of the middle class but belonged to the servant class. Finally, Wilson manipulates the already white-washed Biblical Hagar found in sentimental literature by altering her race – from a

white Hagar with African American features (black curly hair, dark penetrating eyes and a free and rebellious spirit, in general) to a mixed race or mulatta woman who, but for her hue, mirrors the white Hagar (black curly hair, dark penetrating eyes, and a free and rebellious spirit).

Wilson approaches her readers and the issue of race by first introducing the whiteness of Frado's mother, Mag Smith, ostracized due to her interracial relationships and marriage and her mixed-raced children. In Chapter Two of Our Nig, the narrator describes the offspring of Mag and her African American husband, Jim, as "two pretty mulattos" (14). Just as Southworth and Stephens, writers of Hagarian literature discussed in Chapters Two and Three, depicted Hagar as white with mulatta features, so does Wilson imply that because Mag is white, her mixed-raced children must necessarily inherit her "pretty" physical traits. Judith Berzon, in Neither White Nor Black, notes that many nineteenth-century black and white abolitionist writers consciously used mulatta characters "in order to capitalize upon racist ideology: how can we enslave one who is in part 'one of us' by virtue of his or her white blood?" (13) Wilson, however, did not create Frado in an effort to purport her position on abolition, and Our Nig in no way resembles a politically motivated work. As a matter of fact, during the mid-nineteenth century, the slave narrative epitomized one of the more popular forms of abolitionist writings.[7] Eric Gardner contends that "few in the abolitionist

[7]Popular slave narratives include Henry Bibb's Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1856), Benjamin Drew's A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada, Frederick Douglass's

community would have seen Our Nig as a text that would help the movement, and many would have felt it could hurt abolitionist efforts given that its depiction of suffering free blacks in the North echoed texts like the pro-slavery novels written in response to Uncle Tom's Cabin" (10). Additionally, "a free black woman of limited economic status and even more limited social connections simply would have been exceedingly unlikely to tramp around post-Fugitive Slave Law New England claiming to have any connection to slavery, as to do so was to risk abduction and abuse" (15). Like many other women writers of the nineteenth century, Wilson wrote her novel for financial, not political, reasons. A fact well-known about Harriet Wilson is that her destiny included the care of her only son, George, whose illness Wilson attempted to thwart throughout his short life. It stands to reason that she would need an additional revenue stream which would augment her hair tonic profits. One such stream would be the resultant profits from the peddling of a novel in order to pay for his treatments and medications.

Again, even though Wilson did not purport to take a position regarding the abolition of slavery, she nonetheless embraces the racist ideology that all mulattos are beautiful. Jim, when he and Mag discuss giving the children away, states that "Frado's six years old, and pretty" (17). The narrator continues, saying that Frado "was a beautiful mulatto, with long, curly black hair, and handsome, roguish eyes, sparkling with an exuberance of spirit almost beyond restraint." Mag says that "Frado is such a wild, frolicky thing,

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Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (1845), and My Bondage and My Freedom (1855).

and means to do jest as she's a mind to," with Seth countering that Frado is "a hard one" (18, 19). Here Wilson demonstrates the influence of sentimental Hagarian literature by utilizing such language that describes Frado as beautiful but difficult. She juxtaposes Frado's beauty against the wild playfulness in her eyes and wildness embedded in her heart. However, because Frado, a Hagarian figure, is mixed-race and thereby a black woman based on the rule of hypo-descent, she is different from the other Hagarian figures mentioned in Chapters Two and Three. Her black features are no longer implied, as in The Deserted Wife and Hagar, the Martyr, but tangible and physical, existing because of her known genetic make-up. The African American version of Hagar, then, serves as the fictional representation of the oppressive life of black women in nineteenth-century America. For example, Hagar in The Deserted Wife rejects societal codes and conventions throughout the novel because, as she was an outspoken child, she grew into an outspoken woman. She races on horseback in competition with men and talks back to her stepfather, actions in direct contradiction to the genteel southern tradition the novel depicts. In Hagar, the Martyr, the title character spurns societal norms when she returns home with a child born out-of-wedlock that she conceived in a brothel. While both Southworth's and Stephens's protagonists may have experienced grave difficulties, they did not confront the type of oppression that Wilson's protagonist encounters.

Because the character Frado is loosely derived from incidents which occurred in the life of Harriet Wilson, the novel necessarily has its roots in the

life experiences of an African American woman in nineteenth-century New England. Had Wilson lived the life of a slave in the South as opposed to an indentured servant in New England, I dare postulate that her novel would have been drastically different. In the South, for example, African American female slaves became formidable figures in the resistance to slavery. In Sisters in the Wilderness, Delores Williams notes that

> [a]lmost from the day when they first arrived as slaves in America in 1619, African-American women have rebelled against their plight. They have used a variety of resistance strategies, some subtle and silent, others more dramatic. They petitioned courts for the freedom of themselves and their children; they were accused of burning buildings and of attempting to poison their owners. Like Hagar, they ran away from slavery. (136)

Wilson did not run away from her servitude and problems in New England, and neither does her protagonist run away from her indentured servitude. Rather, Frado subtly resists the oppressive forces in the Bellmont home, as well as in the school house, where her counterparts initially torment her under the direction of Mary, Mrs. Bellmont's daughter. Eventually, though, Frado wins the hearts of her classmates by becoming the class clown, not quite the bumbling buffoon but definitely class entertainment. One may explain this type of childish behavior as a method of resistance to the hostile and unhappy existence she lived at home. The narrator of Our Nig informs the reader that

> [i]n Mrs. Bellmont's presence she was under restraint; but in the kitchen, and among her schoolmates, the pent up fires burst forth. She was ever at some sly prank when unseen by her teacher, in school hours; not unfrequently some outburst or merriment, of which she was the original, was charged upon some innocent mate. . . . They enjoyed her antics so fully that any of them would suffer wrongfully to keep open the avenues of mirth. (38)

Frado's antics in the schoolhouse indicate her gumption for challenging an unjust system and society which attempts to control African American women. What is important here is the way in which New England societal norms, including a racially prejudiced culture, may have influenced how her white counterparts responded to her; but Frado thwarts such prejudicial treatment by reversing the stereotypical view of an African American as a lowly servant to that of a girl with human qualities who can make her peers laugh, proving her sense of humanity by inviting her classmates to share her humor. Frado's behavior also allows Wilson's reading audience to bear witness to the humanity of all African American girls who grow into African American women.

Like the Hagarian figure upon which Frado is fashioned, her existence symbolizes the deathly circumstances found in the wilderness – in this case the wilderness of the Bellmont home. Delores Williams defines the African American woman's wilderness experience as "a sojourn in the wide world to

find survival resources for self and children" (130). In Our Nig, Wilson reverses Frado's childhood journey from the exposure to society-at-large to the encapsulated environment of a dysfunctional familial unit. The dysfunctional Bellmont family forces Frado into a mental and physical space of survival – survival for herself as a child. The frequent physical beatings of Frado epitomize the desperation with which Frado fought to survive by resisting in the tradition of the African American female slaves of the South. Frado's beatings begin in Chapter Two of Our Nig, wherein Mrs. Bellmont reasons that if she had a servant she could "train up in my way from a child," then perhaps Frado could remain in their home (26). Once she determines that Frado would become her hand maiden, the torment begins. The age of six brings Frado a life of emotional and physical abuse, with Mrs. Bellmont dispensing both "'words that burn,' and frequent blows to the head" (31). By the time Frado is nine years old, in Chapter Four, the readers learn that Mrs. Bellmont's "blows on Nig seemed to relieve [Mrs. Bellmont] of a portion of ill-will" (41). During one incident, when Nig does not stack the wood according to Mrs. Bellmont's standards, an enraged Mrs. Bellmont "approached [Nig], and kicked her so forcibly as to throw her upon the floor. . . . Before [Nig] could rise, another foiled the attempt, and then followed kick after kick in quick succession and power, till [Nig] reached the door. . . . Nig jumped up, and rushed from the house, out of sight" (43-44). The Hagarian Nig runs into the true wilderness of the world in search of survival and peace. When she reaches Aunt Abby's house, Nig tells her, "'I've got to stay out here and die. I

ha'n't got no mother, no home. I wish I were dead" (46). At the age of nine, then, Nig realizes that her only chance at life lies in abandoning the wilderness of the Bellmont home – a house that epitomizes the savagery possible in a place inhabited by human beings. The Bellmont dwelling also symbolizes the birthplace of "non–middle-class black womanhood" as Wilson, not of the middle-class, is the first African American female novelist (Williams 122). By age fourteen, Bellmont has worked Nig into a state of physical exhaustion, but the beatings, abuse and neglect do not end.

Before Frado's servitude does end, she also endures numerous emotional verbal attacks. For example, when Nig is ill and moving slowly, Mrs. Bellmont, after asking Nig what took so long to fetch an item, yells, "'You saucy, impudent nigger, you! Is this the way you answer me?'" (64). On another occasion, after barely missing Nig's head when she throws a knife at Nig, Bellmont threatens, "'Tell anybody of this, if you dare. If you tell Aunt Abby, I'll certainly kill you'" (65). At one point, Mrs. Bellmont rejoins in a conversation with her husband, "'You know these niggers are just like black snakes; you <u>can't</u> kill them. If [Nig] wasn't tough she would have been killed long ago'" (88-89). She tells Frado that if she does not "'stop trying to be religious, she would whip her to death.'" (104). As the novel progresses and Nig approaches eighteen, the age of release from her indentured servitude, she realizes the power that she (Nig) has over her own life and destiny. No longer thinking as a child, Nig behaves like a young woman ready to set out

into the world when she confronts Mrs. Bellmont just as she attempts to assault her:

> "Stop!" shouted Frado, "strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you;" and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts. . . . She did not know, before, that she had a power to ward off assaults. (105)

What is interesting here is that the narrator reveals to the reader the sense of "power" that Frado finally feels. Michel Foucault, in Discipline and Punish, writes of power that it "exists only when it is put into action" and that, within a power relationship, "the 'other' (the one over whom power is exercised) [must] be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts" (219, 220). In this case, the interactions between Frado and Mrs. Bellmont do not represent a power relationship because Mrs. Bellmont does not consider Frado a "person who acts." Rather, Frado is not a person, not a human being, but a "nigger," a Nig. So that what Mrs. Bellmont wields over Frado is not power. Foucault reasons that "in itself, the exercise of power is not violent," and that "violence is always a way of acting upon an acting subject . . . by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (220). Violence, then, is one acting subject (or person) acting upon another person who has the capacity to respond. Since young Frado, until she becomes older and stands up for herself, does not have the ability to respond to Mrs. Bellmont's physical and emotional abuses, Mrs. Bellmont does not have

actual power over Frado – just a horrific, violent control. And not until Frado internalizes her capacity as an acting subject, or human being, instead of a "nig," does she realize her sense of power, thereby creating a power relationship between herself and her tormentor, Mrs. Bellmont. Once Nig creates that power relationship, the beatings end because Mrs. Bellmont recognizes Nig as an acting subject, a human being who can act based on all of her options.

The combination of race, resistance and power relationships differentiates the whitewashed Hagar found in sentimental fiction from her slightly darker sister, the Hagarian Frado, found in Our Nig. Like both Hagars, in The Deserted Wife and in Hagar, the Martyr, Frado loses her mother due to no fault of her own, with the loss of her mother ultimately resulting in the loss of her childhood. But because of her racial status of mulatta, Frado, unlike the aforementioned Hagars, endures the difficult position of following the racial designation of her African American father, a strikingly ironic fact considering that had she been in slave state, she would have followed the condition of her mother. Additionally, most sentimental fiction follows the heroine throughout tripartite stages of her life – childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, readers of Wilson's novel follow Frado during her childhood years, with great detail given to her from ages six to eighteen. Ultimately, the story concludes with what seems an afterthought of a husband, Samuel, in the final chapter. As a result, readers are privy to Frado's growth and development into girlhood, not womanhood – the

traditional focus of sentimental fiction. And while the primary customers of Wilson's hair tonic were adult women, Eric Gardner, as noted in his 1993 study of original copies of Our Nig, found that her novel landed in the hands of children, leading some to believe that Wilson intended for her novel to be read by children:

> Flora Lovejoy was only two when it was published. George Armstrong Tinker was six. George F. Sawyer was nine, as was Mary A. Whitcomb (she was eleven when she signed her copy). Sarah C. Tompkins . . . was fourteen when her elder sister gave her a copy as a Christmas gift. Further, John H. Colburn was nine when the book was published and fifteen when he gave a copy to the thirty-seven-year old M. Jennie Moar. . . . Only [William Lloyd] Garrison, Henry Stiles and Alonzo Sargent were adults at the time of Our Nig's publication. (12)

It is unclear whether Wilson intended her novel to become a children's book, but in pitching her book, as she pitched her hair tonic to grey haired women, she may have, according to Gardner, "emphasized the book's power as a moral teaching tool – and, given the emphasis that Frado places on values like self-sufficiency, hard work and the love of her child at book's end," such a sale to prospective book-buyers "would not have been far from the truth" (16). Gardner also notes that

> the phrase "children's book" signified differently in the antebellum period than it does now and included a much wider

> range of texts (it would be easy to argue that many sentimental novels could and were designed in part to be read by children) – and that many women writers who considered race (and who advocated abolition) wrote "children's texts." (15)

I must point out that, while I admire Gardner's research and scholarship, his tone and implication of a synonymous relationship between sentimental novels and "children's texts" seems to dismiss the literary value of sentimental novels overall, not to mention giving a type of negative connation to the term "sentimental." Baym points out that the

> term 'sentimental' is often a term of judgment rather than of description. . . . It means that the author is asking for more of an emotional response from the reader than the literary art has earned; or that the wrong kind of emotion is called out. . . . [Additionally,] the term 'sentimental' is used to imply that a work elevates feeling above all else. (24, 25)

I agree with Baym when she notes that many "adverse judgments" about sentimental fiction are "culture-bound" (24). I also observe that the scope of Gardner's article does not include the content of Our Nig; instead it focuses on Wilson's life as a peddler of her hair tonic and one novel.

However, throughout the course of my research, I have not encountered the idea that sentimental novels were written and designed as "children's texts," as Gardner suggests. It is well established that Wilson wrote Our Nig in the tradition of sentimental fiction and that she wrote in order

to financially support her ill child. Therefore, I contend that because she focused the novel on the life of a girl does not necessarily mean that she had a young audience in mind. Furthermore, issues of race, indentured servitude, and physical and emotional abuse are not topics many would consider appropriate for young readers.

Wilson clearly addresses such issues in Our Nig; the question becomes, then, how does she maneuver topics such as race and abuse so successfully? In "The Disorderly Girl in Harriet E. Wilson's Our Nig," Lisa Green writes that by "appropriat[ing] the prototypical young heroine of woman's fiction who, in nineteenth-century parlance, may be called 'the disorderly girl' as a means to narrate . . . the unsanctioned story of racial abuse in the antebellum North," Wilson delicately approaches issues which many may have considered uncomfortable or not her place, as an African American woman, to discuss (140). In sentimental novels, according to Baym, the featured (disorderly) girl is "not loved or valued [and] those who should love and nurture her instead exploit or neglect her" (37). Of this disorderly girl, Green notes that she

> would thus seem to be a sympathetic figure, [but] in fact her willfulness and uncontrolled anger are always construed as flaws that need correction, usually through an internalization of Christian values. As Barbara White writes, this "child heroine" must learn the virtues of self-control: "in novel after novel young heroines must learn to conquer their pride and become humble,

> docile, and obedient. Any spirit or resistance against injustice is considered a 'sickness' that must be cured by strong doses of religion." (142-43)

Much like Southworth's and Stephens's protagonists, Frado maintains a sense of resiliency and self-determination, even as Mrs. Bellmont attempts to cure Frado's "sickness" by whippings, beatings and tongue-lashings, while Aunt Abby mends Frado through religion.

In both Southworth's and Stephen's sentimental Hagarian literature, neither protagonist endures the type of abuse during her adolescent phase as does Frado in Our Nig, which helps to distance her from her lighter complexed literary sisters. In this regard, Frado is left alone, just as the Biblical figure in whose tradition she follows. Frado, a lost child alone in the inverse wilderness of the Bellmont home, represents Hagar's experience in the wilderness, where she was alone in a desolate place. One may consider the Bellmont home emotionally desolate and an insulated physical space, as mentioned above. For Biblical Hagar, according to Delores Williams, the "wilderness" or a "wilderness experience is a symbolic term used to represent a near-destruction situation in which God gives personal direction to the believer and thereby helps her make a way out of what she thought was no way" (108). In the wild of the Bellmont home, the virtuous Aunt Abby introduces Frado to the Bible, guides her through Biblical teachings, and directs her as to how to live a Christian life. Frado turns, then, not only to Aunt Abby for comfort and solace, but to the Bible, church, and "evening

meetings" as well (Our Nig 88). And only after Mrs. Bellmont refuses to allow Frado to attend religious services or read the Bible does Frado claim her power and change her position in her relationship with Mrs. Bellmont from that of (constant) victim to a teenage girl of strength and power.

Typically, along with a teenage girl's sense of power comes her sense of sexuality. However, sentimental fiction of the nineteenth century, which follows the heroine through adolescence seldom approaches issues of sexuality or sexual relations. This lack of sexuality of the protagonists, asserts Nina Baym, occurs because

> the authors, both as Christians and as Victorians, were disinclined to acknowledge the body and physical sexuality as elements of self either inherently spiritual or capable of being spiritualized. Especially where sexual politics was concerned . . they saw themselves as disadvantaged compared to men. Hence rather than integrating physical sexuality into their adult personalities they tried to transcend it. (18)

While Southworth follows the tradition of transcending sex and Hagar's sexuality – Hagar mysteriously has a set a twins, but there is no mention of sex, pregnancy, or delivery of the twins in the novel – Stephens, who writes for a different, lower-brow audience, allows a bit of sexual tension to develop within the novel. Stephens, too, allows her Hagar to awake from a dream-like state, in a brothel and with a baby. Again, the narrator does not mention

prostitution and the sexual acts involved therein or the process of pregnancy and childbirth.

The transcendence of sex and sexuality directly contradicts the story of the Biblical Hagar, whose main purpose was to serve as surrogate to the barren Sarah. The story of Hagar itself, then, implies sexual activity. So that when nineteenth-century white women authors of Hagarian sentimental literature physically reconstructed the Biblical Hagar by depicting her as white, they also stripped her of her sexuality, her womanhood. I must point out, however, that those authors only followed the discourse and culture which produced them. Janet Gabler-Hover asserts that, historically, it "was risky for white feminists to activate, even temporarily, a sexualized Hagar in their portrayal of 'white' Hagar heroines; patriarchally invested Victorian women readers, as well as male readers, deplored the inscription of women's sexuality" (23). But the standard for nineteenth-century black women differed greatly.

The notion of sexuality (explicit or implied) follows the tradition of the African American slave, as she birthed, or produced, the next generation of slaves since 1619, making her and her womb valuable commodities. Williams notes that

> [t]he Victorian ideal of true womanhood (for Anglo-American women) supported a consciousness which, in the area of sexual relations, <u>imagined</u> sex between free white men and their wives

> to be for the purpose of procreation rather than for pleasure.[8] Many white males turned to slave women for sexual pleasure and forced these women to fulfill needs that, according to racist ideology during this time, should have been fulfilled by white women. (67; emphasis added)

She also notes that such forced illicit sexual relationships between white male slave owners and their black female slaves have contributed to the negative stereotypes of African American women that continue to this day.

> Black women as "loose, over-sexed, erotic, readily responsive to the sexual advances of men, especially white men" derives from the antebellum southern way of putting the responsibility for . . . sexual liaisons upon "immoral" slave women – black females whose "passionate nature was supposed to have stemmed from their African heritage. (Williams 70)

And that stereotype of black women allows authors like Stephens to transcend the sexuality of their white characters, while it continuously lurks in the background. (Stephens's Hagar did live in a brothel for months – making her sexually responsive to her customers' advances.) And while the "antebellum southern way" of interacting with black females may have initiated the stereotyped sexuality of black women slaves, that stereotype definitely travelled northward, for otherwise writers such as Stephens would

[8] It seems that Williams and Gabler-Hover agree that women writing in the Victorian tradition were sexually repressed and (possibly) unfulfilled.

not have known to consign such features to her reconstructed black female protagonist, Hagar.

Harriet Wilson, on the other hand, follows the Victorian tradition found in sentimental novels by transcending Frado's sexuality, even though she is indeed a black female, by challenging the stereotype of the loose African American woman. She focuses the bulk of the novel on Frado's girlhood and limits her womanly experience to the last chapter, in which a physically weakened Frado meets and marries the bogus fugitive slave, Samuel. If anything, Wilson initiates another stereotype found in African American culture – that of the nomadic African American male who leaves his wife and children. The limiting of Frado's womanhood directly contrasts with the plot of the majority of sentimental novels in that it follows the heroine until she comes into her own being. "The heroine's 'self' emerges concurrently with her growth from child to adult; as child and woman her chief relations are with those more powerful than she" (Baym 37). Our Nig, however, while written in the sentimental tradition, does not follow all conventions of the genre. Frado does not emerge into her "self" – ever. The reader is privy to her girlhood and adolescence only. The fact that the narrator informs the reader that "Frado had merged into womanhood" serves as a way to transcend her sexuality as well as emotional growth as a woman (Wilson 115). And, Lisa Green writes, "while Wilson was able to 'fit' her girlhood persona into [the] standard [sentimental] plot, she could not appropriate its requisite happy ending" (152).

Instead, Wilson reflects her unhappy and oppressive life experiences as typically found in tragic mulatta fiction.

The first American novel which showcased a mulatta character is James Fenimore Cooper's The Last of the Mochicans, published in 1826 (Berzon 53). Between 1845 and 1865, according to Judith Berzon,

> the mulatta character played a central role in the American novel. . . . The figure is, first of all, the all-but-white son (or occasionally a daughter) of a southern white gentleman and a slave, often of mixed blood herself. . . . [His] intellectual abilities are seen as coming from his father. Yet the mixed blood's life is fraught with tragedy and bitterness because his culture has defined him as Negro and a slave. (54)

Clearly, Wilson's novel does not conform to characteristic tragic mulatta fiction, as Frado's experience is that of a northern indentured servant who is the product of an interracial sexual relationship. According to Our Nig, Frado's mother, Mag Smith, fell in love with a "charmer" whom she "could ascend . . . and become an equal" (6). Immediately, the reader infers that Mag's lover is of a higher social class than she. And because, during the nineteenth century in New Hampshire, as indicated above, most Negroes were of the servant class, the reader can also infer that Mag is not of the servant class and thereby not African American. Here, Wilson follows the sentimental tradition by introducing a woman/mother who, "like other nineteenth-century mothers with few resources . . . [had] to relieve herself of a

child she could not support" (Foreman 126). Unfortunately, Frado is left in a home that Nina Baym, in referring to the setting of most sentimental novels, calls "more a detention camp than a 'walled garden,' sharing with that popular image only the walls" (37).

Although it may appear that Wilson bases the fictional mother, Mag, on her own biological one, descriptions of Wilson's mother differs drastically from those of Mag. P. Gabrielle Foreman indicates, in "Recovered Autobiographies and the Marketplace," that Wilson's biological mother is actually "'Margaret Ann Smith,' a twenty-seven-year-old New Hampshire woman who died in Boston" (126). And in a death notice published in the newspaper Farmer's Cabinet on March 27, 1830, Margaret Ann Smith,

> black, late of Portsmouth, N.H. about 27 years was found dead in the room of a black man with whom she lived in Southack [sic]. . . . The verdict of the Coroner's jury was that she came to her death from habitual intoxication. It appears that she and the man had quarreled, both being intoxicated, and he had beaten her severely, but that the immediate cause of her death was drinking half a pint of raw rum. (127)

In the novel, the narrator actually describes Frado's mother as a woman who considers herself "ruin[ed]" due to delivery of a stillborn baby out-of-wedlock, not alcoholism, thus marking the beginning of the end for the fictional Mag Smith. Already ruined, she turns to an African man, Jim, for companionship and support due to her ostracism from the white community. Of course out of

that union Frado is conceived. What is interesting here is that Wilson's biological mother bears the racial designation of "black." Wilson's biological father, Joshua Green, also bears the designation of "black" as he "boarded [with] other 'free men of color'" in the town of Milford, New Hampshire (Foreman 124). Why, then, would Wilson, who claims the story of Our Nig "as her own," change the race of her mother from black to white, implying the taboo topic of the "evils of amalgamation" (Foreman 124; Wilson 13)?

By manipulating the reconstructed white Hagar found in sentimental literature, Wilson allows her Hagarian Frado to become a true African American woman by virtue of the "evil" nature of "amalgamation." She placates her audience by adopting the opinion that interracial relationships and miscegenation are evil acts. The fact that Wilson even mentions them in the novel speaks to her bravery and determination to expose such activities in the New England region, implying a kindred to her southern "colored brethren" because her "mistress was wholly imbued with southern principles" (preface, Our Nig n.p.). So that just as miscegenation occurred in the South, so, too, did it occur in the North – just not in such a callous and disconcerting manner. And the act of miscegenation allows Wilson to create a Hagarian figure whose history and genetic makeup placed her as a social outcast, a figure also found in tragic mulatta fiction. Her use of Frado as a social outcast due to how she came into being, as opposed to the loss of a mother, distances Our Nig from sentimental fiction proper and places her in the category of what I term Hagarian sentimentality. Here, the African American

or mulatta woman, like Hagar, must endure the pressures that society places on her based solely on her race, not on her character. As a child, the Hagarian Frado is a social and emotional outcast in the wilderness of the Bellmont home. Unlike many writers of the tragic mulatta trope, Wilson wrote Our Nig to expose Northern racism and to support herself and her son. Like many mulatta fiction writers, Wilson's protagonist had to appear sympathetic and appeal to her white audience and customers.

Additionally, the use of the mulatta child character enables Wilson to situate Frado in a place of ambiguity, forcing her New England readers to empathize with the plight of a mixed race human being. According to JerriAnne Boggis, in her Introduction to Harriet Wilson's New England, "[T]he prevailing vision of [New England's] cultural and commercial geography is premised upon ethnic and racial exclusions" (xxi). She continues, "[T]he traditional notion of the New England village green has no room for newly arrived Irish immigrants, for example, and certainly none for poor African Americans, no matter how 'free.'" Joseph Conforti, in Imagining New England, writes that "New England has been a posted territory where certain people, places, and historical experiences have been excluded or relegated to the cultural margins" (123). Finally, Joanne Melish, in Disowning Slavery, notes that "a virtual amnesia about slavery in New England had a history almost as old as the history of slavery itself. . . . It was an easy leap from the erasure of the experience of slavery to the illusion of the historical absence of people of color generally" (xiii, xiv). Harriet Wilson, in 1859, forces New

England residents and readers to acknowledge the ambiguous spaces within which not only free African Americans, but all mixed race people, existed, socially, legally and economically. Socially, as a "nig," Frado has no social status because she is isolated within the Bellmont wilderness, save her brief interactions at school and religious meetings. Throughout the novel, Frado remains part and parcel of the Hagar-in-the-wilderness image until she is "released" into the den of peace, the home of "a family a mile distant" from her place of imprisonment (Wilson 117).

Legally and economically, as an indentured servant, Frado is deemed what R.J. Ellis calls a "farm servant" and "is therefore a member of the laboring class. Consequently," he continues, "Our Nig also needs to be considered in relation to laboring-class writing" (5). While the issue of laboring-class writing is beyond the scope of my study, her classification as an indentured farm servant reinforces her conflicting legal status as "not free" in an area that had abolished slavery proper. For, as noted above, many New Englanders considered Negroes as servants and all servants as negroes. Once an African American's servitude ended, no physical place or legal space existed for her, unless they continued in the "service" arena. But Frado, working in the tradition of the resilient and resistant Hagar, learns from an "instructress" and, after Samuel's abandonment, begins to "busily . . . prepare her merchandise . . . to encounter . . . some kind friends and purchasers." (124, 130) So Frado becomes self-sufficient by selling her wares while Wilson, too, gains some sense of self-sufficiency by selling her

hair tonic and book. Her important and innovative book, however, exposes the contradictions of "free" African American life in New England and the resultant ambiguity of northern African Americans' social, legal, and economic status. Ellis likens Frado's "free" experience to "that of a dog at the mercy of dogs [and asserts that it] foreshadows the problems that free African Americans experienced following slavery's nationwide abolition" (183). The custom of northern racist discrimination, then, as exposed in Our Nig, prefigures subsequent legal black codes (or Jim Crowism) of the South. In either place, North or South, African Americans found themselves in precarious positions.

Finally, the last trait that I have identified in Hagarian sentimental novels, the abjectification of the Hagarian heroine, occurs in Our Nig via the severe physical abuse that Mrs. Bellmont administers to Frado. Abjection, as discussed in Chapter Three, is "a process of jettisoning what seems to be part of oneself" (McAfee 46). It is what Julia Kristeva describes as "being opposed to I" and "disturb[ing] identity, system, and order" (Kristeva 231, 232). The process of abjection occurs when one expels a part of oneself as a form of rejection, yet is drawn to that which one has expelled. For Mrs. Bellmont, the child Frado represents an expelled and rejected part of her self – the nurturing nature of a mother, blackness and black people (as they had no place in New England villages). However, Mrs. Bellmont is drawn to what she calls "'the nigger in the child'" because she can train her, as one would a horse or dog (Wilson 26). From the outset, Mrs. Bellmont puts the child into a

space "'good enough for a nigger,'" a comment which foreshadows the treatment Frado would come to endure – treatment that is "'good enough for a nigger.'" Such treatment includes frequent and violent whippings with a "rawhide," "'words that burn,'" blows upon the head and frequent "wedging"[9] of her mouth (29, 30, 36). Lisa Green argues that the wedging of Frado's mouth epitomizes Mrs. Bellmont's attempt to silence her: "Mrs. Bellmont . . . threatens that if [Frado] ever exposed her [to her son James again] she would 'cut her tongue out'; Frado's 'tongue' [thereby serving as] a metonym for the girl's outspokenness" (148). While wedging definitely silences Frado, it first and foremost represents a most horrific form of child abuse that harkens back to the way that slaves were treated and spiritually "broken."

Even though Mrs. Bellmont's attitude regarding "niggers" as less-than-human servants whom New England could live without mirrors prevalent and common attitudes during the nineteenth century, her determination to psychologically destroy a child borders on what we would call the criminally insane today, as one can clearly define wedging as a form of torture. Her torturous abjection of Frado actually reflects Mrs. Bellmont's tortured spirit. For example, the narrator informs the reader that even Nig, at age nine, understood that "a few blows on Nig seemed to relieve [Mrs. Bellmont] of a portion of ill-will" (Wilson 41). Hence, the process by which Mrs. Bellmont physically expels her hostility and anger onto the innocent child (and adolescent) Frado while simultaneously drawing Frado into her physical

[9] Wedging entails placing a piece of wood into the mouth of a slave (in this case Frado), forcing the mouth to remain open and rendering the slave unable to speak, scream, etc.

space-for Frado must remain at arm's length in order to be physically touched-symbolizes a violent abjection of blackness and African American people under the guise of benevolent indentured servitude.

We can conclude, then, that Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, rather than imitating Hagarian or sentimental fiction proper, expands sentimentality into the realm of African American women and culture. She distances her novel from the sentimental genre, first and foremost, by creating a mulatta or African American female protagonist, as per the rule of hypo-descent, which in itself draws some "kind" nineteenth-century readers into the text. Additionally, her use of the loss of childhood motif found in sentimental fiction reveals the resultant effect of miscegenation or amalgamation – that of unhappy women and abandoned mulatta children. As Wilson seems to have written the novel in the tradition of the sentimental novel common during the nineteenth century, it lacks any type of sexuality or sexual innuendo, transcending sexual relationships completely. In this regard, of course, she mimics the sentimental tradition, but what differentiates her sexual transcendence is her use of an interracial couple who produce an interracial child, as opposed to a character who has only African American features. Along with the mixed race status must necessarily follow the ambiguous status of the mulatta (thereby African American) population in the nineteenth century, contrary to a definite designation of social, legal, and economic status found in the sentimental fiction of E.D.E.N. Southworth and H. Marion Stephens discussed in Chapters Two and Three. And the abject physical

abuse found in Our Nig not only distances the text from both Hagarian sentimentalism and sentimentalism proper, but it innovatively crosses literary boundaries by exposing such violent treatment of African Americans in the North, a place that abolished slavery and seemed to represent a sympathetic space for the plight of African Americans. Ultimately, then, Hagarian sentimentality serves as the foundation for African American female novelists who, rather than espouse the tragic circumstances of the mixed-race female, turn her into an African American female figure who represents a sense of spirit and fortitude that allows her to survive in the wilderness of nineteenth-century America. This Biblical Hagarian figure becomes a pioneering spirit who births a new generation of determined African Americans.

CHAPTER FIVE – HAGAR COMPLETE: HER ULTIMATE FORM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S NOVELS

The story of Hagar in American literature is one of reconstruction and manipulation. This study begins with a brief introduction and history of various forms of Hagarian art – from visual to literary – and continues with how nineteenth-century writers alter her race and ethnicity – from Egyptian to Caucasian with African American traits. In this study I have traced Hagar's progressive metamorphosis from "ethnically bleached" in E.D.E.N. Southworth's 1849 novel, The Deserted Wife, to abjectified in H. Marion Stephens' 1855 novel, Hagar, the Martyr. By 1859, Harriet Wilson, in the first novel written by an African American woman, Our Nig, transforms the figure of Hagar even further by permanently altering her race and ethnicity from white, with an implied darkness, to a concrete blackness via her designation as a mulatta. In 1892, Frances E.W. Harper continues Wilson's trend by publishing Iola Leroy, a novel which seals Hagar's destiny as an African American woman with an African American-centered consciousness.

My study traces the manipulation of Hagarian figures in nineteenth-century women's novels – not the tragic mulatta figure per se, however I must note that, in 1853, William Wells Brown published Clotel, the first novel written by an African American male abolitionist, which includes what Judith Berzon calls "the figure of the beautiful white slave girl," not the manifestation of Hagar (57). The figure of Hagar, in sentimental fiction and later in African American nineteenth-century fiction, and the tragic mulatta trope do not share

similar connotations. According to Berzon, the figure of the tragic mulatta is an "almost-white character whose beauty, intelligence, and purity are forever in conflict with the 'savage primitivism' inherited from his or her Negro ancestors" (99). Debra Rosenthal writes that "tragic mulattas are tragic because they cannot be saved from themselves and inevitably die by novel's end" (508). In contrast, authors of Hagarian literature manipulate the ethnicity and race of their heroines, whose conflict does not stem from her race but from her domestic circumstances, and she does not die by the end of the novel. As a result, nineteenth-century Hagarian figures are not tragic mulattas.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Wilson's Our Nig begins the process of distancing the white-washed Hagar found in sentimental fiction from her mulatta sister in African American literature. What we find in Harper's novel, Iola Leroy, is a complete severance of ties between the sentimental Hagar and the African American Hagar in that Harper's Hagarian figure, Iola, moves beyond the realm of sentimentality and domesticity into other arenas that affect the nineteenth-century African American community. Unlike Hagar in Southworth and Stephens, Harper's Iola does not belong to the middle-class for the majority of Iola Leroy. While Iola is born into the southern aristocracy, she ultimately learns that she has "[O]ne drop of negro blood in her veins," which changes her fate from free white to enslaved black woman (Harper 67). Just as in Wilson's Our Nig, the rule of hypo-descent drastically affects the Hagarian figure's racial designation.

What remains constant in Hagarian literature written by both Wilson and Harper is the notion of a difficult childhood or the loss of childhood in an African American home. The separation of families within the institution of slavery detrimentally affected African American communities, making family stability very difficult. In Iola Leroy, the separation and reuniting of families serve as a major theme in that, by the novel's end, three generations of Iola's family are reunited. Chapter 18, entitled "Searching for Lost Ones," focuses on Iola's and Robert's search for their respective mothers; but as early as Chapter 13, Iola rejects Dr. Gresham's proposal of marriage and tells him that "when the war is over I intend to search the country for my mother," because she was "torn from [her] mother [and] sold as a slave" (117, 114). Hazel Carby, in her introduction to Iola Leroy, writes that "finding a dispersed family, a metaphor for the African diaspora, is an established Afro-American literary convention" (xviii). As such, the dispersing of families necessarily results in a disconnection of familial contact and relationships. When families disconnect, childhood suffers.

Another common thread found in both Wilson and Harper, as African American authors who employ the Hagarian figure, is sexually nonthreatening female characters. Iola Leroy was published, states Hazel Carby in Reconstructing Womanhood, "to promote social change [and] to aid in the uplifting of the race," so the issue of sex or sexuality does not present itself (63). Even though the story revolves around an interracial family, and two white men propose to Iola, the narrator mentions the topic of miscegenation

only once.[10] In her conversation with Dr. Gresham, following his proposal, she asks, "[S]uppose we should marry, and little children in after years should nestle in our arms, and one of them show unmistakable signs of color, would you be satisfied?" (117). When she tells him that it seems that he "had not taken into account what might result from such a marriage," the implied issue of interracial sex and miscegenation is simultaneously raised and dismissed. In her introduction to the novel, Carby writes that "Harper represses female sexuality to gain an independent heroine" (xxv). She continues,

> [A]lthough Harper could imagine the feminist dream of a "woman's era," she was unable to represent a black heroine who was also a sexual being. . . . [Until] Nella Larsen's Quicksand in 1928, black women were in outright rebellion against the dominant sexual ideology that declared them to be immoral, sexually aggressive creatures who were consistently available to sexually service white men. . . . [As a result,] the impulse to contradict accusations of sexual promiscuity appears to have led to a complete repression of female sexuality. (xxv)

Like Wilson, Harper represses Iola's sexuality, further distancing the Hagarian figure found in African American literature from her sister in sentimental fiction by focusing not on domestic duties but societal issues, more specifically, racial issues.

[10] Iola's father was white, her mother was quadroon, which would make Iola an octoroon. I don't believe in the racist use of such language and designation, but here I use the parlance and formulaic nature of race during the nineteenth century to paint a picture of the foundational "interracial" relationship in the novel.

What differentiates Iola Leroy from all of the other novels analyzed in my study is the heroine's lack of social, legal, and economic status once she discovers her true racial lineage. The entire plot of the novel centers around the institution of slavery, from the slaveholding class of Iola's parents to slaves themselves, and how members of all classes must unite in order to uplift the race. As a free (white) girl educated in a northern boarding school, Iola defends the institution of slavery when conversing with a classmate: "'Slavery can't be wrong . . . for my father is a slave-holder and my mother is as good to our servants as she can be. . . . [O]ur slaves do not want their freedom. They would not take it if we gave it to them'" (97-98). Once she returns south and becomes an enslaved (black) girl, her views automatically change as does her social status, as indicated by the way her travelling companion, lawyer Louis Bastine, treats her. lawyer Louis Bastine. While Iola naps, Bastine enters her room, and Iola "was awakened by a burning kiss pressed on her lips, and a strong arm encircling her" (103). During the nineteenth century, men did not approach women with such bold sexual overtures; but since Bastine knew of Iola's mulatta status, it seems he assumed she would respond. In that scene, where Iola spurns Bastine's advances, Harper unmistakably challenges the stereotype of the supposed loose sexuality of black women as well as reveals the liberties that white men take with black women – even if they look white. His sexual advance marks the beginning of Iola's change in social status, even before she becomes aware of that change. Barbara Christian, in Black Feminist Criticism, notes

that after having Iola “live much of her childhood and adolescence as a white woman of wealth, refinement, and education,” she is “plunged into slavery during which she must confront rape; after becoming free she must earn a living and deal with racial discrimination” (169). Such a drastic fall in social status and class represents the disparities between the two Hagars found in the sentimental tradition.

Such disparities between the races are also found in the story of Iola’s parents, Eugene Leroy and Marie, his former slave turned wife, foreshadowing the issue of Iola’s legal status. When Eugene reveals to Alfred Lorraine, his cousin, his plans to marry a quadroon who nursed him back to health, Lorraine serves as the voice of the slaveholding South: even “if she is as fair as a lily, beautiful as a houri, and chaste as ice, still she is a negro. . . . One drop of negro blood in her veins curses all the rest” (67). He tells Eugene that he “had better be careful how [he airs his] Northern opinions in public,” and that he would “rather follow [Eugene] to his grave” than accompany him to the North and witness his marriage to Marie (72). Eugene, on the other hand, loves Marie but vocalizes his concern as well: “[I]f I openly make her my legal wife and recognize her children as my legitimate heirs, I subject myself to social ostracism and a senseless persecution” (66). On the other hand, he says,

> I could live with her, and not incur much if any social opprobrium. Society would wink at the transgression, even if after she had become the mother of my children I should cast

> her off and send her and them to the auction block. . . . She is beautiful, faithful, and pure, yet all that society will tolerate is what I would scorn to do. . . . [But] in the North no one would suspect that she has one drop of negro blood in her veins, but here, where I am known, to marry her is to lose caste. (66)

Clearly, Eugene finds himself in a conundrum: how can he both marry the love of his life, who has "one drop of negro blood," and continue to live the lifestyle to which he has become accustomed? How can he keep both the girl and his money? He treads upon the slippery slope of love and legalities.

In deciding to manumit and marry Marie in the North and bring her back to the South, Eugene gambles on everyone's freedom but his own. Once the children are born, Marie remarks that she is "glad . . . that these children are free" even though they are prisoners in their own home (76). They have no friends or family outside of the plantation and, as such, fall victim to the setting of a walled garden discussed in Chapter Four. Legally, while on the plantation and protected from Southern society, they are "free." When the oldest children, Harry and Iola, attend boarding school in the North, they are legally "free." But the great protector, Eugene, dies, and his cousin Alfred Lorraine challenges Eugene's will:

> Lorraine made a careful investigation of the case, to ascertain whether Marie's marriage was valid. To his delight he found there was a flaw in the marriage and an informality in the maumision. He then determined to invalidate Marie's claim, and

> divide the inheritance among Leroy's white relations. . . . [Eventually] Alfred Lorraine entered suit for his cousin's estate, and for the remanding of his wife and children to slavery. (95)

I quote this passage at length to demonstrate how Harper succinctly conveys the ambiguous nature of African Americans' legal status and fate during the mid-nineteenth century when the novel is set. While the novel was written during Reconstruction, Harper exposes how quickly African American lives can change at the caprice of one man and the stroke of a pen. Her point here, then, is to raise awareness of the historical and legal plight of her race in the post-civil war South.

While the stroke of a pen alters her position in society, a change in economic standing corresponds to Iola's fall in legal status in that she is no longer the daughter of a wealthy planter but a slave. After the war, however, Iola's economic fate shifts again as she finds her family and they move to the North. Rather than live by her brother's economic support, Iola attempts to find work to support herself as an independent woman. At this point in the novel, Harper addresses another important issue found in the African American community of the nineteenth century – the rights of women. In Reconstructing Womanhood, Carby writes,

> [A]s a black woman and a feminist, Harper had to confront the contradictions between advancing the cause of equal rights for her race and the predominantly white movement for women's suffrage. As a black Northern intellectual, she had to address

> the condition of the majority of black people in the South and assess the quality of alliances with white Northern intellectuals and movements. Harper regarded the South as "a great theater for the colored man's development and progress," but she did not view the Northern states as an example of progress and liberty. (67)

So in Iola Leroy, Wilson has her heroine confront both a woman's right to support herself and the task of uplifting the race. Throughout the final third of the novel, for example, Iola experiences racial discrimination when she applies for a job as a "saleswoman" and when she debates in intellectual circles the plight of her people and how best to serve them (Harper 205). By dedicating this portion of the novel to such complex issues, Harper challenges her reading audience to join her in acting to better both the African American community and America at-large. According to Melba Boyd, in Discarded Legacies, "what distinguishes Harper's . . . voice is her capacity to demonstrate how racism, sexism, and classism are intricately intertwined in American culture" (14). We see the intertwining of such "isms" in Iola. Even though she does not become a social activist per se, she does represent "a growing black middle class" who "work in their sphere for the betterment of the race" (Christian 169). Harper's Hagarian figure, then, moves beyond the domestic realm into realistic societal concerns facing the African American community. She becomes a woman in the Hagarian tradition who blazes trails not only for women but for her race as well.

I must note here that Frances Harper herself was a pioneer of sorts, in that her involvement in the women's movement "heightened black feminist presence in American politics and culture" (Boyd 12). Born of free parents in Baltimore, Maryland, and orphaned at the age of three, Harper was raised by her uncle, Rev. William Watkins, who himself was involved in the abolitionist movement (Carby 65). By the age of 46, Harper was a well-known social activist who travelled "to plantations, cities, and towns in the South in her speaking engagements at schools, churches, courthouses and legislative halls" (66). Carby writes that

> Frances Harper fought for and won the right to be regarded as a successful public lecturer, a career not generally considered suitable for a woman, especially a black woman. . . . [William] Still recorded that because she was so articulate and engaging as a public speaker, some audiences thought Harper must be a man, while others thought she couldn't possibly be black and had to be painted. (66)

In addition to her recognition as a public speaker, Harper also wrote and published "ten books of poetry in 1846, the first short story by a black woman in 1859, three serialized novels in 1859, 1877, and 1887-88, and the first reputable novel by an American black woman in 1892," when she was 67 years old (Boyd 12). In both her oratory and literary career, Frances Harper, like Hagar, cast herself into the wilderness of public opinion by addressing both issues of race and women's rights. Through her works, like Iola, Harper

served as a pioneer among other African American female writers. What happens, though, is that Harper's Hagarian figure, Iola, more closely resembles the Islamic version of Hagar, rather than the Biblical Hagar, via the life lessons embedded in Iola's story. A discussion regarding how Iola reflects the Islamic story of Hagar occurs below.

Conclusions

Hagar proper in sentimental fiction and the Hagarian figure in African American literature share a story – a story of a woman who discovers her worth and identity, regardless of race and class. Biblically, Hagar denotes a woman of implied darkness who is cast into the desert by a weak man and his jealous wife. In Ancient Sisterhood, Savina Teubal notes that

> the traditionally understood theme of Hagar's life . . . serv[es] as a sanction to the enslavement of human beings in the Western world. Hagar's role has been that of the mistreated Egyptian slave, thrust empty-handed into the desert with her son, left to watch her child die of thirst under a bush where she had placed him. (193-94)

While the theme in the domestic fiction of Southworth and Stephens does not address slavery per se, their use of the Egyptian Hagar enables them the freedom to ascribe a darkness of physicality or character to their heroine's being. Southworth and Stephens, then, exploit Hagar's race by appropriating and erasing her darkness at their caprice. On the other hand, Wilson's and Harper's Hagarian figures more closely resemble the actual societal

circumstance of Hagar. In other words, since both Wilson's Nig and Harper's Iola are African American women, their race becomes secondary to their social circumstances. Nig functions as an indentured servant because of her mulatta classification. Iola moves between slavery and freedom because of "one drop of black blood" that flows through her veins. Both characters move on with their lives both inside and outside of the home – Nig as a wife, mother, and peddler of wares; Iola as a wife, teacher, and race leader – as opposed to Southworth's and Stephens's Hagarian heroines who remain solely in the domestic realm.

As mentioned above, the story of Hagar serves as a means of sanctioning the institution of slavery in the West, especially during the nineteenth century. According to Nina Baym, because sentimental fiction is usually a "story of the development of feminine character [it] is set in a social context [and] contains much explicit and implicit social commentary" (44-45). Because both Southworth and Stephens utilize a discourse of darkness, the influence of African Americans and the institution of slavery become apparent. But while they are both influenced by African Americans, it appears that Southworth's stance regarding them and the institution of slavery is ambivalent at best. On the one hand, she privileges pure Africans, such as the slave Cumbo in The Deserted Wife, over the fugitive African American slave Jim. On the other, she allows Sophie, Hagar's cousin, not only to free Jim once he has been captured but to offer him a boat so that he can sail into Northern freedom. However, Stephens's explicit position about African

Americans becomes evident as soon as the narrator describes Hagar, the heroine, as dark and fiendish – devilish and evil – due to her legal racial designation as black. In Hagar, the Martyr, Stephens portrays Hagar as an exaggerated, minstrel figure and, as a result, seems to maintain either a pro-slavery or white supremacist tone throughout the novel. It appears, then, that both Southworth and Stephens sanction the institution of slavery.

As expected, neither Harriet Wilson nor Frances Harper sanctions the institution of slavery in their respective novels. Wilson, as noted in Chapter Four, served as an indentured slave herself and loosely models her Hagarian figure, Nig, on her own experiences. Throughout Our Nig, Wilson illustrates the complete and utter dominating control that Mrs. Bellmont has over Nig in both childhood and adolescence, just as Sarah had over her handmaiden Hagar. While Nig's story parallels the biblical Hagar, Wilson's novel also challenges the benevolent connotation associated with Northern beliefs concerning free blacks and that peculiar institution of slavery. Valerie Cunningham, in "New Hampshire Forgot," writes that "Wilson's landmark work not only helps to expose [New England's pre-Civil War relationship with slavery], but it disrupts the lingering notion of a state free from 'slavery's shadows'" (104).[11] R.J. Ellis, in Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, writes that Nig's story is one "of racist mistreatment," and the novel itself "draws attention to how racist legacy impinges on the lives of Northern 'free' blacks" (135). Wilson's interpretation of the Biblical Hagar story, therefore, does not sanction

[11] "Slavery's shadows" is a direct reference to the entire title of Wilson's novel – Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North, Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There. By "Our Nig."

slavery but exposes Northern racism and the hypocrisy of slave sympathizers.

Frances Harper, in Iola Leroy, also denounces the institution of slavery by creating a Hagarian figure who actually falls victim to the precarious nature of that peculiar institution by having her whiteness and freedom denied by Southern laws and customs. In "The White Blackbird," Debra Rosenthal contends that "by claiming Iola's black identity, Harper elevates the acceptance of black womanhood and the importance of the African-American community" (516). And it is the survival of black womanhood that shapes Iola as a Hagarian figure because she is liberated through her black identity and becomes a pioneer in the field of racial uplift, as evidenced by her return to the South:

> Kindred hopes and tastes had knit [Iola's and Dr. Latimer's] hearts; grand and noble purposes were lighting up their lives; and they esteemed it a blessed privilege to stand on the threshold of a new era and labor for those who had passed from the old oligarchy of slavery into the new commonwealth of freedom. (271)

Like Hagar, Iola moves out of the hypocritical North, as established by Harriet Wilson in Our Nig, into the wilderness of a new era in the South. Delores Williams, in Sisters in the Wilderness, writes that "liberation in the Hagar stories is not given by God; it finds its source in human initiative" (5). Within Iola, Harper's Hagarian figure, the pioneering spirit of black womanhood

emerges, creating a new generation of black children who are able to perpetuate their cultural heritage of strength and perseverance. As Claudia Tate writes in "Allegories of Black Female Desire," "For nineteenth-century black women writers, marriage and family life were not the culminating points of a woman's life but the pinnacles of a people's new beginning" (126).

Savina Teubal, in Ancient Sisterhood, asserts that one understood theme of Hagar's story is that of an empty-handed thrust into society. In other words, Hagar finds herself unexpectedly displaced from her familiar life, forcing her to adapt to new and difficult surroundings and circumstances. Such blatant abandonment extends through all of the novels examined above – regardless of the heroine's race. What I conclude is that such common abandonment of women (black or white) speaks volumes of the value and worth of them in nineteenth-century America. The ability of a society to disregard and dismiss women corresponds to its designation of them as second-class citizens. But nineteenth-century white "women authors responded to the class system with . . . ambivalence" and, according to Nina Baym, "detested poverty" more than being second-class citizens (46). As a result, "few of them contemplated radical social reform," as evidenced by both Southworth's and Stephens's heroines. Claudia Tate maintains that

> nineteenth-century white women writers who wrote much of the popular literature of sentimentality, some at considerable financial reward, claimed to have done so not for fame or fortune but because they had infirmed husbands or were

> widows supporting their small children. Moreover, they trivialized their work, claiming not to be professionals who took writing seriously in deference to Victorian social conventions demanding female self-effacement. In short, these white women claimed to have been driven to take up the pen not by the desire for personal satisfaction but by financial desperation. (115)

While Harriet Wilson, in the preface, also asserts that she penned Our Nig to "aid me in maintaining myself and child," the storyline of the novel itself reflects Wilson's attention to social matters, especially those surrounding the issue of northern indentured servitude and its close cousin – southern slavery. Harper's Iola Leroy, too, addresses numerous topics outside of the domestic realm – from racial to women's issues – as mentioned above.

Again, throughout all of the novels, the heroines leave the comforts of home, either as children or adults, with nothing-no financial or emotional support from family or friends-like their counterpart, the Biblical Hagar. Both Hagars in the works of Southworth and Stephens are propelled out of the family home when their guardians – male or female – introduce a significant other into the domestic realm. Southworth's Hagar, in The Deserted Wife, is emotionally and physically replaced by her guardian's, Sophie's, new husband, the Rev. John Withers, whom Hagar loathes. Stephens' Hagar, in Hagar, the Martyr, runs away from home when her father remarries and she (Hagar) learns that her mother is the quadroon house slave. It seems that, in

the works of the white authors in this study, men, directly or indirectly, contribute to the heroine's entry into the wilderness, where she ultimately finds another male suitor who becomes her husband. In the works of Wilson and Harper, however, both Hagarian heroines are thrust into the wilderness very deliberately. In other words, neither Nig nor Iola are displaced by an authoritative or paternalistic character; instead, they have a specific timeframe which would mark the end of their servitude/enslavement. Nig endures her time in the reversed wilderness of the Bellmont home until the legal age of eighteen. Iola gains her freedom at the before the end of the Civil War. For African American writers of Hagarian literature, then, the liberation of the heroine relies not on domesticity but on the laws that governed blacks in the nineteenth century.

Biblically, liberation and new beginnings are threads that run throughout Hagar's story, and those threads reveal themselves in the literature as well. Teubal writes that the "wonder of Hagar's story [is] . . . her spiritual growth. . . . Hagar emerges from her initial experience as a dependent human being, whose vocation was to serve the needs of others, to the establishment of herself as an independent person, the mother of a people" (176). It is interesting to note that within Southworth's and Stephens's works the theme of motherhood becomes secondary to the protagonists' growth and independence. It seems that both Southworth and Stephens utilize the figure of Hagar not for her courage and perseverance but

for her accessibility as a character whom they can manipulate racially in order to tell a better story. Gabler-Hover writes of Southworth,

> Southworth does not simply manipulate the language of slavery with the result that real black conditions are erased in favor of whiteness. . . . Southworth's legacy to the white woman from her imagined African woman appears to be threefold, emerging both from the cache of Egyptian mythology and from an ineradicable awareness of the enslaved black woman in her historical time. (43)

However Stephens's legacy as an author of Hagarian literature corresponds with her attempts at acting – rejection. Gabler-Hover quotes a review of Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr found in "the 'Editor's Table' of 'Graham's Magazine' in February 1855: [The novel is] the epitome of the worst of 'this lady literature. . . . Why, we ask mildly, why will ladies sit down and write in such a style as that? Where is the need of exhibiting such womanly weakness in the matter of telling a story and describing the agitated feelings?'" (84) Stephens's Hagar, though depicted as white with African American features, does not aspire to motherhood or independence. Rather, the focus of Stephens's Hagar underscores the stereotyped sexuality that surrounds African American women. Southworth and Stephens, then, seem to read the Biblical Sarah-Hagar story from the perspective of Sarah, who represents powerful white women. As a result, manipulating the oppressed Hagar in their literature reflects both Southworth's and Stephens's position of

power over African American women during a time when they saw themselves as powerless (as white women in a white, male-dominated society).

Both Harriet Wilson and Frances Harper, on the other hand, seem to read the Sarah-Hagar story from the perspective of the slave woman Hagar, reversing her status from oppressed to powerful. For Wilson and Harper, Hagar becomes the centralized human figure, allowing them to humanize their enslaved African American characters rather than simply manipulating their race. Additionally, utilizing an Hagarian figure allows them to explore other issues than African American women. In "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," Delores Williams identifies numerous themes that result from African American appropriation of Hagar: such themes include "sexual exploitation . . . destitution and single parentage . . . survival struggle involving children or family . . . a poor, oppressed woman having an encounter with God . . . [and] naming under duress" (173). It is no coincidence, it seems to me, that Wilson and Harper chose an Hagarian figure as their protagonist because, in the African American community, all of the themes that Williams identified in the passage quoted above intrinsically reflect both Hagar's resistance to an oppressive society and circumstances therein and the importance of motherhood in building a strong African American community.

The combination of resistance, survival, and motherhood seems to create an underlying theme of African American female liberation in Hagar's

story, as well. In another work, Sisters in the Wilderness, Williams explains that "racial oppression helped create . . . the black experience," as evidenced in the novels (and lives) of Harriet Wilson and Frances Harper (153). Both Nig and Iola become liberated when they develop a positive black consciousness that transforms them from powerless victims to powerful adult women in their respective wilderness experiences. For Williams, such an Hagarian "wilderness experience is suggestive of the essential role of human initiative (along with divine intervention) in the activity of survival, of community building, of structuring a positive quality of life for family and community" (160). Both protagonists in Our Nig and Iola Leroy exhibit such initiative via their survival of conditions designed to destroy them: Nig in the Bellmont home and Iola enslaved. And such a wilderness experience, Williams contends, is "suggestive of human initiative in the work of liberation [because a wilderness experience reflects] . . . black initiative and responsibility in the community's struggle for liberation" (153). The novels of Wilson and Harper mirror such struggles for liberation as they expose both the internal tensions and conflicts of their protagonists as well as their intent to build a stronger community and/or family. And while building strong communities becomes the cornerstone of nineteenth-century black intellectual thought regarding how to uplift the African American race, a fine line separates notions of bettering a community versus pioneering a new civilization. In Christianity, Hagar's story is one of survival and liberation,

which differentiates it from the Muslim account of Hagar's experiences as a pioneer of the new civilization.

In "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," Williams identifies what is, to me, the most important theme of Hagar's story, "the theme of women's agency in the development of nation building [which] presents itself in both Hagar's and African American women's experience" (173). While an interpretation of the Sarah-Hagar story from Hagar's perspective offers many similarities between Hagar's plight and African American women's experiences, the notion of nation building places Hagar in a more significant and central position. In the Islamic tradition, the story of Hagar differs from its Christian counterpart by "tend[ing] to leave readers with the impression that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away in order to placate the jealous wrath of Sarah and has nothing more, henceforward, to do with them," writes Riffat Hassan, author of "Islamic Hagar and Her Family" (154). She continues, saying that in the Islamic tradition, "Abraham had a continuing relationship with" Hagar and Ishmael "by periodically . . . visit[ing]" them. This version completely eliminates one of the themes in Biblical Hagar's story identified above as single parentage and male abandonment. In Islam,

> the figure of Hagar that emerges from the traditions narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari is that of a woman of exceptional faith, love, fortitude, resolution, and strength of character. Once she hears from Abraham that God commands her and her infant son to be

> left in the desert, she shows no hesitation whatever in accepting her extremely difficult situation. She does not wail or rage or beg Abraham not to abandon her and Ishmael. Instead, surrendering spontaneously and totally to what she believes to be God's will, she says she is "satisfied with Allah," who will never neglect her. She lets Abraham go, without any words of recrimination or sorrow, and returns to her infant son. (154)

I quote Hassan at length in order to introduce the Islamic Hagar to the reader. And while my study does not focus upon the theological aspects of either the Christian or Islamic Hagar, I would be remiss if I did not include their stories upon which I base my literary interpretation.

One variant in Hagar's story is that the Islamic tradition "does not . . . distinguish between the status of Hagar and Sarah"(163). As a result, binary relationships, such as mistress/slave and black/white, do not exist between Hagar and Sarah in Islam. Hassan writes that the Christian tradition favors both Sarah and Isaac "because they do not accord to Hagar the same status of being Abraham's 'wife' as they do Sarah" (163). Of course, Hagar's position, in the Christian version, is lower because she is the slave to Sarah, rendering Hagar powerless in the relationship. Similarly, there exists a corresponding relationship between African American slaves and their owners, as indicated in both Our Nig and Iola Leroy. But if we reread both novels through an Islamic lens, eventually granting Nig and Iola equal status with all whites by the end of the stories, we find that both protagonists are

powerful in their own right. For example, once Nig reclaims her voice and develops a consciousness of resistance, she forces Mrs. Bellmont to retreat and concede Nig's humanity. Iola, once free, determines that she will work to uplift her race, a statement that tells the world that she challenges the nineteenth-century status quo regarding the African American community.

One element that differentiates the Islamic and Christian versions of Hagar is that of motherhood. For in Islam, Hagar is viewed as

> the mother of all Arabs . . . Hagar, a black slave-girl, rose from the lowliest of positions to the highest place of honor in the Islamic tradition. In Muslim societies the mother is the most highly revered member of the family because, following one of the most popular traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims widely believe that Paradise lies under the feet of the mother. (154)

In other words, the mother nurtures, raises, and teaches the next generation. Her guidance, therefore, shapes the next generation, as well as subsequent generations, resulting in both a major responsibility and burden. The emphasis on motherhood is conspicuously absent in the novels in my study, regardless of the race of the authors or the characters. Perhaps because all of the stories begin with both Hagars in Southworth and Stephens and the Hagarian figures in Wilson and Harper as child protagonists, by the time they endure their trying adolescence, marriage and children are secondary concerns. Except for Stephens's Hagar, the Martyr, children do not

prominently factor into the heroines' lives. At the end of Iola Leroy, however, the narrator does inform the reader that once Iola moves South she becomes a Sunday school teacher and mother to the community: "When the dens of vice are spreading their snares for the feet of the tempted and inexperienced her doors are freely opened for the instruction of the children before their feet have wandered and gone too far astray" (278-79). In that regard, Iola volunteers for the responsibility and burden of raising the next generation, like the Islamic Hagar.

Comparable to Delores Williams's notion of the wilderness experience providing the opportunity for initiative for African Americans mentioned above, in the Islamic tradition the wilderness experience also provides an opportunity for individual growth. "When one is in the wilderness, without the protection of any familiar framework or faces," writes Riffat Hassan, "one's faith in God and oneself is put to a real test. Those who are willing . . . to leave their place of origin or sojourn in order to live in accordance with the will and pleasure of God gain merit in the sight of God" (155). In Iola Leroy, Iola makes many symbolic journeys into the wilderness as she blindly searches for her mother and ultimately moves South with her new husband. She even tells her Uncle Harry, who recalls Iola as a child, that she had "passed through a fiery ordeal of suffering" since the breakup of their family (195). Through her determination and initiative to reunite with her kin, Iola sacrifices her own lifestyle just as both the Biblical and Islamic Hagar sacrifices for her child.

Similarities, such as the binaries of race and class and the issue of motherhood, link the Biblical and Islamic Hagar stories, but one major difference between the two versions is how readers of the Bible and Qu'ran view Hagar. As indicated above, for the Biblical Hagar, the binaries of race and class place her in a powerless position. But Islamic Hagar's life story, according to Raffat Hassan,

> shows that class or color is not a deterrent to any person who has faith in God and is resolutely righteous in action. So Hagar does not see herself as a victim of Abraham and Sarah, or of a patriarchal, class- and race-conscious culture. She is a victor who, with the help of God and her initiative, is able to transform a wilderness into the cradle of a new world dedicated to the fulfillment of God's purpose on earth. (155)[12]

What we find in Iola Leroy is a Hagarian figure who, in the Islamic tradition, does not see herself as a victim of her race or her society just because she was thrust from freedom into the jaws of slavery. Rather, once she learns of her predicament, "almost wild with agony, Iola paced the floor . . . then [burst] into a paroxysm of tears succeeded by pleas of hysterical laughter" (106). Like the Islamic Hagar, Iola does not beg or wail or rage. She briefly reacts, but ultimately accepts her circumstances. She tells Dr. Gresham,

> I did not choose my lot in life, but I have no other alternative than to accept it. . . . Thoughts and purposes have come to me in shadow I should never have learned in the sunshine. . . . [But]

[12] According to Hassan, Hagar settled what we know today as Mecca.

> I intend . . . to cast my lot with the freed people as a helper, teacher, and friend. I have passed through a fiery ordeal, but this ministry of suffering will not be in vain. (114)

Her strength and willpower are universal ideals that would serve anyone who has suffered such dogmatic racism in a country that enables one race to dominate and control another group of human beings.

Finally, the story of the Islamic Hagar

> is important . . . for all women who are oppressed by systems of thought or structures based on ideas of gender, class, or racial inequality. Like her, women must have the faith and courage to venture out of the security of the known into the insecurity of the unknown and to carve out, with their own hands, a new world from which the injustices and inequities that separate men from women, class from class and race from race, have been eliminated. (164)

So even in the domestic fiction of Southworth and Stephens, discussed in earlier chapters, that depicts Hagar as white, the influence of an Islamic (read Egyptian) Hagar resounds through the authors' nineteenth-century discourse of darkness. In both The Deserted Wife and Hagar, the Martyr, Hagar's internal blackness remains, utilizing such "black" characteristics as courage and strength in confronting issues of gender and/or class. But for Wilson and Harper, Nig's and Iola's legal and social designation as black, though they are technically mulatta in the vernacular of the nineteenth century, redeems them

because their “blackness” forces them to confront an issue as complex as racial inequality in nineteenth-century America. And while Nig’s blackness redeems her, Iola’s blackness, and subsequent black-consciousness, differentiates them by putting Iola in the elevated position as an emerging pioneer for the next generation of African Americans.

Both Harriet Wilson’s and Frances Harper’s Hagarian figures venture into unfamiliar spaces, Nig into a life free of the torment she endured in the Bellmont house and Iola into unknown geographical places in the South in search of her mother. But Iola, in venturing into a new wilderness, if you will, wherein she meets other people and ultimately locates her mother, helps in molding and shaping a generation of children (and adults), as does Islamic Hagar. In that regard, Iola aids in the establishment of an African American community that will thrive as a result of her work in bettering that community. She represents the founding mother of racial uplift in the South as she works toward championing the educational and religious needs of a rising generation.

Frances Harper’s Hagarian figure, Iola, and the novel itself, Iola Leroy, can be regarded as a pioneering effort, of sorts. While other writers, such as William Wells Brown mentioned above, and later Charles Chesnutt, penned works that feature mulatta characters, Harper’s mulatta, Iola, in no way represents what eventually develops into the tragic mulatta trope. Instead, Iola Leroy, and its Hagarian protagonist, serves as a foundational work for other writers who, at the turn to the twentieth century, challenge the normative

images of the tragic mulatta as a way to combat racial stagnancy. Writers such as A.E. Johnson (The Hazeley Family, published in 1894) and Pauline Hopkins (Contending Forces, published in 1900) utilize non-tragic mulatta protagonists to serve as voices for the continued betterment of the African American race, which, theoretically, would result in a more advanced community.

Tracing the metamorphosis of the character of Hagar found in sentimental fiction, then, concludes with the finding that basing a literary character upon a Biblical one allows writers to erase and alter features and qualities well-known to their audiences. Authors such as E.D.E.N. Southworth, in The Deserted Wife, and H. Marion Stephens, in Hagar, the Martryr, by utilizing the Biblical figure of Hagar, are able to address issues found in the domestic realm, such as relationships and dependency. African American authors, such as Harriett Wilson, in Our Nig, and Frances Harper, in Iola Leroy, though, in depicting an Hagarian figure as African American rather than white, are able to focus their novels on broader social and racial concerns that affect the African American community. However, it is the emergence of a black-consciousness, not the black skin of Iola Leroy, that distinguishes Harper's Hagarian figure as a pioneer of new ideals that lead to a new community of African Americans.

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