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“The Prettiest Specimen of Boyhood”

Cross-Gender and Racial Disguise in Pauline E. Hopkins’s *Winona*

The contradictory status of the Black woman’s body in American culture may be measured in part by the frequency with which it is the site of impersonation. Motivated by both desire and contempt, the tradition of imitating Black women through drag of blackface is pervasive in American history. It is easy to find examples of such performances, beginning with the practice of “acting the wench” on the minstrel stage, in which white men donned blackface and women’s clothing to perform caricatures of African American women.¹ White women have also participated in the blackface tradition on stage and screen: Shirley Temple blacked up in 1935 in *The Littlest Rebel*; Sophie Tucker regularly donned blackface in her vaudeville acts; and more recently, Sandra Bernhard, with perhaps more self-conscious irony toward this history, presented impersonations of Black women performers in her 1990 film, *Without You I’m Nothing*.² Likewise, African American men’s performances of cross-gender drag have been enormously popular, particularly in recent years, as evidenced by widespread fascination with figures such as RuPaul, Dennis Rodman, and the drag queens in Jennie Livingston’s documentary *Paris Is Burning*, to name just a few examples.³

Indeed, impersonations of Black women historically have held a much more central place in American popular culture than have impersonations by Black women. One explanation for the dearth of examples of cross-gender impersonations by African American women is the history of racialized constructions by which they, particularly

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darker-complexioned women, have been granted limited access to the very category of femininity (from which one would presumably cross to a masculine persona).⁴ An extraordinarily stark example of these racialized constructions of gender occurs in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Palmetto-Leaves* (1874), a collection of travel sketches about Florida. In "The Laborers of the South," the book's final chapter, Stowe recalls a memorable scene from her visit to the Mackintosh Plantation, which had been "in old time, the model plantation of Florida":

Never shall we forget the impression of weird and almost ludicrous dreariness which took possession of us as Mrs. F—— and myself sat down in the wide veranda. . . . The black laborers were coming up from the field; and, as one and another passed by, they seemed blacker, stranger, and more dismal, than any thing we had ever seen.

The women wore men's hats and boots, and had the gait and stride of men; but now and then an old hooped petticoat, or some cast-off, thin, bedraggled garment that had once been fine, told the tale of sex, and had a woefully funny effect.⁵

Unmistakably informed by nineteenth-century ideologies of gender and race that effectively excluded African American women from the very category of "woman," Stowe can view these African American women only as masculine in relation to herself and her companion, the elliptical Mrs. F——.⁶ She carefully remarks upon their clothing ("men's hats and boots"), as well as the particular movement of their bodies ("the gait and stride of men"), in contrast to her own seemingly unquestionable femininity, further stabilized by her position as an immobile white spectator. Ironically, what jars Stowe is not the laboring women's perceived resemblance to men; rather, she fixes on the petticoat as the discrepancy in this scene. A seeming marker of femininity, the petticoat is revealed to be a racialized image as well: on the body of a Black woman, the petticoat can be understood by Stowe as a key element in a kind of comic drag performance. She naturalizes the masculinity of these women, only to be startled (albeit somewhat pleasantly) by the reminder—the detail that "told the tale of sex"—that the bodies underneath so many conflicting signals are female after all. The bodies of African American women in this scene call up implicitly for Stowe the traditions of the minstrel stage, where white men entertained their audiences with cartoonish impersonations of Black women.

Another explanation for the relative scarcity of representations of

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Black women as agents of cross-gender impersonation is their symbolic position within both gender and racial hierarchies in the United States, available as the imagined “other” against which normative subjectivity is constituted. Crossing down, or taking on the status of a supposed social inferior, has been the very spectacle that generates the comic effect of drag and/or blackface in popular culture. Apparently not so funny, at least to mainstream audiences, is the prospect of African American women crossing “up,” as the genre of the passing novel, beginning in the nineteenth century, makes clear.⁷ Traditionally seen as tragic, representations of Black women’s racial passing have held the more serious possibility of usurping cultural authority in contrast to the playful and temporary abandonment that blackface and drag have historically represented to audiences imagined as white and male.

It is significant that the passing genre rests squarely within the same constructions of gender and race that shaped Stowe’s description of Black laborers. Only the light-complexioned African American woman—the tragic mulatta—has been figured in fiction as having access to this movement across the color line. In the nineteenth-century novel of racial passing, the mulatta is typically described according to traditional hierarchies of white beauty. In her study of the mulatto figure in American fiction, Judith Berzon notes that Black women are portrayed as “beautiful (in Caucasian terms), morally upstanding, prim, and wealthy (or at least comfortable).”⁸ A certain amount of erotic tension and narrative curiosity surrounds this figure, as Werner Sollors has pointed out: “In nineteenth-century American culture the figure of the Quadroon and the Octoroon was such a taboo: puzzling, strangely attractive, forbidden (and, perhaps, attractive *because* forbidden).”⁹ Importantly, in comparison to the male mulatto figure, the female mulatta almost inevitably bears a tragic narrative. Berzon notes how generic conventions were tied to the gender of the protagonist:

In most novels with mulatto characters, the male mixed-blood characters are brave, honest, intelligent, and rebellious. . . . Few male mixed-blood characters are tragic mulattoes in the traditional sense. . . . There are almost no male suicides, whereas there are quite a few suicides by female mulatto characters. While there are some female characters who are race leaders . . . there are not many such women in mulatto fiction.¹⁰

Berzon’s useful observation about the narrative conventions attached to the gender of the mulatto/a figure has been echoed by other critics. In

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her study of gender and ethnicity in the American novel, Mary Dearborn adds that “the tragic mulatto, usually a woman . . . is divided between her white and black blood. The tragic mulatto trajectory demands that the mulatto woman desire a white lover and either die (often in white-authored versions) or return to the black community.”¹¹

When the mulatta figure impersonates white men, combining racial passing with cross-dressing, she does so ostensibly only for purposes of escape. In the fugitive slave narrative *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), for instance, Ellen Craft assumes the identity of a sickly white man while her darker-complexioned husband, William, poses as her slave in order that the two may escape to the north. In boots, top hat, spectacles, and cropped hair, Ellen makes “a most respectable looking gentleman,” whom at least two white women find attractive along the course of the journey.¹² Fictional characters, too, have used similar devices, perhaps most notably the young light-complexioned heroine Eliza Harris in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Attempting to evade relentless slave hunters, Eliza cuts her hair and adapts “to her slender and pretty form the articles of man’s attire, in which it was deemed safest she should make her escape.”¹³

In a very few instances, the light-complexioned African American woman performs a cross-gender impersonation that is combined with blackface, not to cross boundaries of racial identity but rather to stabilize a racial identity that the mulatta’s body itself seems to call into question. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs eludes her master through such a disguise.¹⁴ In her initial escape attempt, a family friend provides her with “a suit of sailor’s clothes,—jacket, trowsers, and tarpaulin hat,” which enables Jacobs to move through public spaces in safe anonymity. Ironically pointing out the arbitrariness of racial signs, Jacobs also darkens her skin, exaggerating the supposedly biological feature that commits her to slavery in the first place. The disguise works: “I wore my sailor’s clothes, and had blackened my face with charcoal. I passed several people whom I knew. The father of my children came so near that I brushed against his arm; but he had no idea who it was.”¹⁵ In another example of cross-gender impersonation, Mark Twain echoes Jacobs’s strategy in his depiction of Roxy in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894). Roxy “to all intents and purposes . . . was as white as anybody, but the one sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro.”¹⁶ In one part of the novel, when she is running from the law, Roxy disguises herself as a man, appearing as “a wreck of shabby old clothes . . . with a black face under an

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old slouch hat.” (180) She explains, “I give a nigger man a dollar for dese clo’es . . . [and] I blacked my face.” (187–88)

Importantly, in these examples of African American women donning men’s clothing and black make-up, the motivation is to escape from capture. Their cross-dressing and racial disguise function as tools of passing rather than of theatrical performance, such as blackface minstrelsy or a drag show, performances that seek to expose rather than mask the discrepancy between a body and its disguise.¹⁷ The performer creates the possibility for the audience to acknowledge the disjunction between the performance and the “true” identity. In contrast, passing can be understood as a representational strategy that appropriates the “privileges” of invisibility. An attempt to transcend the disenfranchisement imposed through a stigmatized identity, passing can be understood as a movement toward the privileges that accrue to those whose bodies are perceived as culturally *unmarked*.

In this chapter, I discuss a less well-known fictional instance of an African American woman assuming a male persona combined with blackface, performed by the protagonist of Pauline E. Hopkins’s *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902).¹⁸ Hopkins was one of the most important African American women writers at the turn of the century. Between 1900 and 1904, she wrote four novels, numerous short stories, and biographical articles for the Boston-based *Colored American Magazine*, where she also exerted considerable editorial influence.¹⁹ As I will discuss, Hopkins’s portrayal of an African American woman in double-layered disguise can be read as a figure for her own position as an African American woman writing at the turn of the twentieth century, within a literary and political sphere dominated by male voices. Yet, precisely because of the unstable meanings of constructions of gender and sexuality during this period, Winona’s cross-gender and “blackface” impersonation circulates uneasily in Hopkins’s text. Unlike the incidental temporary disguise performed by Jacobs or Roxy, Winona’s impersonation serves a very different function: clearly it is not a superficial costume but rather an expression of an inner subjectivity.

Winona, first published as a serialized novel in *Colored American Magazine* in 1902, takes place in the 1850s within a number of different geographical and political settings, including the United States/Canada border, a slave-holding plantation in Missouri, and the frontier state of Kansas. The title character, Winona, is the biracial daughter of an unnamed fugitive slave woman and “White Eagle,” the chief of a community of Seneca Indians in Canada. Significantly, *Winona* borrows many

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conventions from the popular genre of the Western: much of the action of this novel takes place outdoors, in contrast to the interior spaces of domestic fiction; and, except for Winona, the novel is populated overwhelmingly by male characters.²⁰ Winona's mother dies in childbirth, and when her father, White Eagle, is murdered by slave rustlers, Winona and her stepbrother, Judah, are sold into slavery. A new character, the British lawyer Warren Maxwell, enters the text by arriving in North America in search of heirs to the estate of a wealthy English aristocrat, Lord Carlingford. Through a series of complicated plot twists, Maxwell befriends Judah and Winona and eventually helps them escape their slaveholders. Soon all three join forces with the radical abolitionist John Brown on behalf of the Free-Soil movement in Kansas. After a number of close calls and hairbreadth escapes, the novel concludes with a series of revelations about the characters' origins, including Winona's identity as the lawful heir to the Carlingford estate. In the novel's final scenes, Winona and Maxwell plan their marriage and set sail to live permanently in England.

By opening the novel on the Canadian border, Hopkins uses national and geographical boundaries to symbolize the guiding questions of the novel: "Many strange tales of romantic happenings in this mixed community of Anglo-Saxons, Indians and Negroes might be told similar to the one I am about to relate, and the world stand aghast and try in vain to find the dividing line supposed to be a natural barrier between the whites and the dark-skinned race" (287). With this opening, Hopkins clearly states the project of her novel: to show that the color line is not a "natural barrier," as segregationists attempted to construct it, but rather an arbitrary and ultimately unfounded division. The plot pivots on a series of scenes of passing that expose the permeability of these purportedly "natural barriers" between the so-called races.

Hopkins first demonstrates this fluidity of racial boundaries through the character White Eagle. Early in the novel, we learn that White Eagle was formerly a British nobleman, who fled to Canada in order to escape a mistaken murder charge. He has disguised himself and "passed" into Seneca Indian culture. Reversing the familiar conceit of a light-skinned African American passing for white, Hopkins shows that racial passing is also practiced by whites. She notes that White Eagle is one of "many white men" who "sought to conceal their identity in the safe shelter of the wigwam" (288). Further, Hopkins suggests an identification between White Eagle and his wife, a fugitive slave. Just as he finds safety among the Senecan community, she makes her escape from slavery through the Underground Railroad, which lands her in freedom

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in the Canadian wilderness. Moreover, once they are married, this passing white man and African American woman bring up two children: Judah, an adopted escaped slave; and Winona, a biological daughter. Both children are raised within the Senecan culture, and Hopkins remarks that Judah "might have been mistaken for an Indian at first glance" because he "handles the paddle [of the canoe] so skillfully" (289). Through this family, interracial and intercultural, Hopkins privileges a model of cultural mixture in defiance of the prevailing eugenicist anxieties of the period.

At the same time that Hopkins seeks to dismantle the "natural barrier" of race, she also attempts to refute naturalized constructions of gender, a project that carries difficulties and risks, given the period in which Hopkins was writing. As historians of sexuality have argued, this period saw two important shifts in cultural understandings of sexuality in the United States, in particular the emergence of categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Before the late nineteenth century, homosexual acts had been punishable through legal and religious sanctions, but they had not defined individuals as a type.²¹ In the late nineteenth century, a new understanding of sexuality emerged, in which homo- and heterosexuality became the conditions, and therefore identities, of particular individuals. In the much-quoted words of Michel Foucault, "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species."²² As I will argue, when Hopkins uses cross-gender impersonation to develop her theme of dismantling naturalized constructions of gender and race, she also introduces into her text difficult questions about the representation of homoerotic desire and these "new" sexual subjectivities.

Hopkins renders the instabilities of categories of race, gender, and sexuality in a key scene at the center of the text, when Warren Maxwell, the British lawyer, is taken prisoner for assisting John Brown and his fighters. Maxwell's illness in prison becomes the narrative device for the introduction of a new character, Allen Pinks, a "young mulatto" nurse who volunteers to care for Maxwell and calms the cell with a "soft hush of a tender voice stilling the tumult" (386). The scenes between Pinks and Maxwell are the most overtly erotic in the entire novel. At one point, while Maxwell seems to sleep, Pinks gazes upon him with explicit desire: "He stood for some moments gazing down on the Saxon face so pitifully thin and delicate. The brow did not frown nor the lips quiver; no movement of the muscles betrayed the hopeless despair of the sleeper's heart" (387). If this description did not mark out clearly enough Pinks's desire for Maxwell, Hopkins provides unambiguous

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physical evidence: "There was a light touch on his hair; a tear fell on his cheek; the nurse had kissed the patient!" (387) Hopkins details, as she simultaneously tempers, the eroticism of this scene. Although Maxwell puzzles over this kiss and questions the identity of his nurse, Pinks deflects both Maxwell's and the reader's curiosity. When Maxwell insists on asking questions about his identity, Hopkins writes, "Allen silenced him firmly and gently" (388). This silencing, however, only kindles Maxwell's own attraction to Pinks:

Maxwell was fascinated by his nurse; he thought him the prettiest specimen of boyhood he had ever met. The delicate brown features were faultless in outline; the closely cropped black hair was like velvet in its smoothness. He could not shake off the idea that somewhere he had known the lad before in his life. At times this familiarity manifested itself in the tones of the voice soft and low as a woman's, then again it was in the carriage of the head or the flash of the beautiful large dark eyes. (389)

Throughout this scene, Hopkins plays with the reader's knowledge and ignorance. Although the reader may gradually recognize that this "prettiest specimen of boyhood" is Winona in disguise, Maxwell himself ostensibly remains ignorant of the other identity of this "lad," despite his rapt attention to the details of Pinks's body. Thus, while the reader may know that their kiss is "really" heterosexual, to Maxwell the kiss is homoerotic. Although the object of Maxwell's desire is "really" a girl, Maxwell ostensibly knows it only as desire for a boy.

Maxwell remains pleasantly blind to his nurse's identity until a scene in which Pinks, along with John Brown and his followers, storm the prison to help Maxwell escape. It takes the malevolent gaze of the white villain Bill Thomson to see through Pinks's disguise. "If it ain't Winona! . . . a gal dressed up in boys clo's!" (392) he exclaims. Hopkins's use of dialect here is significant because it acts as a kind of vocal cross-dressing for Bill Thomson, who is later revealed to have been passing also. He is actually the English valet guilty of murdering Lord Carlingford. Importantly, when he exposes Winona, Thomson stresses her cross-dressing but never mentions that she has also blackened her face. For Maxwell, however, the reverse is true. Winona's cross-dressing is apparently irrelevant to him; instead he fixates on the effectiveness of her blackface disguise. With his new knowledge, his vision is transformed: he "wondered . . . at his own stupidity in not recognizing Winona; be-

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neath the stain with which she had darkened her own exquisite complexion, he could now plainly trace the linaments [sic] that had so charmed him” (396).

In a brief essay on *Winona* and Bakhtin, Elizabeth Ammons writes:

The text only permits us to see same-sex attraction, a man tenderly caring for and kissing another man. Complicating the scene even more, the name Hopkins gives Winona in drag, Allen, is the same name she gave herself when she wanted to publish anonymously in the *Colored American Magazine*, Sarah Allen—her mother’s name. How do we read this dense network of signs? We know so little about Hopkins’s biography that we can say almost nothing about her sexual orientation. At the same time, this scene, so carefully but obviously coded (and therefore inviting decoding), forces us to think broadly rather than narrowly about Hopkins’s sexuality.²³

While I agree that this scene raises a number of questions about sexuality, it has implications far beyond biographical speculations about Hopkins’s own sexual practices or identity. It seems less urgent to attempt to confirm whether or not Hopkins herself was a lesbian, or whether she wrote “lesbian” novels, than to ask how she engaged emerging models of homo- and heterosexuality, particularly when these models held very different stakes for African American women and men, who historically had been sexualized in nineteenth-century popular culture. Questions of sexuality have shaped the work of writers for whom we lack biographical information or who are not easily classifiable in the terms *homosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, or *queer*. As Deborah McDowell has implicitly demonstrated in her insightful discussion of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, one need not rely on biographical evidence to show that questions about gender, homoeroticism, and homosexuality are not only relevant but often necessary for understanding cultural representations of race and racial difference.²⁴

Ammons usefully points to the suggestiveness of this passage, but her comments might be developed further by placing the “Allen Pinks” scenes in the context of the entire narrative, particularly because “his” presence is represented as a response to a previous scene of racial and sexual violence between men. In prison, before the arrival of Allen Pinks, Maxwell discovers “a hole for the stove-pipe of the under room to pass through, but the stove had been removed to accommodate a larger number of prisoners. This left a hole in the floor through which

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one might communicate with those below” (384). This hole positions Maxwell as a kind of voyeur gazing into the crowded cell below: it “afforded diversion for the invalid who could observe the full operation of the slave system” (384). Just as Maxwell, a British citizen, has observed the U.S. “slave system” as an outsider looking on (or down), so he is literally placed above and outside of the “heart-rending scenes . . . enacted before his sight in the lower room” (384). This scene, then, inscribes a racialized and asymmetrical structure of looking and power: the white Maxwell is able to gaze upon the African American prisoners below, but not vice versa.

This hole in Maxwell’s cell is significant not only because it structures a hierarchy of race, vision, and knowledge but also because it becomes the site of a corresponding gap in Hopkins’s narration. Hopkins describes a scene in which Maxwell is “aroused to greater indignation than usual” by the sound of “heart-rending cries from the lower room” (385). Yet, in the course of this description, Hopkins’s narration suddenly meets an obstacle: “Hurrying to the stove-hole [Maxwell] gazed one moment and then fell fainting with terror and nausea upon the floor. He had seen a Negro undergoing the shameful outrage, so denounced in the Scriptures, and which must not be described in the interests of decency and humanity” (385). This crisis in Maxwell’s experience of the prison coincides with a crisis in representation: what is “the shameful outrage” that “must not be described” here? In the previous chapter of the novel, Hopkins had been daring enough to include violent and graphic physical details in her description of Maxwell’s near-lynching. At this moment in the narrative, however, Hopkins, like the repulsed Maxwell, backs away from a direct representation of “the shameful outrage.” Abandoning detail, Hopkins resorts instead to a code phrase for sodomy. The content of this “shameful outrage” is left unspecified, a muteness consistent with the history of confusion around the term *sodomy* itself.²⁵ One cannot be sure what the “outrage” is, but Hopkins’s description suggests that a Black male prisoner is being raped by a white male guard.²⁶ Although Hopkins mentions neither homosexuality nor sodomy explicitly, it is important to distinguish between the two. This rape may technically be a homosexual act, but its unambiguous content is violence, not desire. A categorization of sex acts that refuses to acknowledge the context of those acts and the structures of power under which they are performed is the source of this confusion. Thus the same silence surrounds and can collapse two very different acts: consensual sex between two men and the often homophobic, misogynistic, and brutalizing crime of rape by one man against another.²⁷

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What is curious about Hopkins's depiction is that Maxwell identifies cross-racially, with the Black victim of this rape, not the white perpetrator. Significantly, his own mental and physical integrity seems threatened by the specter of this sexual violence between men. Maxwell responds to the scene with an embodied sympathy, becoming faint and “delirious.” This moment marks a corresponding disorder and disruption in Hopkins's text. As if the very unspeakability of the rape will result in its unbelievability, Hopkins herself steps into the text to address the reader directly: “Unhappily we tell no tale of fiction,” she insists (385). On the one hand, Hopkins's appeal to “decency and humanity” as the reason for her elliptical description of the violence establishes the authority of her narrative voice. Clearly asserting her privileged knowledge of “the shameful outrage,” she ostensibly “protects” her reader from the explicit facts of what, according to middle-class sexual ideologies of the period, any respectable reader should *not* know. On the other hand, Hopkins follows this crisis with a critique of organized religion: these “unspeakable” horrors would not occur, she writes, “if Christianity, Mohammedanism, or even Buddhism, did exercise the gentle and humanizing influence that is claimed for them” (385). With this gesture Hopkins abdicates responsibility for the presence of the “shameful outrage” in her text. According to her logic, if organized religion cannot prevent this violence, then Hopkins herself, in an effort to report the truth, cannot be held responsible for its eruption in her text. She invokes the demands of realism to justify her reference to sodomy; at the same time, she removes herself as a cause of its presence, since she is telling “no tale of fiction.”²⁸

If Hopkins simultaneously foregrounds the narrative rupture while avoiding an actual description of male rape in this scene, she also seems intent on making a distinction between male-male sexual violence and male homoeroticism. The physical and mental delirium resulting from Maxwell's exposure to the scene of male rape becomes the narrative catalyst for the invention of Allen Pinks, who seems to answer Hopkins's call for “a religion that will give the people individually and practically an impetus to humane and unselfish dealing with each other” (385). As is discussed earlier, this “humane and unselfish dealing” takes on an undeniably homoerotic cast in subsequent scenes.

While both Pinks and Maxwell actively participate in eroticizing each other, it is important to note that the figure of Pinks, rather than that of Maxwell, resonates with contemporary understandings of non-normative sexuality and gender. In the context of turn-of-the-twentieth-century notions of masculinity and sexuality, as George Chauncey has

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shown, although two men might desire each other, only the feminized partner would be considered “abnormal” or “deviant.”²⁹ Thus, especially given Pinks’s ostensibly subordinate position within hierarchies of race and age, Maxwell’s desire for Pinks could exist well within the range of expected behavior for “normal” men. Pinks/Winona, however, resembles one of the “intermediate types” that Hopkins’s contemporaries, such as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and others, attempted to classify in studies of inversion. Conceived of as a man’s soul trapped in a woman’s body (and vice versa), the figure of the invert represented a perceived mismatch between desire and the body. Later, this model saw a shift in emphasis toward a notion of sexual orientation, articulated as one’s sexual object of choice rather than one’s gender identity. Hopkins’s portrayal of Pinks resonates with the earlier model of the “invert,” whose gender identity was thought to be somewhere between male and female. Pinks is a figure with both conventionally masculine and feminine characteristics: s/he is “the prettiest specimen of boyhood,” with a voice “soft and low as a woman’s.”

What makes Hopkins’s text unusual is that she does not dismiss Winona’s impersonation of Allen Pinks as a temporary, superficial flirtation with inversion and homoeroticism, as one might expect in a story of gender or racial disguise, where the exposure of the “true” identity of a character usually signals a return to the established social order of a fictional world. According to these conventions, one would expect the unveiling of Allen Pinks as Winona to resolve the tensions between male/female, Black/white. Yet, for Winona, exposure inaugurates not a resolution and reversion to a previous stable identity but rather a transformation and a source of new disturbance. After securing Maxwell’s escape, Winona herself now experiences a sense of imprisonment outside the walls of the prison. She admits that she had rested more comfortably within her blackface and transvestite *disguise* than in the boundaries of her own female and biracial body. Although the rescue party exhales a general sigh of relief over Maxwell’s escape, Winona feels a distinct sense of discomfort: “Winona was silent and constrained in manner. For the first time since she had adopted her strange dress she felt a wave of self-consciousness that rendered her ashamed” (396). Neither the cross-dressing nor the blackface itself produces Winona’s sense of shame. Rather, her *exposure* deflates her sense of self-worth:

During her weeks of unselfish devotion when she had played the role of the boy nurse so successfully, she had been purely and proudly glad. Now, little by little, a gulf had opened be-

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tween [herself and Maxwell] which to her unsophisticated mind could not be bridged. There lay the misery of the present time—she was nothing to him. . . . Fate had fixed impassable chasms of race and caste between them. (404–5)

In this passage, Hopkins suggests that the persona of Allen Pinks represents a more accurate rendering of Winona’s subjectivity. Her embodiment as the dark-skinned “boy nurse” gives her license to take a more active role in her own desire for Maxwell. The double layering of black-face and cross-dressing erases the problematic position of Winona’s body; paradoxically, without her disguise, she becomes invisible to Maxwell as a subject or object of desire. She now faces “impassable chasms of race and caste,” seemingly unshakable prohibitions against respectable love between a white man and mulatta woman.

Importantly, unlike the other instances of African American women’s cross-gender impersonation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Winona wears her disguise not in order to escape capture but rather to enter an all-male space. This space is not only that of the literal prison but also that of the Western adventure, a literary genre that conventionally has no position for an active female character, much less the figure of the mulatta.³⁰ Through her disguise, then, Winona is able to escape from the narrative expectations attached to the figure of the mulatta heroine by entering temporarily into the role of the Western hero, or at least his (often racialized) male sidekick. Here Hopkins’s text reveals that interracial homoeroticism is at the center of this male-centered genre of popular fiction. In fact, it seems more desirable and sanctioned than interracial heterosexuality. Whereas erotic intimacy between a white man (Maxwell) and a younger Black “man” (Pinks) is possible within the supposedly all-male space of the prison, sexual desire between a white man and a younger biracial woman remains culturally forbidden, at least within constructions of race and gender in the United States.

In the final scenes of the novel, however, Hopkins constructs a utopian revision of the legal system, which allows her to refuse and defy the conventions that construct interracial sexuality as inevitably tragic. Back in Canada, Winona and Maxwell are presented with documents—her parents’ marriage license and a birth certificate—that prove that she is the legitimate daughter of White Eagle and thus the heir to the Carlingford estate. This proof of the legal interracial marriage of her parents in Canada provides Winona with a legitimate claim to both Black and white identity and to the literal inheritance of her father’s

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property, both of which now entitle her by law to her desire for Maxwell. Yet Hopkins seems to be less than enthusiastic about using the marriage of Winona and Maxwell as a resolution to the novel. In fact, with decided indifference, she renders their marriage completely predictable and unproblematic:

They made no plans for the future. What necessity was there of making plans for the future? They knew what the future would be. They loved each other; they would marry sooner or later, after they reached England, with the sanction of her grandfather, old Lord George; that was certain. American caste prejudice could not touch them in their home beyond the sea. (435)

Hopkins's tone here is remarkable for its lack of urgency, its utter nonchalance after Winona's previous frustrations about "the impassable chasms" that seemed to separate her permanently from Maxwell.

In the two central episodes within the prison in *Winona*—first, the "shameful outrage" against a Black prisoner by a white guard; and second, the homoerotic fascination between Allen Pinks and Maxwell—Hopkins attempts to untangle conflicting contemporary representations of race and sexuality. By staging a scene of the unspeakable "shameful outrage," Hopkins insists on a distinction between male-male rape, depicted as a means of racial and sexual terror, and homoeroticism, depicted as a calming and tender exchange. Winona's retrospective realization that she is more comfortable as Pinks, along with Hopkins's deferral of her marriage to Maxwell, suggest that Hopkins saw the emergence of new sexual subjectivities as a potential site for generating new narrative conventions. As part of her project to disrupt conventional representations of Black womanhood and racialized desire, Hopkins uses Winona's blackface and transvestism to figure new possibilities for movement across lines of race and gender.

NOTES

1. See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 159–68.
2. On Shirley Temple, see James Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, ed. Colin MacCabe and Cornel West (New York: Routledge, 1994), 47–66; and Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* New Expanded Edition (New York: Continuum, 1994), 45–52.

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3. Other examples include Flip Wilson as "Geraldine," Martin Lawrence as "SheNayNay," and Lady Chablis in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

4. In her discussion of female masculinity, Judith Halberstam has noted that "mainstream definitions of male masculinity as nonperformative" account for the relative absence of a tradition of lesbian drag. See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 234–35. Such models of masculinity as nonperformative have also shaped African American women's access to gender-crossing impersonation.

5. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Palmetto-Leaves* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), 287, 300–301.

6. On racialized constructions of womanhood in the nineteenth century, see Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20–39. On the ways that definitions of middle-class white womanhood depended on the exclusion of "other women" in a British context, see Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832–1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

7. This tradition continued in the twentieth century, in fiction such as Charles Chesnutt's *House Behind the Cedars*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, and Fannie Hurst's *Imitation of Life* and in films such as *Pinky* and *Imitation of Life*.

8. Judith Berzon, *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 62.

9. Werner Sollors, "'Never Was Born': The Mulatto, An American Tragedy?" *Massachusetts Review* 27 (summer 1986): 302.

10. Berzon, *Neither White nor Black*, 74.

11. Mary Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 139–40. In a discussion of the mulatto figure in American race melodrama, Susan Gillman concurs that in the conventions of the tragic mulatto tale, the protagonist is most often a woman; see Susan Gillman, "The Mulatto, Tragic or Triumphant? The Nineteenth-Century American Race Melodrama," in Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 221–43.

12. William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860; reprint, Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969), 35, 60. For further discussion of this text, see Ellen M. Weinauer, "'A Most Respectable Looking Gentleman': Passing, Possession, and Transgression in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*," in Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 37–56.

13. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly* (1852; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1987), 545.

14. Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (1861; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 112–13.

15. Jacobs, *Incidents*, 111, 113.

16. Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1987), 64. All further references to this edition will be made parenthetically within the text.

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17. Houston Baker's discussion of "phaneric" and "cryptic" masks is useful for understanding this distinction. "Cryptic" masks are used for self-disguise, concealing the identity of the performer, while "phaneric" masks offer an instrument for self-display, expressing more fully the "true" identity of the performer. See Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 51–52.

18. Pauline E. Hopkins, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*, in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, intro. Hazel V. Carby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 287–437; first published in *Colored American Magazine* 5 (May–Oct. 1902). Subsequent references to the Oxford edition will be made parenthetically within the text.

19. After 1904, Hopkins continued to publish her writing, but on a much smaller scale, and she eventually returned to her job as a stenographer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she worked until her death in 1930. For further discussion of the history of the *Colored American Magazine*, see Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 121–27. On Hopkins, see also Ann Allen Shockley, "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: A Biographical Excursion Into Obscurity," *Phylon* 33 (spring 1972): 22–26.

20. For a brief discussion of the gendered implications of the generic shift from the domestic novel to the Western in the nineteenth century, see Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 38–45.

21. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1980). On the invention of the classification of heterosexuality, see Jonathan Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality," *Socialist Review* 20 (1990): 17–34.

22. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:43.

23. Elizabeth Ammons, "Afterword: Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-first Century" in John Cullen Gruesser, ed., *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 217–18.

24. Deborah McDowell, introduction to Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), ix–xxxv.

25. As Jonathan Goldberg notes, "sodomy is, as a sexual act, anything that threatens alliance—any sexual act, that is, that does not promote the aim of married procreative sex (anal intercourse, fellatio, masturbation, bestiality—any of these may fall under the label of sodomy in various early legal codifications and learned discourses)." See Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodomities: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 19.

26. The use of sodomy as a form of racial and sexual domination figures powerfully in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (New York: New American Library, 1987), in which Paul D remembers white male guards forcing Black prisoners to perform oral sex at gunpoint (107–8). Thanks to Kimberly Wallace-Sanders for reminding me of the ways Morrison's text echoes the scene in *Winona*.

27. Through the assumption that such acts of rape feminize (and therefore degrade) their victims, they participate in a misogynist logic. For further discussion of anal rape and homophobia, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 225, n. 6.

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28. Hopkins’s strategy is similar to the intricate interweaving of authorial power and knowledge that D. A. Miller discusses in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2–5: “‘Poor Dorothea,’ ‘poor Lydgate,’ ‘poor Rosamond,’ the narrator of *Middlemarch* frequently exclaims, and the lament is credible only in an arrangement that keeps the function of narration separate from the causalities operating in the narrative. The *knowledge* commanded in omniscient narration is thus opposed to the *power* that inheres in the circumstances of the novelistic world” [italics in original].

29. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 120–21.

30. For a discussion of Hopkins’s use of popular-fiction genres in her serialized novels, see Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 145–62; and Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine’s Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 195–96.