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“In the Tangled Lily-bed”: Rhizomatic Textuality and Rooted Cosmopolitanism in Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*

Of One Blood—“one of the earliest known fictional accounts of the [African] continent by a black American writer” (Gruesser 40)—tells the story of the hidden city of Telassar, located in today’s Sudan, awaiting “the coming of [the] king who shall restore to the Ethiopian race its ancient glory” (Hopkins, *Of One Blood* 547). It is sought by a group of Anglo-American explorers, motivated by their desire for “a few dollars and fresh information” (584). Should they be successful, their discovery is expected to “establish the primal existence of the Negro as the most ancient source of all that [people] value in modern life, even antedating Egypt” (520). In the novel, Hopkins recasts the ideology of a glorious African past, a central theme of black nationalism dating back to the antebellum days. At first sight such a narrative can be easily categorized as an expression of the resistant nationalism of the oppressed, widely criticized by postcolonial critics for its reinscription of ethnic authenticity and racial essentialism, with their disturbing discriminatory underpinnings. Nevertheless, I will show here that Hopkins’s popular magazine novel manages to transcend the regressive celebration of an authentic past and of pure origins, and can be read instead as an example of rhizomatic textuality or “minor literature,” which according to Deleuze and Guattari, “produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism” (*Kafka* 17). In its portrayal of an interracial cast of characters and the multicultural hidden Ethiopian city, *Of One Blood* imagines a new community, a literary figuration of Mitchell Cohen’s notion of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” which both recognizes difference and simultaneously conceptualizes multicultural exchange and transnationality. In contrast to both multiculturalist particularism and humanist universalism, it “accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and ... rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground” (483).⁶ Analogously, as Susan Gillman puts it, Hopkins “constructs a transculturated Africa, ... inclusive of both contemporary United States and the colonial world as well as of a diasporic, Pan-African future, itself contingent on colonial incursions in present-day Africa” (53). Such an enunciation from a black writer was especially significant in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Jim Crow US, a period referred to as the ‘nadir’ or ‘a second slavery’⁷ since, as Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo argues in her *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness*

⁶ For a discussion of Hopkins’s engagement with transnationalism, anti-imperialism, and Marxism in her novel *Winona* and journalistic writings, see O’Brien. For a discussion of anti-imperialism in her story, “Talma Gordon,” see Carby, *Reconstructing*.

⁷ See, for example, Sundquist 228.

and *Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* “the ideology of slavery also discouraged, sought to destroy, and was weakened by the cosmopolitanism of slaves and others of African descent” (134). Thus Hopkins—as other influential black writers and activists examined by Nwankwo—strategically puts the discourse of cosmopolitanism to emancipatory uses.

Postcolonial and poststructuralist criticism abounds with warnings against the celebrations of imaginary glorious pasts by the colonized. As Gayatri Spivak argues, “a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 87). Analogously, Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, poses a challenge to “the originary Past,” which authenticates, homogenizes, and thus helps solidify nationalist identity, and contends that “hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable” (55). As Philip Leonard’s analysis of a new cosmopolitanism in post-structuralist discourse demonstrates, so too Deleuze and Guattari frequently express concerns similar to postcolonial critics and state that “a return to a domesticated topology, to an Oedipalized motherland that is inhabited by virile sons” is a myopic melancholia and “sedentary nostalgia” (66). As they conclude in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “It is certainly not enough to travel to escape phantasy, and it is certainly not by invoking a past, real or mythical, that one avoids racism” (379).

Long before postcolonial criticism warned against fantasies of lost origins, configurations of ancient African glory had interpolated African American culture in multivalent ways, from jazzy Harlem Renaissance primitivism to the Black Arts Movement’s nationalist radicalism. Most notably, they were central for the thought of Marcus Garvey, who argued that “All the original Pharoahs [sic] were Black. ... The Sphinx, in Egypt, which has stood through the millenniums, has black features. There is [sic] good grounds for saying that civilization started in Africa and passed from and through Northern Africa into Southern Europe, from which the Greeks and Romans and the people of Asia Minor made good copies” (13). Both Garvey’s ideas and Hopkins’s *Of One Blood* are indebted to the appropriation of Egyptology and the papers on hieroglyphics by Martin Delany, a mid-nineteenth-century black abolitionist and nationalist thinker.⁸ Written five decades after Delany’s works, Hopkins’s novel clearly enters into a dialogue with the same authors, works, and ideas as Delany’s. Gillman and Mario H. Beatty, in their analyses of both Hopkins’s and Delany’s writings, find that both these African American writers and activists drew on the newly founded science of Egyptology and strategically used its growing popularity in the US. More specifically, both undermined the ideas that dominated the ethnology emergent in the 1840s. According to its champions, George R. Gliddon and Samuel Morton, “[t]he

⁸ As John Gruesser argues, Hopkins is more widely “versed in Africa’s past,” and she refers to a number of classical accounts of Africa apart from Delany’s work, including Herodotus and Diodorus (34–35).

valley of the Nile, both in Egypt and in Nubia, was originally peopled by a branch of the Caucasian race” (Morton 65–66). Delany argued against this thesis, pointing out “the proximity of Ethiopia and Egypt in customs” and “their once unity of national interests” (42). As Beatty shows, “Delany critiqued one of the core theses of Gliddon’s work” and for Delany “echoes of the ancestral past were reintegrated into present historical understandings and contexts to provide the necessary foundation for the creativity and ingenuity that would ‘regenerate the African race’ ” (91). In the same vein, Gillman demonstrates that Hopkins’s novel argues for the doctrine of monogeny and thus counters Gliddon’s and Morton’s widely recognized theory of polygeny (54–55). Hopkins’s characters go to Africa to “add to ... ethnological knowledge” (521) and “establish the primal existence of the Negro as the most ancient source of all that [people] value in modern life, even antedating Egypt” (520).⁹

Nevertheless, as Gillman argues in her analysis of the ambivalent significance of “blood” in the novel,¹⁰ “Hopkins’s Ethiopianism is ... not simply an elite black intellectual tradition combining the doctrine of uplift ... with the theme of ancient African cultural retentions and return” (53). Her syncretic and deeply critical vision does not offer clear binaries, easy solutions, or neat closures. Thus, it stands apart from the myopic and regressive mythology of Garvey, and avoids the nostalgia for the authenticating, homogenizing, originary past criticized by Spivak, Bhabha, Deleuze, and Guattari among others. *Of One Blood* constructs a paradoxical vision that celebrates the Ethiopian influence spread “throughout Europe, Asia and Africa” (531) and links it with North America, emphasizing the interconnectedness of different locations, cultures, and communities. Hopkins cites the biblical quote used by Booker T. Washington in his Atlanta speech a few years earlier: “The laws of changeless justice bind / Oppressor with oppressed; / And close as sin and suffering joined / We march to Fate abreast” (607), but she gives a much more radical, ambivalent, and critical edge to it. I will demonstrate how the rhizomatic heterogeneity and aporetic ambivalence of the novel are figured in the multiracial bodies of its protagonists and in the cultural hybridity of the hidden city of Telassar.

1 “Yes, Honey, All of One Blood”: Hopkins’s Multivalent Races

Hopkins opens her novel in “highly-cultured New England” (454) among the select body of Harvard students as well as aristocratic Boston and Southern families, auto-

⁹ For a comparative reading of Hopkins and Delany, see Reid.

¹⁰ For an analysis of “blood” in the novel in the context of the 1896 U.S Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, see Gruesser (36–37).

matically assumed to be white. In such a context, she recasts the triangular melodramatic formula of the hero, his false friend villain, and the woman they both love. The Manichean opposition is introduced at the very opening, when the Harvard medical student Reuel, a "genius in ... scientific studies" (444), is contrasted with his colleague Aubrey, whose features do not "inspire confidence" but "engender doubt" (446–47). This contrastive introduction encourages the reader to read their physical appearance as accordingly polar. Reuel, "blessed ... with superior physical endowments," athletic, tall, strong with a "vast breadth of shoulder," is marked with an "abundance of black hair," "thick and smooth," "broad nostrils," "large mouth," and olive, almost sallow, complexion. For any reader familiar with nineteenth-century mulatto fiction, these bodily markings, together with a lack of relatives and no information regarding his origins, indicate that Reuel's eponymous "hidden self" is multiracial. The novel explicitly points to his racial ambiguity: "it was rumored at first that he was of Italian birth, then they 'guessed' he was a Japanese" (444), whereas his friend addresses him as an "inhospitable Turk" (446). The reader's suspicions are confirmed at first by implicit comments about his "secret" and then by a more explicit statement regarding his "origins" and "the infernal prejudice" that "closes the door of hope and opportunity" (480, 494). Reuel's thinly veiled mulatto identity is clearly contrasted with Aubrey's "beautiful face of a Greek God" (446). Interestingly, Hopkins's narrative gaze appreciates the bodily appeal of men even more frequently than of women, and the reader gets a closer look at Aubrey: "the beauty of his fair hair and blue eyes was never more marked as he stood there in the gleam of the fire and the soft candle light" (455). Hyperbolically, "he was a sight for gods and men" (504). By juxtaposing Reuel's "one drop of black blood" and Aubrey's visibly pure fairness, Hopkins seemingly underlines the melodramatic contrast between the black hero and the white villain.

This binary opposition is embodied in the object of their affections, racially ambivalent Dianthe Lusk with her "golden" "chestnut hair," "large, bright, and dark" "soft brown eyes" and creamy complexion (445, 453, 461). As member of the Fisk Jubilee singers, she is explicitly introduced as black, although the multiracial character of the group is pointed out by Harvard students: "one or two [are] as white as we"; "they range ... from alabaster to ebony" (451). Her magnetic appeal, emphasized by her name, suggesting a combination of "dusk" and "lust," makes her ideally fit the mulatto heroine, "distinguished for [her] fascinating beauty" (Brown 46), whose presence in African American fiction dates back to William Wells Brown's *Clotel; Or, the President's Daughter* (1853). For men, Dianthe "had the glory of heaven in her voice, and in her face the fatal beauty of man's terrible sins" (488), and even women "surrendered unconditionally to the charm of the beautiful stranger, drawn by an irresistible bond of sympathy" (489). Moreover, although the melodramatic aesthetics of the novel suggest from the opening pages that the two male protagonists will compete for Dianthe's love, Hopkins invests the homosocial relationship between Reuel and Aubrey with a deep intimacy, bordering on erotic desire. Reuel feels affection, worship, and dog-like devotion for his friend (447); and the "Greek God" in turn

truly admires him (473) and expresses his affection in gestures such as "a light caressing hand upon the other's shoulder" (471). When disclosing to Reuel that he knows his secret identity, "his eyes [look] full into his," and "their hands [meet] in a close clasp" (480). Thus, the novel highlights the intimate bonds among the three protagonists and strange "magnetism" of Reuel and Dianthe.

Despite the presence of this intimate male friendship, the opening chapters construct a seemingly clear-cut triangle of the professional mulatto, the beautiful mulatta, and the white villain, and the reader, even one not well-versed in the erotics of politics typical for fin-de-siècle mulatta melodrama (cf. Pochmara 165–170), expects a mulatto marriage at the novel's closure. Hopkins's novel, however, is not simply another example of poetic justice and the black erotics of politics, and its neatly constructed melodramatic oppositions are radically disrupted. Against the Victorian expectations of narrative development and closure (Baym 40–42; DuPlessis 4), Dianthe marries Reuel in the first part of the novel, and they are separated by an expedition to Africa, in which he decides to take part. Reuel leaves her under Aubrey's protection, declaring that "I intrust her to you as I would intrust her to my brother," and Aubrey responds that he "will have her with [them] always like a dear sister" (497). The reader, aware of Aubrey's evil intentions, reads the passage as deeply ridden with tragic irony and a sign of Reuel's shortsightedness. Towards the end of the text, Reuel is informed that Dianthe has died, while Dianthe is convinced that Reuel is dead, and the villain Aubrey uses his mesmeric powers to convince her to marry him. However, instead of the expected hero's return and the rescue of the damsel in distress, the reader learns that "Dianthe Lusk is [Reuel's] own sister, [and] the half-sister of Aubrey Livingston, who is [Reuel's] half-brother" (593). This revelation reverses the meaning of the previously declared fraternity among Reuel, Dianthe, and Aubrey. Rather than dramatically ironic or myopic, Reuel's statement becomes visionary. The relationship turns out to be literally true and thus the utterance possibly reveals Reuel's mystic prophetic powers. Introduced as dramatic opposites, the mulatto hero and the white villain turn out to be multiracial brothers.

The scene of revelation forces a rereading not only of the short conversation before Reuel's departure, but of the whole romantic narrative. What the reader, in following both the African and North American episodes through the fragmentary poetics of the texts, regards at first as a *bigamous* and *miscegenous* union between Dianthe and Aubrey, turns out to be in fact an *incestuous* relationship, just like her seemingly *legitimate* and *intraracial* marriage with Reuel.¹¹ All three turn out to be the children of white doctor Livingston and mystic mulatta Mira. On top of that, the information is delivered by a villainous, visibly black servant, who is referred to as their "foster brother" (593). With this scene, Hopkins adds a completely different meaning to her

11 For a detailed discussion of incest, monogenesis, and endogamy in the novel, see Shawn Salvant's "Pauline Hopkins and the End of Incest" (2008).

title “of one blood”: apart from signifying human unity, it also stands for the horrors of sexual exploitation during slavery. From Reuel’s outraged male perspective, it is “the accumulation of years of foulest wrongs heaped upon the innocent and defenceless women of a race” (594). His view is complemented by the more stoic words of his grandmother: “Dede things jes’ got to happen in slavery” (605). Making the private public and thus politicizing the family triangle is the hallmark of a melodrama’s work. Yet, in *Of One Blood*, the Freudian family romance is not only politicized by its revelation of forced amalgamation and historical oppression of the black community, but it is also twisted and intensified. The dominance of sibling rivalry both challenges the traditional patriarchal priority of the Oedipal triangle and takes the literal form of multiple incestuous relationships and intimacies.

The revelation of the miscegenous and incestuous interconnectedness of the three protagonists is not the only narrative excess the novel has in store for its readers. The identity of the protagonists is complicated by the way the narrative links the North American part and North American past with their African equivalents. It turns out that Mira is not a just another fascinating mulatta; her charm is represented as closely related to mystic magnetism.¹² Her supernatural appearances episodically intersect the text, although she remains in a ghostly, enigmatic, and undetermined realm. Even though the narrative uncovers the lost city and the grandmother of the family, it does not follow Mira’s fate after she is sold down the river and separated from her three children. Despite this absence, she is one of the driving forces as a seer and protector in the narrative. When telling a “ghost story,” Aubrey remembers that his father, who was “deeply interested in the science of medicine” and “the line of mesmeric phenomena,” would throw their maid Mira “into a trance-state,” and in such a state she once predicted the tragic fates of Southern aristocrats after the Civil War (485–487). Two chapters later, a ghostly voice joins Dianthe’s performance of “Go Down, Moses”: “A weird contralto, veiled as it were, rising and falling upon every wave of [Dianthe’s] great soprano” reaches the audience “as from some strange distance” (503). In another mystical and “strange occurrence,” Mira visits Dianthe and underlines the biblical quotation “For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed” (506), which aptly expresses the novel’s melodramatic drive to revelation and foreshadows both hope and horror connected with the text’s hidden secrets. In her next appearance, the “shadowy” but “shining apparition,” “by mesmeric forces,” helps Reuel read with “his spiritual eyes” Aubrey’s letter, which reveals his evil conspiracy (522–523). Mira’s magnetic powers are also mentioned by her mother, who delivers the final words of revelation in the text. She uses the word “shine” to express the magnetic attraction of Mira to Dr. Livingston. Ultimately, Aunt Hannah, who

12 Significantly, forced sexual relations in the novel are related to the power of Western mesmerism as studied and practiced by their white father and inherited by both Reuel and Aubrey. For an analysis of the relationship between rape and mesmerism, see Sanborn.

herself resembles "an African princess" (603), reveals that all Mira's children belong to the royal line, are marked with "de lotus-lily on each leetle breast," and are claimed "for de great Osiris" (606). In the light of the revelation regarding the characters' royal identity, the opinion regarding Dianthe at the beginning of the novel that "Probably the best blood of the country flows in the poor girl's veins" (490) gains a new meaning. The "best blood" in Dianthe's veins is overdetermined: it refers simultaneously to white Southern aristocracy¹³ and to Ethiopian royalty. Yet it is neither Dianthe nor the younger son Aubrey that are destined to restore the past glory of Ethiopia. In accordance with tradition, Reuel, as the primordial son, becomes the chosen "son of a fallen dynasty," and his "lotus lily" is "God's mark to prove [his] race and descent" (555). Thus, the novel veers from realist expectations by foregrounding supernatural elements and the hidden aristocratic past.

Significantly, the text's representations of two kinds of rhizomatic plant species—two kinds of lily—suggest the intermingling of two rivers, the Charles and the Nile, and their respective American and African locations. The lily is also a metonymy of the marriage and death that end the novel. It marks the union of Reuel and Candace, two royal descendants with the lotus-lily on their breasts, which takes place in Telassar on an island on the Nile. The poetically just suicide of Aubrey is analogously positioned in "the tangled lily-bed" "floating in the Charles river" (620). Thus, the rhizomatic water plant aptly symbolizes the ultimate interconnectedness of both the particular characters and "all races of men," made "of one blood" (621).

As the interconnectedness of the American water-lily and African lotus-lily suggests, Hopkins's text does not celebrate the pure origins of the siblings; on the contrary it explicitly reconciles the idea of the royal matrilineal line with history of migration into "strange lands and amalgamation with other races" (535). Reuel proves that "Truly, he is the King" in an African rite of passage, during which he confronts a lion and makes him withdraw with "his personal magnetism" and "wonderful and powerful eyes" (566). Reuel does admit that he has inherited "his mysticism and his occult powers" from Mira (558), but his talents can be also a hereditary trait from his white father's side: a continuation of Dr. Livingston's Western mesmerism. On one hand, the novel leads to Reuel's enthronement and his restoration of the ancient Ethiopian race; while on the other it repeatedly emphasizes his "Americanness": Reuel's "healthy American organization missed the march of progress attested by the sound of hammers on unfinished buildings" (526); "Reuel was devoid of fear" because "[t]he American man is familiar with many things because of the range of his experience" (544); and "with an American's practical common sense, [he] bewailed this waste of [Telassar]" (565). Thus, the novel constructs a paradoxical notion of a chosen race

13 For a different recasting of the "best blood" motif, see also Charles Chesnutt's "Her Virginia Mammy."

that is not pure, but deeply creolized, which is mirrored in the novel's representation of the lost city's hybrid culture, which will be analyzed in the last part of this chapter.

In the novel, racial hybridity is paired with intimacy and unity, which is suggested in the title phrase "of one blood." Hopkins imagines a whole spectrum of intimate bonds among the main and minor characters, from the shocking incest to interracial brotherhood. For example, the horror of the incestuous relationships of the protagonists, and the past of slavery it evokes, finds its narrative equivalent in the hopeful union of Reuel and Queen Candace. She reminds him "strongly of his beautiful Dianthe; in face, the resemblance [is] so striking that it [is] painful" (568). The physical similarity between the two women suggests that they are closely related, and it turns out that Candace is Dianthe's antecedent. When Dianthe dies her "royal ancestors—Candace, Semiramis, Dido, Solomon, and David" come to honor her (615). Thus, both of Reuel's unions are consanguineous marriages. As Shawn Salvant puts it, in the novel, "all roads lead to incest" (674). On the other end of the "of one blood" spectrum, there is the interracial, cross-class brotherhood of Reuel's true friend Charles, alias Adonis, and Aubrey's black helper Jim. During the trials of their African expedition, Charles, clasping "Jim's toil-hardened black hand," realizes that "Jim [is] his brother, the nearness of their desolation in this uncanny land [leaves] nothing but a feeling of brotherhood. He [feels] the truth of the words, 'Of one blood have I made all races of men' " (590). This relationship is especially important for the narrative as it introduces class differences and inter-class bonds into the novel's predominantly aristocratic cast of characters. Charles's feelings of fraternity for Jim in distant Meroe are mirrored by his sister's feelings for Dianthe in Boston and their secretly interracial, "intimate friendship" (490). "With the impulsiveness of youth, a wonderful friendship sprang up between the two; they rode, walked and shopped together; in short became inseparable companions" (489). Thus, Hopkins's text both surprises the reader with unexpected discoveries of kinship and represents intimate relationships among people who are not immediate blood relatives.

The novel attempts to reconcile human uniformity and ethnic particularity, a gesture central to the notion of rooted cosmopolitanism, which is visible in the way Hopkins uses multiple turn-of-the-century meanings of "race" and destabilizes its signification. In *Of One Blood*, implicit references to "a race [that] had been delivered" from degradation (454), or "a downtrodden race" of the US South (487) as well as explicitly "the Negro race" (494), "the race of Negroes" (536), and "the white race" (594), the latter three clearly referring to the black and white racial division of the Jim Crow US. This Manichean dichotomy is disrupted by Hopkins's references to the "American race," "a race bold and venturesome, who not fear if [it] can get a few more dollars and fresh information" (584), which as has been shown with reference to Reuel's Americanness refers to both whites and blacks. This ambiguity is commented upon in one of the novel's final intrusive comments: "He [God] has united the white race and the black race in this new continent. ... No man can draw the dividing line between the two races" (607). In analogous evocations of ethnological

and biblical discourse, the novel suggests the unity of all people: “of one blood have I made all races of men” (621), arguing for monogyny and a single human race. In her article “The Dark Races of the Twentieth Century” (1905), Hopkins analogously outlines “the theory of ‘one blood’ ”: “the principle that the human species is one cannot be disputed, and all men that inhabit the earth are but varieties of this one species” (191). Nevertheless, in *Of One Blood*, this human unity is, in turn, counterbalanced by descriptions of ethnic specificity. Again, linking biblical and anthropological discourses, the leader of the expedition delivers a lecture on Ethiopian origins, according to which:

four races were ethnically connected, being all descended from Ham; and the primitive people of Babylon were a subdivision of one of these races. ... Babylon and Egypt—Nimrod and Mizraim—both descendants of Ham—led the way. ... The Ethiopians ... manifested great superiority over all the nations ... and their name became illustrious throughout Europe, Asia and Africa. (531–532)

This outline seems to be parallel to the narrator’s commentary in *Contending Forces*, which postulates that in “the Easter continent” there are many “black races,” including Negro, Egyptian, and East Indian (198). In all these uses, racial and ethnic subdivisions seem to refer to nations. As Gillman has noted, Hopkins’s novel paradoxically promises “both racial distinctiveness, for the ‘Ethiopian race,’ and racial unity, for all ‘races’ ” (49). Thus, veering between human uniformity and ethnic particularity, Hopkins’s racial imaginarium—an example of creoleness as discussed by Leonard—“challeng[es] the fixity that is attributed to these categories in work on race and culture” and “point[s] to the overlapping and interlocking relationships that exist between space, subjectivity, and the social” (Leonard 137).

The complexity of these relationships is most visible when Hopkins adds, to the human, national, and ethnic meanings of race, yet another shade of meaning. In phrases such as “God’s mark” of “race and descent” (555) or “a race of African kings” (558), “race” seems to refer to a family line, which is also compatible with the narrative’s references to the biblical family line of Noah, Ham, and Cush, which is divided into distinctive races. The above-quoted commentary from *Contending Forces* also argues that “races are like families” (198). Hopkins’s diverse uses of the word “race”—from political to familial—complement the erotics of politics of the novel. In nineteenth-century romance and melodrama (Gillman 22), political ideas are allegorically represented by characters and the relationships between them. They harmonize unity and particularity with the intimacy suggested in the metaphor of the multiracial family. Nevertheless, this harmony is not ideal, but broken through the specters of the sexual violence of slavery in the United States and continuing colonial oppression in Africa.

Of One Blood is not the only novel by Hopkins vested with the issues of racial hybridity and new communities. *Hagar’s Daughter* and *Contending Forces* also imagine multiracial bodies. *Hagar’s Daughter* is set in the white upper-class society of Washington, and yet by the end of the narrative all three female protagonists turn out

to be of mixed race. The sentence from *Of One Blood* “who is clear enough in vision to decide who hath black blood and who hath it not? ... No man can draw the dividing line between the two races, for they are of one blood!” (607), aptly sums up the excessive double racial identities in the novel. *Contending Forces* recasts the theme of amalgamation in an even more interesting way. Significantly, the novel opens in Bermuda, which is, according to Stuart Hall, the “true diasporic” and “‘natural’ cosmopolitan” region, as the only indigenous characteristic of the Caribbean “is creolisation, the cultural mix of different elements.” This cultural hybridity in Hopkins’s novel is reimagined as interracial identity:

In many cases African blood had become diluted from amalgamation with the higher race, and many of these “colored” people became rich planters or business men (themselves owning slaves) through the favors heaped upon them by their white parents. This being the case, there might even have been a strain of African blood polluting the fair stream of Montfort’s vitality, or even his wife’s, which fact would not have caused him one instant’s uneasiness. (*Contending Forces* 22–23)

This reflection on the omnipresent multiraciality is the one and only information the reader gets regarding racial identities of the Montforts, the novel’s protagonists. Thus, Hopkins challenges the Manichean race politics of Jim Crow US and, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, constructs a text whose “subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 6). Following Kate Chopin’s “Desiree’s Baby” (1893) and foreshadowing Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif” (1983) and *Paradise* (1997), *Contending Forces* refuses to reveal the definite racial identities of its characters. Thus, through their melodramatic excess of indeterminate or hidden selves, Hopkins’s novels complicate the idea of Jim Crow racial divisions and construct multivalent multiracial bodies, families, and communities. Telassar, even though geographically distant from Washington and Bermuda and seemingly isolated from the contemporary reality, is an analogous racially hybrid space.

2 “The Enterpret of Trade between the North and South, between the East and West,” or the Impure Ancient Glory of Meroe

In the words of the Ethiopian leader Ai “that Ethiopia should stretch forth her hand unto Eternal Goodness, and that her glory should again dazzle the world” (548), Hopkins recasts the biblical quotation: “Princes shall come out of Egypt, [and] Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands to God” (Ps. 68:31). The use of the passage in African American political discourse dates back at least to Alexander Crummell’s speeches. In 1865, in a sermon about African American missionary activism deliv-

ered in Monrovia, Liberia, he claimed that “The Lord God shall hasten the number of His elect; and the tide of salvation, sweeping along, in one broad, mighty current, shall bear along the mighty masses of thy people to salvation and to glory; and then ‘Ethiopia,’ from the Mediterranean to the Cape, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian, shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God” (429). As though foreshadowing Reuel’s return to Meroe, in Crummell’s vision “[Ethiopia’s] exiled sons, [will] return to the bosom of [their] mother” (421). The African American minister outlines the notion of a chosen black diaspora, which largely parallels the black communities in Hopkins’s novels, “living on the mainland, in the States; or residing as inhabitants of the Antilles; or sojourning in the Republics of the South; or dwelling in the Brazilian Empire.” They are “[a] REMNANT ... widely scattered” and by these “‘remnants,’ ‘the called,’ the ‘chosen,’ the ‘elect;’ that God works the marvels of his providence” (421; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, Crummell’s narrative of uplift is not connected to any restoration of ancient wisdom—African republics are explicitly introduced in opposition to “ancient kingdoms” (425). His vision is rooted in the stark contrast between pagan African and Christian North America, a binary that was strategically used by abolitionist activists to argue for the human equality of all Christians. Crummell appropriates the Western missionary ideology and univocally forms a hierarchical opposition between the enlightened Christian diaspora and the heathen savages of Africa: “By contact with Anglo-Saxon culture and religion, they [the African slaves] have, themselves, been somewhat permeated and vitalized by the civilization and the Christian principles of their superiors” (439–440). Echoing the anxieties of respectability central to the uplift mythology, he warns that the black missionaries have to watch out for “[the natives’] vicious habits, and their corrupting influences” (427). Some fragments from *Of One Blood* clearly echo Crummell’s rhetoric. Telassar’s leader announces that “the prophesies of the Trinity shall in time be fulfilled. ... Ethiopia, too, is stretching forth her hand onto God, and He will fulfill her destiny. The tide of immigration shall set in the early days of the twentieth century, toward Africa’s shores, so long bound in the chains of barbarism and idolatry” (573). Her depictions of present day African cities highlight their “dilapidated abandon, dirt and picturesqueness” (512) or “ruin and decay” (545). Yet Hopkins’s vision, despite such residues of earlier Africanist discourses, is much less conservative, and her text destabilizes the contrast between enlightened African Americans and heathen Africans. The images of decay are not a result of backwardness, paganism, and isolation, but to the contrary they stem from exterior exploitation. When Hopkins introduces the “decayed” Tripoli, she points to the colonial intervention and refers to the region as “the natural road by which Africa has been attacked by many illustrious explorers” (512). The image of continuing imperial aggression also closes the novel, as Reuel is anxious about “the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land” (621). Thus *Of One Blood* is significantly more ambivalent about Western interventions in Africa than Crummell’s sermons.

Hopkins combines the biblical quotation with Egyptologist discourse and makes claims for “a prehistoric existence of magnificence” in Ethiopia (532). The British professor, leader of the expedition looking for “ancient records of Ethiopia’s greatness, accepts “the primal existence of the Negro as the most ancient source of all that you value in modern life, even antedating Egypt” (520) and states that “it is a fact that Egypt drew from Ethiopia all the arts, sciences and knowledge” (521). This Western scientific perspective is later confirmed by Reuel’s discovery of Telassar and its leader’s words: “from Ethiopia came all the arts and cunning inventions that make your modern glory. At our feet the mightiest nations have worshiped, paying homage to our kings, and all nations have sought the honor of alliance with our royal families because of our strength, grandeur, riches and wisdom” (560). Another authentication comes in the form of a “song of the past of Ethiopia” delivered as a “recitative” by a number of different voices of Telassar to celebrate the return of Reuel (556–559). Thus, the second part of the novel is interpolated by heteroglot repetitions of the glory, fall, and hope for the restoration of Ethiopia, among which Western archeology is not dominant but just one of several narratives.

The mythology of “Meroe, the greatest city of them all, pure-blooded Ethiopian” (556), of the “once magnificent race,” and of “the coming of [the] king who shall restore to the Ethiopian race its ancient glory” (547) evokes associations with “the originary Past” and “an Oedipalized motherland” criticized as a key element of a nearsighted nationalist strategy of resistance by postcolonial critics. Neither contemporary nor ancient Meroe, however, represents an unadulterated Ethiopian culture and racial authenticity. One of the first archeological remains that the explorers find are “traces of a highway” (527). The narrative—through both the voices of Western explorers and the Telassarians’ recitatives—repeatedly emphasizes Meroe’s central position as “the *enterpret* of trade between the North and South, between the East and West”: “Meroe must have held vast treasures. African caravans *poured* ivory, frankincense and gold into the city” (520; emphasis added). The novel repetitively uses the fluid metaphor of “pouring” to refer to the thriving exchange that took place in the ancient Meroitic kingdom: “into her lap caravans *poured* their treasures gathered from the North, South, East, and West. All Africa *poured* into this queenly city ivory, frankincense and gold” (556; emphasis added); “Into it *poured* the traffic of the world in gold, frankincense and ivory” (527; emphasis added). Thus, the boundaries of ancient Meroe were fluid and open to foreign goods. Moreover, the word “enterpret” suggests that it was a place of translation, a cosmopolitan location where cultures from all directions intermingled.

The exchange and resultant cultural syncretism is unmistakably visible in the descriptions of Meroe and Telassar, in which Hopkins links signifiers from numerous ancient civilizations of the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean. According to a letter from a Telassar’s Council member, the mines hold an assemblage of treasures from Egypt, Babylon, and Israel: among them are jewels “hidden by the priests of Osiris,” “the crown of the great Semiramis,” and “the black diamond of [Israeli]

Senechus’s crown” (528–529). Reuel eats from “golden dishes that resembled the specimens taken from ruined Pompeii,” but the remaining elements of the décor and his clothing are Oriental rather than Roman: he sleeps on “silken cushions,” “wears silken garments” and “a jeweled dagger literally encrusted with gems” (548–549). Accordingly, Telassarians are robed in “soft white drapery,” “Grecian in effect” (545), but they speak Arabic (546). Reuel is amazed by “the *combination* of Oriental and ancient luxury” of his room:

In the air was the perfume and luster of precious incense, the flash of azure and gold, the *mingling* of deep and delicate hues, the gorgeousness of waving plants in blossom and tall trees—palms, dates, orange, *mingled* with the gleaming statues that shone forth in brilliant contrast to dark foliage. The floor was paved with varied mosaic and *dotted here and there* with the skins of wild animals. (548; emphasis added)

The description again fuses diverse elements: traditionally Arabic incense and dates, Mediterranean oranges, and African “skins of wild animals.” Also, the fragment highlights the harmonious intermingling of these various cultural and natural objects. This syncretism goes beyond the level of commodities. When Ai demonstrates his prophetic and mesmeric powers, he claims that this is “an old secret, known to Ethiopia, Egypt, and Arabia centuries ago” (575), thus suggesting that caravans and highways also brought an exchange of knowledge.

This ancient openness is also upheld in modern Telassar, even though the remnant of ancient Meroitic kingdom is hidden and isolated, and only the select are allowed to enter. Reuel is surprised that the inhabitants of the city “hold communion with the world outside” (551). The leader Ai, apparently up-to-date with Western knowledge, proudly states that “in many things your modern world is yet in its infancy” (551). The hidden Ethiopian city, despite its advantages in some fields, is open to the contemporary Western knowledge. As Ai explains, the people who govern Telassar, “a Council of twenty-five Sages,” ... are educated and speak “two out-world languages” (561). Accordingly, as a king Reuel “spends his days in teaching his people all that he has learned in years of contact with modern culture” (621). As Kwame Anthony Appiah claims, “openness to the achievements of other civilizations” is a marker of rooted cosmopolitanism (33), and thus Telassar continues to be a cosmopolitan space despite its isolation. Hopkins’s emphasis on exchange and accessible knowledge is one of the ways in which the novel counterbalances its elitist focus on US and Ethiopian aristocrats, a residue of the imperial romance. The narrative points out that, in contrast to Egypt, where “A knowledge of [hieroglyphics] was confined to the priests, ... in Ethiopia they were understood by all, showing that even in that remote time and place learning and the arts had reached so high a state as to be diffused among the common people” (536).

Whether as a result of its ancient or modern openness, or both, the society of Telassar is visibly mixed-race. The Council member who joins Reuel’s expedition must be multiracial, as Charles states that in the US, people “would simply label [him] ‘Arab,

Turk, Malay, or Filipino' " (584). Ai and his companions are "tall, handsome, dark-visaged" (548), but they range "in complexion from a *creamy tint to purest ebony*; the long hair which fell upon their shoulders, varied in texture from soft, waving curls to the crispness of the most pronounced African type" (545; emphasis added). The narrative juxtaposes the racial creolisation of Telassar with the amalgamation in the US South. The description of Telassarians echo earlier-quoted comments of Harvard students on the looks of Jubilee singers, who "range ... from *alabaster to ebony*" and "one or two [are] as white as we" (451; emphasis added). This narrative coupling of two instances of interraciality—one resulting from a cultural openness and exchange and the other from oppression—enables Hopkins to both radically confront the US history of sexual exploitation and hopefully construct a vision of an open multiracial community of the future.

3 Hopkins's Nomadic Textuality

Deleuze and Guattari, when discussing "minor literature," i.e. texts created by the oppressed using the master's tools, specifically refer to examples of "what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language" (*Kafka* 16). Hopkins's novel fits neatly all the criteria they outline with surprising clarity. Not only does she use the dominant language, but also, as many critics have pointed out, she puts an array of dominant Western discourses—from the Bible, to ethnology, to archeology, to psychology—to her own political uses (Carby; Gillman). Secondly, according to Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature is politicized throughout and "the family triangle [in the text] connects to other [sociopolitical] triangles" (*Kafka* 17). In *Of One Blood*, all erotics are melodramatically politicized: Hopkins's use of race veers between the family and different political ethnic identities, and her characters' particularities represent more general historical phenomena. Finally, minor literature functions as a collective, revolutionary enunciation, which "produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism" and "express[es] another possible community" (17–18); and Hopkins's text imagines a heterogeneous and multiracial community of Ethiopia. Moreover, *Of One Blood* exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari discuss as rhizomatic writing in their much less lucid *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In rhizomatic textuality:

unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity triumphs in the subject; ... the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination, in an always supplementary dimension to that of its object; ... the book remains the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. (6)

Accordingly, Hopkins exposes the rhizomatic relatedness of multiple pasts and multiple geographical locations in her transnational narrative. In her evocations of ambivalent and overdetermined notions of race, Hopkins problematizes the dichot-

omy of human unity and ethnic specificity. Although formally quite remote from the examples of “cut-up” texts of Burroughs, Joyce’s words with “multiple roots,” and Nietzsche’s aphorisms cited by Deleuze and Guattari as models for rhizomatic textuality (5–6), *Of One Blood* is also fragmentary, or as Hazel Carby contends “episodic,” which largely stems from its original form of publication as magazine fiction released in installments (Introduction xxxvii). As Augusta Rohrbach argues, Hopkins’s choice of “serialized fiction” should not be dismissed as an aesthetic failure. To the contrary, it “evidences her belief in the manifold of nature, experience, and culture,” and “[h]er complicated plots—plots sometimes too elaborate to be considered anything other than a series of episodes—duplicate the complexities of identity and experience” (483). Rohrbach contends that Hopkins’s magazine novels engage in “literary ‘sampling’ ” and illustrate the “dynamic, chaotic and multiple” character of human experience, which, she adds, is in accordance with Deleuze and Guattari’s “theory of multiplicity” (483–484). Thus, the formal density and narrative excess of *Of One Blood* makes it an emergent rhizomatic book. This ur-text of African American fiction set in Africa becomes “all the more total for being fragmented” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 6).

Of One Blood’s rhizomatic nature is visible not only in its thematic evocations of cosmopolitan communities or in its structural fragmentation, but also in its symbolic imagery. As has been shown, the creeping rootstalk is a part of the pivotal sign in the novel—the lily. The African lotus-lily and the North American water lily, “the tangled lily-bed” (620), symbolically link both the two distant locales and the dispersed members of Hopkins’s transatlantic diaspora. This rhizomatic sign also is an apt metaphor of the “a multiplicity of roots and branches” central for Cohen’s rooted cosmopolitanism (483). Thus, despite its residues of both Afrocentric nostalgia and bourgeois missionary uplift ideology, *Of One Blood* offers a radical, cosmopolitan vision, which is neither blind to the past and present colonial oppression nor devoid of hope for a new cosmopolitan future.

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