

Solving the ‘Mystery’ of Blackness through African American  
Detective Fiction: Pauline Hopkins’ and Rudolph Fisher’s  
Intervention in a White Tradition

By  
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Submitted to the graduate degree program in English and the Graduate Faculty of the University  
of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Approved: May 5, 2017

## Abstract

This project investigates two early works of African American detective fiction, Pauline Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter* and Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies*, and the ways in which these writers intervene in a white-dominated tradition to expose constructions of race. As these writers work from and modify models of detective fiction, to use Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s term, they "signify" upon detective tropes to establish African American subjectivity and promote racial equality. Chapter 1 examines Fisher's appropriation and disruption of the Holmesian tradition, particularly through his use of multiple detectives (5), a liminal character in N'gana Frimbo, masking, and doubling to question racial categorization and Western systems of knowledge. Chapter 2 discusses Hopkins' text as a place of resistance for African American women, as well as its deviation from a mystery tradition that is strikingly similar to Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Hopkins employs doubling, "passing" characters, and a complex narrative to illuminate constructions of both race and gender. This project demonstrates Hopkins' and Fisher's texts ultimately challenge Western pre-conceptions of African Americans that historically relegate them to positions of inferiority, exposing systems of injustice, while simultaneously creating space for African American subjectivity.

Key terms: detective fiction, African American detective fiction, signification, Pauline Hopkins, Rudolph Fisher, mystery, race, twentieth century

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to committee members, Cheryl and Paul, for their support and feedback on this project, as well as elsewhere. Special thanks to my committee chair and adviser, Doreen. Your help and advice have pushed me to be a better scholar and writer. Finally, thank you to my friends and family, particularly my parents, Trent and Janell, for listening and always providing encouragement.

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## ***1 The Conjure-Man Dies: Questioning Race and African American Identity in the Detective Tradition***

The figure of the genius has historically defaulted in its embodiment to that of the white male (see Francis Galton), largely excluding women and people of color; the detective genius, capable of locating patterns and unsolvable mysteries, has largely been no exception to this rule. Key American writers Edgar Allan Poe's and Arthur Conan Doyle's creations of C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes have dominated the Western detective genre and provided a default for representations of white, heterosexual men and conservative value systems. The "white" tradition's roots in Western literature are concerned with maintaining patriarchal dominance through detective genius figures who employ scientific and deductive reasoning to solve the unsolvable. Both Poe and Doyle's detectives are white, male, educated, and use practical, deductive, scientific reasoning as their mode of genius. Sherlock Holmes, especially, refuses intuition or emotional intelligence in favor of professional, scientific intelligence.

As Stephen Soitos has noted, the African American detective literary tradition has combatted these representations of whiteness through signification upon the white detective tradition's tropes. By employing these tropes and modifying them, African American detective writers have crafted space for people of color in a tradition that largely excludes them. Stephen Soitos has noted that *The Conjure-Man Dies* recognizes competing systems that compose African American experience and intervenes in the white value system that typically describes African Americans as secondary and minor, putting these characters as the forefront. When black characters did appear in the white detective tradition, they were incidental, often employed in the background as servants, and depicted as racist tropes (Soitos x). In *The Blues Detective, A Study of African American Detective Fiction*, Stephen Soitos explores the tradition of the African

American detective as a subversive alternative to the Western (white) detective form. Soitos classifies four powerful black detective tropes that signify upon the white genre: double consciousness detection, “alteration of detective persona,” use of black vernacular, and hoodoo (27). While I will be applying these terms of signification to my own study of Rudolph Fisher and Pauline Hopkins, I will also be adding to this conversation with further investigation of Fisher and Hopkins’ use of these tropes to bring race and gender to the forefront of the detective story; here, in this chapter I will discuss Fisher’s intervention in a white tradition and signification upon Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. In addition, while Soitos identifies four detective figures within Fisher’s novel, I identify five- duo teams of Bubber Brown and Jinx Jenkins, Perry Dart and John Archer, and N’gana Frimbo.

While *The Conjure-Man Dies* employs many well-known detective tropes (bumbling detectives, an “unsolvable” crime, detective duos, etc.), Fisher also provides multiple ways of knowing that prove reliable at various times. The effects of this juxtaposition of intuition with scientific, deductive reasoning to question systems of knowledge and African American subjectivity in an African American community have been less studied. Scholars including Soitos and Emad Mirmotahari have also made references to Fisher’s use of detective tropes, but less so to the use of duo detectives; Fisher, for example takes the Poe/Conan Doyle trope of the duo detective and multiplies the number of detectives in his novel. By examining Fisher’s racially subversive use of intuition and African mysticism upon the tropes that figure in the Poe/Conan Doyle tradition specifically, I provide additional emphasis upon African American male subjectivity than previous study of *The Conjure-Man Dies*. In this chapter, I argue that Fisher’s text reflects a distinctly African American male subjectivity in its emphasis upon African American men and the Harlem community, while a separate chapter details Hopkins’

work and its concern with African American women's subjectivity and disruption of gender constructions.

Pauline Hopkins' serialized novel, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1900-1902), is the first work of serialized detective fiction written by an African American woman, while Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932) is the first detective novel written by an African American that contains an entire cast of black characters. Both these works make use of the detective tradition, signifying upon the genre's tropes and narrative devices as means of resistance to racial constructions and to establish African American subjectivity. I find that by investigating epistemological systems through crime cases, including juxtaposing science with intuition and hoodoo, these writers improvise on the detective tradition, Hopkins relying on Mark Twain and Fisher relying on Poe and Doyle as precedents. While both writers signify on a white, male detective tradition, they signify differently, a difference that I find is reflective of their particular placement in history and shifting expectations of African American literature, as well as differing concerns with gender.

While *Hagar's Daughter* holds women and gender prominent in its narrative, *The Conjure-Man Dies* is almost exclusively concerned with male characters in the communal environment of Harlem. In addition, Fisher's verbiage is much more reflective of Harlem Renaissance writers (his use of dialect, in particular.) However, the two texts both explore the effects of discrimination and racism, as well as question systems of knowledge and racial constructions. Both also resist dominant white culture and its expression in the African American detective genre through signification upon white detective tropes. I would add that *Hagar's Daughter* further complicates narrative by questioning gender constructions (as I will show in my second chapter).



Forming a narrative containing multiple detective characters, Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies* was critiqued by W.E.B. Du Bois for its portrayal of Harlem and its use of primitivism. As a proponent of the Talented Tenth ideal and the "New Negro" movement, critics such as Du Bois encouraged African American writers to craft narratives that depicted black characters with high aspirations: educated, morally upright, and talented middle-class characters, largely to combat racist tropes and stereotypes that dominated literature and white mainstream thought. *The Conjure-Man Dies*, through its rich descriptions of Harlem life and its inclusion of eccentric characters, including dialect-speaking, lower-class Harlemites and fortune teller/detective N'Gana Frimbo, presents a seedier underside to Harlem. For Du Bois, rather than demonstrating the potential for genius and upward mobility among the black community, dialect-speaking characters and depictions of the lower-class reinforced long-standing stereotypes. However, important literary figures such as Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, and Langston Hughes acclaimed Fisher's work, and *The Conjure-Man Dies* novel was so successful that Cullen and Bontemps adapted it for the stage; the play was also successful and toured, reaching 65,000 audience members in its Lafayette Theatre run alone (Bryant 231).

Langston Hughes found Fisher's works vital because of their realistic portrayals of Harlem life and the Harlem community, rather than a romanticization of the African American elite. In "The Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes writes, "Let Paul Robeson singing Water Boy, and Rudolph Fisher writing about the streets of Harlem ... cause the smug Negro middle class to turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimpse of their own beauty" (Hughes par. 14). Hughes' essay argues against establishment of the middle-class African American to the exclusion of others in the community in literature, calling for portrayal of dialect-speaking, urban, rural, and lower-class African Americans. His inclusion of Fisher as a

writer of Harlem's streets also illuminates the impact Fisher's works had on contemporary audiences and other Golden Age writers. Rather than conforming to expectations of white respectability, Fisher's works disrupt the white literary canon to explore intuition and rationalism, as well as conceptions of racial difference in Harlem. Specifically, *The Conjure-Man Dies* plays with the genre of detective fiction and detective tropes to investigate issues including science and religion and old and new tradition.

As Robert E. Crafton writes in his book, *The African American Experience in Crime Fiction*, historically, traditional detective fiction examines social values in its written context, amidst seemingly unexplained horror and gothic elements. However, the traditional detective story is almost always conservative, rule-based, and obsessed with maintaining hegemony.

Crafton writes:

the rift in the social order, the product of evil impulses and/or sociopathy- the act of a morally and psychologically disordered personality- [is] repaired by the operations of the (more than) rational detective. Order is restored, the forces of evil contained, (social) justice done (7-8).

Crime texts must solve and contain potential threats to the social order. As the highly rational, practical, and often genius detective investigates this social rift the heinous crime creates, he also must repair the rift as he closes the case. The white tradition's dominant detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes, expose the underbelly of crime, and are then responsible for containing and repairing the criminal's threat to the social hierarchy. Crime cannot be prevented, but, through the detective, capable of locating the threat when all others cannot, justice may be carried out. Fisher's work, however, points to race as the mystery, and racial prejudice as the narrative's crime, thus modifying the white tradition's typical structure. In addition, the story investigates competing systems of knowledge- intuition, education, science, and ancestralism. The African

American detective tradition, including Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies*, presents readers with a complex picture of African American experience in Harlem, intervening in the white value system that typically describes them as secondary and minor and exploring African American subjectivity.

African American detective fiction specifically attempts to describe and explore African American subjectivity and African American social values. Earlier twentieth-century writers such as Rudolph Fisher and Chester Himes set their detective fiction in the midst of the African-American community, allowing an investigation, not just of crime and morality, but also of racial constructions and systems of knowledge, including rational scientific deduction and intuition. In *The Conjure-Man Dies*, Fisher's setting of his detective fiction in the African American community of Harlem allows his work to be more visibly concerned with black identity. This community portrays the varied subjectivities within this community, as well as intra-ethnic tensions, and questions what it means to be black, locating the story's true "crime" as one of racism.

As Paula Woods has worked to recover the black mystery tradition in *Spooks, Spies, and Private Eyes*, it has become increasingly clear in recent scholarship that an African American detective genre does intervene in the Western tradition. Woods traces the publication of the genre pre-dating Rudolph Fisher, including works written by Jamaican writer W. Adolphe Roberts (1926) and Pauline E. Hopkins (1900). Woods notes the influence of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" for early African American writers, as well Arthur Conan Doyle's influence on the African American literary tradition (xiv). Woods finds that African American writers express anxieties about race and rebuttals to white society's prejudices and expectations of African Americans. By combining certain deductive reasoning techniques with contemporary

settings, writers such as Fisher address issues important at the time to African Americans, including “their relationship to their African ancestry, color prejudice, and superstition” (xv). Other Harlem Renaissance writers, including George Schuyler, crafted political thrillers that allowed them to explore African politics and the struggle for black equality both within and outside of the United States. This tradition has carried on, most notably with Chester Himes during the 1950s and 1960s, to expose and grapple with civil rights issues and urban violence. Woods explains that black mystery fiction continues to influence writers of color, especially Walter Mosely, and including writers outside of the genre, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, among many others. Black mystery fiction has thus had lasting influence, even as it morphs and impacts other genres of literature.

### *1.1 The Detectives Within and Outside the Tradition*

With inclusion of a debate between logic and intuition, *The Conjure-Man Dies* signifies on the white detective tradition and points to racial construction. Drawing attention to criminal deviance, the traditional detective recognizes societal anxieties, putting complex and competing narratives in conversation. In Crafton’s words, works of detective fiction “play out the debate...over Darwin and intelligent design, of the ends of law and justice, of the limits of empirical knowledge and logical systems versus the evidence of intuition and gut instinct” (11). These debates, of science versus spiritualism, systems of law versus actualized justice, limits of knowledge versus intuition, are often entangled in systems of corruption and intrigue that strike audience members to their core and force them to question those competing systems.

As a mystery, the plot of *The Conjure-Man Dies* is confusing and continually raises questions, from the start of the novel until its end. This frenzied series of would-be and intended murders, potential suspects, and unexpected turns of events allow Fisher to employ the detective

genre's tropes in order to focus the reader on issues of racial classification and systems of knowing. To provide context, I will give a brief summary of the text. Dr. John Archer serves as the novel's main protagonist, who is called to the scene of a crime that occurs across from his office and flat, by lower-class Harlemites Jinx and Bubber Brown. The crime appears to be the murder of self-styled "psychist," N'gana Frimbo, at his fortune telling table; the body is dead, and has been bludgeoned, a handkerchief pushed to the back of his throat. Harlem detective Perry Dart arrives to investigate and interrogate clients waiting for Frimbo at the time of the murder, and Dart then includes Archer as his consultant in the investigation. The two complete an exploration of the gothic building, including Frimbo's strange office and the morgue at the building's first floor. During the investigation, the murder victim's body disappears, and later, pieces of it emerge as Frimbo is seen by Bubber Brown and Jinx -burning the body in the basement's incinerator and contributing to continued suspicion of foreigner and African N'gana Frimbo. What ensues is a confusing series of events, in which N'gana Frimbo is identified as alive, and the murder victim is revealed to be Frimbo's assistant, called N'Ogo Frimbo. "Psychist" Frimbo begins his own investigation of the murder, believing himself to be the intended murder victim. In the novel, the supposedly dead become living, bodies go missing, suspects become detectives, and seemingly harmless characters are unmasked as dangerous threats.

The tradition of Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin contains genius detective figures who are isolated (with the exception of their detective duo partners), and I read N'gana Frimbo as one form of signification upon this isolated genius character. Recent works, by both white and black authors, carry out their detective work through what Crafton recognizes as chiefly two main sorts of detection: scientific and numeric (stemming from "Holmesian observation and

rationation”) or other-worldly and paranormal (stemming from the genre’s gothic roots) (9). I find that Frimbo’s employs both these modes of detection: scientific and numeric, as well as “other-worldly and paranormal,” as he uses deductive reasoning and intuition. The rooms of Frimbo’s establishment depict an air of isolation and mystery: the fortune-telling room’s walls are covered in black velvet drapes, including the ceiling, from which a chain bears a “single strange source of light...focused a horizontal beam upon a second chair...Clearly the person [Frimbo] who used the chair beneath the odd spotlight could remain in relative darkness while the occupant of the other chair was brightly illuminated” (6). While it makes sense that as a fortune-teller, Frimbo might desire to exude an air of mystery and to watch his clients while keeping himself elusive, this description also anticipates the hardboiled detective fiction that will follow, and it further locates Frimbo as a detective figure before he actively investigates his assistant’s murder/his own would-be murder. Like noir detective fiction, in which detectives interrogate suspects with a singular bulb focused on the suspect, Frimbo illuminates the faces of his individual clients. He performs his study from the safe retreat of a darkened room and hidden chair. Frimbo’s work as a “psychist” is also indicative of his desire to understand human psychology; essentially, Frimbo investigates his clients through study of their body language, clothes, and intuition. With the exception of intuition, Frimbo reads like a Holmesian figure: isolated and exceptionally smart in his deductions. However, the mixture of Western deduction and intuition sets Frimbo apart from Holmes or Dupin and allows Fisher’s text to signify on the white tradition’s genius detective figure.

In “black” Harlem, populated with African American migrants from the South, native Harlemites, and immigrants from the Caribbean, Fisher portrays a broad number of identities from the African diaspora. Still, within Harlem, N’gana Frimbo is set apart from native locals as

a fortune-teller, an oddity, and an Other; even his name, distinctly African-sounding, isolates him to locals as a product of Africa, rather than America. When detective Perry Dart and Dr. John Archer investigate Frimbo's home, Frimbo's African identity appears pronounced; Dart imagines Frimbo is West Indian, but Archer explains: "This sounds definitely African to me. Lots of them have that N'. The 'Frimbo' suggests it, too- mumbo- jumbo-sambo... Wonder why he chose an American college? Most of the chiefs' sons'll go to Oxford or bust. I know- this fellow is probably from Liberia or thereabouts. American influence-see?" (Fisher 27). This initial description of Archer's is dismissive of Frimbo's subjectivity, at the same time that it expresses intra-ethnic tensions within Harlem and casts Frimbo as an outsider of the African American community. Archer's musing is derogatory in its relegation of "Frimbo" as "mumbo-jumbo-sambo" and reminds the audience of minstrelsy. Archer calls attention to the blackface Sambo figure, and Frimbo's performance of blackness and whiteness is called into question. Frimbo's ancestry is mocked in its foreignness and blackness, and although at this time Archer knows nothing personally about Frimbo, he nonchalantly labels Frimbo as tribal, as one of the "chiefs' sons," but based on Frimbo's diploma from Harvard, Archer deduces Frimbo originates from a part of Africa occupied by Americans, rather than the British. Studying Frimbo's library, which contains philosophy texts with such titles as Tankard's *Determinism and Fatalism, A Critical Contrast*, Bostwick's *The Concept of Inevitability*, and Dassault's *The Science of History* with Frimbo's marginal notes, Archer says, "A native African, a Harvard graduate, a student of philosophy- and a sorcerer. There's something wrong with that picture" (27-28). As one of the novel's lead detectives, although an amateur, Archer signifies upon Holmes, taking in minor details about Frimbo's office and hobbies and rationalizing them to deduce something about the subject's character. What Archer observes here does not add up in his worldview or what he

thinks he knows about Africans and Westerners: the image of a native African who also graduates from Harvard as a student of philosophy but ends up fortune telling is illogical to Archer, and it is not only illogical but also “something wrong.” Frimbo could be a Harvard graduate and a student of philosophy or a native African and a sorcerer, but within Archer’s worldview and bank of knowledge, Frimbo cannot contain all of these identities; Frimbo cannot be both African and American, but must be either or neither. This refusal on Frimbo’s part to perform as African or American according to the stereotypes and rules Archer understands results in an ambiguous characterization of black identity: N’gana Frimbo is not quite African, but neither is he American.

Frimbo exemplifies duality and double consciousness, as he displays symbols of both blackness and whiteness. Stephen Soitos writes, “Black detectives use their own blackness to mask their true identities as detectives, connecting the trope of double consciousness to the trickster tradition” (18.) Fisher’s detective, Frimbo, masks his own detective work through his status as an alternating dead man and psychic black man, exemplifying double consciousness and the trickster motif. His duality is also reflective of Holmes’ duality and the white tradition of the detective genre. While Detective Dart and Dr. John Archer investigate Frimbo’s home further, they evaluate Frimbo’s belongings as Holmesian figures of the tradition do, noting minute details in the hopes that they may provide clues as to Frimbo’s identity and the reason for murder. The conjure-man’s house contains both symbols of Western education, as well as African ancestralism and mysticism. Frimbo’s apartments occupy the upper floors of a house that is described as “a little taller and gaunter than its fellows, so that the others appeared to shrink from it and huddle together in the shadow on either side,” dimly illuminated, and “about the place hovered an oppressive silence, as if those who entered here were warned beforehand not to speak



above a whisper” (Fisher 4). “Like a footnote,” the narrator tells us that one of the two first-floor windows displays the two establishments in the house, one for “Samuel Crouch, Undertaker” and one for “N. Frimbo, Psychist.” Frimbo’s chief occupation, then, is that of a “psychist,” although he holds a college degree. In addition, like the gothic elements contained in the white tradition of detective fiction, the crime scene is one in a dark, mysterious, and creepy home. Like Frimbo himself, his home and business are set apart from the rest of the Harlem community, reflective of his isolation and others’ suspicion of him, and like him, his home is read as strange, intimidating blackness.

As a liminal figure, Frimbo stands at a strange cross between the African American community in Harlem and his African roots. He is ambiguous, and both inside and outside the Harlem community. I read Frimbo as a queering figure, as well, one that troubles the hyper-masculinity exhibited in white works, such as Sherlock Holmes. Ironically, it is Frimbo’s affair with Martha Crouch, a married woman, that motivates the threats upon his life and subsequent murder. However, detective Perry Dart initially reads Frimbo as a gay man, based on his apartment decorations and organization. Early in the text, as Dart and Archer stand in Frimbo’s bedchamber, they note a complete absence of the feminine, “no suggestion of any feminine contact or influence; there was simply the atmosphere of an exceptionally well ordered, decided masculinity,” which strikes them as odd (Fisher 25). Archer describes the chamber as “a man’s”: “A man of means and definite ideas, good or bad- but definite. Too bare to be a woman’s room- look- the walls are stark naked. There aren’t any frills...and there isn’t any perfume.” (24). Dart’s response to Archer’s evaluation is to say, “I guess you’ve been in enough women’s rooms to know,” and Archer acknowledges that as a doctor, he has seen the most private part of people’s lives; he knows both how heterosexual women and men decorate and live in their

homes. What is conspicuous to Archer is that Frimbo's bedroom contains no photographs of women. Archer sees this complete absence as a sign of repression. He muses the lack of femininity is strategic, telling Dart, "May it not be deliberate- a wary suppression of evidence- the recourse of a lover of great experience and wisdom, who lets not his right hand know whom his left embraceth?...this over-absence of the feminine...it means something" (25). Archer is nearer to the truth here than the reader expects; by the novel's end, it is revealed Frimbo has indeed been having an affair with a married woman, and has carefully kept his quarters free of any sign of the relationship. Dart, however, reads this absence as "woman-hating," and he pushes the narrative that Frimbo is a closeted gay man in Harlem, further marginalized as a new immigrant and as a supposed homosexual man.

The rest of N'gana Frimbo's home proves a combination of African and Western influences. Frimbo's office contains medical and philosophical texts, but his halls are also decorated with African masks "gruesome black masks with hollow orbits...small, mis-shapen statuettes of near-human creatures, resembling embryos dried and blackened in the sun," swords, arrows, spear-heads, and a "murderous-looking club" made of "the lower half of a human femur, where the original bone had been severed, covered with a silver knob representing a human skull" (37-8). These African relics contribute to Dart and Archer's understanding of Frimbo's "blackness" and African nature. The masks terrify in their grotesqueness, and the statues and masks are black, not entirely human but uncanny. But, like Sherlock Holmes, Frimbo also has a scientific laboratory, capable of carrying out experiments and containing a chemical work-bench, beakers, flasks, and other scientific instruments. The laboratory also holds surgical instruments, specimen jars, and preserving fluids. When Archer picks up one of these jars, he realizes the jars contain male sex glands, as well as other biological specimens, but it is the male sex glands that

astonish Archer and contribute to his reading of Frimbo as a gay man. In these ways, Frimbo serves not only as a detective figure in the novel, but also as a suspect, one whose identity is investigated as he investigates others. Unlike detectives in the white tradition preceding Fisher, Frimbo combines products of intuition and African mysticism with science and practical reasoning.

Essentially, *The Conjure-Man Dies* stays true to the detective form: there is a crime (Frimbo's assistant's murder and later Frimbo's murder) that must be contained, and through thorough investigation and luck, the initial case is "solved." However, the story's alteration of the Western scientific method of deductive reasoning is telling of Fisher's background and investigation into race relations. Fisher himself was the son of a minister and attended Brown and Howard; becoming a physician, he worked in New York City as a radiologist while he wrote, including while he worked on his detective pieces (Soitos 95). In addition to writing fiction, Fisher continued to publish medical articles in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* (Bell 138). Science and religion clearly impacted Fisher's fiction work. Soitos writes, "Fisher was concerned with how urban and rural characters with vernacular beliefs came into contact with modern scientific and philosophical attitudes and black urban problems" (94). Fisher's fictional works reflect some familiarity with forensics, and it is not a stretch to think he represented the tensions between faith and medicine he himself saw in his own work within hospitals. As a physician working in the diverse Harlem area, life experience perhaps led him to depict a wide range of characters, including street-smart, working class African Americans, as well as scientific, professional types. The combination of this range provides rich ground for investigating epistemological value systems.

Through his use of multiple and competing detectives, Fisher signifies on the tradition established by Poe and Holmes. While the tradition established by Poe and Holmes contains a talented duo detective team, Fisher multiples this number and confuses it. He has, not two detectives, but five. Frimbo, the fortune teller who occupies the building across from Dr. John Archer's home, is initially thought to be murdered at his fortune telling table. Dr. Archer and detective Perry Dart attempt to locate the murderer, and their investigation reveals N'gana Frimbo is not only a sort of conjure-man from Africa, but also a Harvard graduate and scientist. During their investigation of the building, Frimbo's body disappears. Emad Mirmotahari writes, "This turn in the narrative is where cultural asymmetries begin to be exposed and assailed, and where Frimbo assumes the task of re-educating Dr. Archer and Detective Dart, pushing them to de-center their worldviews" (270). Frimbo appears alive, announces his own investigation into what was actually the murder of his assistant, disguised as himself, and destabilizes scientific truisms and cultural asymmetries through his own combination of scientific and spiritual knowledge. In doing so, his character operates to de-center a white, scientific, professional, worldview- one that aligns with Du Bois's understanding of what the Talented Tenth should be. This complicated representation of Africa/Africans extends to the reader, pushing the reader to question cultural constructions of knowledge.

Frimbo, as a liminal figure who is composed of traditional Africa and traditional white Western education, confuses John Archer's (and by extension, the reader's) understanding of intuition and rationalism, blackness and whiteness. In fact, combined with Frimbo's practical analysis is an intuitive ability to read people's past, present, and future. Himself an African king "of Buwongo, an independent territory to the northeast of Liberia," Frimbo maintains ties to his home country, but is also capable of reading people like John Archer (*Conjure* 215). Frimbo's

African and Western dynamic is something that does not appear within the white detective tradition that precedes Fisher. This combination in Frimbo not only shakes Archer's understanding of value systems, but signifies upon the white detective tradition that adheres to Western rationalism. Frimbo drinks sherry and Scotch with Archer in his library, in which Frimbo shows himself just as capable of discussing Western psychology and Herbert Spencer's classification system as tribal Africa and psychic intuition. And, in fact, the narrator explains that upon being alone with Frimbo, "Dr. Archer's apprehensions faded away and shortly he and his host were eagerly embarked on discussions that at once made them old friends: the hopelessness of applying physico-chemical methods to psychological problems; the nature of matter and mind and the possible relations between them" and including "Frimbo's own hypothesis" that matter and probably mind too vanished into energy (214). In this passage, Frimbo shows a level of education and intelligence on par with Archer's own quick mind and Western value system. Through similar training and interests in Western science, Frimbo is relatable and capable of dissolving Archer's previous prejudice against him (a prejudice that stems over two hundred pages before this section.) Frimbo's liminality also bridges a gap between Archer, the Western system of knowledge that informs him, and mysticism. Frimbo tells Archer, "Pure faith in anything is mysticism. Our very faith in reason is a kind of mysticism," to which Archer responds, "You certainly have the gift of harmonizing apparently opposite concepts. You should be a king- there'd be no conflicting parties under your régime" (214-215). While Archer makes this joke, he unknowingly bestows Frimbo with a title already his, for Frimbo has been an African king and has given it up to his brother in favor of travel and Western education. Archer also thus recognizes Frimbo as a source for middle ground and unity between two contrasting value systems, science and mysticism.

The white, Western tradition and African mysticism are reflected in Frimbo's domestic quarters. His study is filled with books concerning science, destiny, and determinism, as well as the series of jars containing male sex glands. As Perry Dart says, "A native African, a Harvard graduate, a student of philosophy- and a sorcerer. There's something wrong with that picture" (28). Both a man of science and of tradition, Frimbo is able to connect with Archer in deep ways. He has a marked sort of intuitive intelligence, one that Archer lacks. For example, Archer brushes over his own history when he tells Frimbo that his father died after he finished college, but that a professor's wealthy friend, helped him. In response, Frimbo discloses surprising details about Archer life: "You have omitted the drama, my friend, Your father's struggle to educate you, his clinging on to life just to see you complete" and describes Archer's alternating feelings of frustration, desperation, hardship, and resentment (224). Without magic, and without being told, Frimbo is able to understand details of Archer's life and feelings through an emotional or intuitive intelligence of which no other character is capable. It is Frimbo's intuition and emotional intelligence that allow him to succeed as a "psychist" and as a detective.

Ultimately, Fisher's "conjure-man" does die, and while his life causes Archer and Dart to question their value systems and detective skills of reasoning, the novel's ending leaves science and deductive reasoning as the victors. Frimbo unmasks his killer and foresees his own death, but he cannot save himself. And, while their interactions with Frimbo give Archer and Dart pause, their system of professionalism and scientific thought as modes of detective genius continues in their later storyline. *The Conjure-Man Dies* thus explores the differing value systems of science and religion, intelligence and intuition, showing value in both, but the lesson of impact is this: in a world dominated by increasing technology and scientific/mathematical intelligence, mysticism and faith remain fixed in tradition and the past. They may compose

African American tradition in Harlem and complicate our understanding of what it means to be black in America, but to succeed in a white majority, professional society, African mysticism has to make way for Western value systems. Frimbo's dual nature thus dies and makes way for the Talented Tenth sort: Dr. Archer and Detective Dart.

Dr. John Archer, *The Conjure-Man Dies*' main protagonist and thread of narrative, serves as a foil to Frimbo's mysticism and emotional intelligence, and I read him as Fisher's revision of a scientific Holmesian figure, one with ties to his African American roots but one who represents a successful move toward assimilation. There is a doubling here between characters and tropes that confuses the reader. At one moment, Archer appears to be like Watson (he is, after all, a doctor), and at another, he seems to be like Holmes. Friends with actual detective Perry Dart, Archer serves as a consultant for Dart in *The Conjure-Man Dies* and in a later short story, "John Archer's Nose" (1935). Fisher had planned to write a series of detective works with Archer and Dart as his detective pair, much like Holmes and Watson, but died before he could finish another short story, "Thus Spake the Prophet" (Soitos 100). Fisher also makes clear allusions between his "traditional" African American detective-duo and Conan Doyle's Watson-Sherlock in the white tradition. Both Dart and Archer are bachelors, often together, who banter and compare themselves to the widely known detective team. Generally, the narrator tells us, Archer responds to Dart's taunts with phrases such as: "Avoid unscientific generalizations, my dear Sherlock. They are ninety-one and six-thirteenths percent wrong by actual measurement" ("John" 185). Alluding to Watson and Sherlock, it is clear that Fisher knows Conan Doyle's work well and draws and adapts the Watson/Sherlock trope for his own purposes. Through Archer, he also mocks a little here the genre's emphasis on mathematics and minute reasoning with nonsensical percentages that do not add up. Comparing themselves to Holmes and Watson, Fisher signifies

on the white tradition in this section, also emphasizing the ways that Archer and Dart are decidedly different, perhaps more understandable and reachable than Holmes with his lack of approachability, a level of genius that others cannot understand. At times, Archer seems to be an adaptation of Watson, because of his capability of connecting with people and solving clues, while Perry Dart is a capable detective, rather than a sort of bumbling detective, like Holmes' Lestrangle, or Fisher's Bubber and Jinx. Neither Archer nor Dart is distinctly Watson, Holmes, or Lestrangle in type. Fisher's joke with the readership seems to be: "I know the genre, and I'm pulling from its tropes, but notice how I'm improvising upon it."

Because of Archer and Dart's characterizations of rational and methodical intelligence, scholars have largely identified both Detective Dart and Dr. Archer as examples of the black bourgeoisie, and of Du Bois's Talented Tenth ideal. Because of Archer's background as a medical professional, critics have often identified him as an insertion of Fisher himself into the novel. Through these two characters, Fisher creates a foil to Frimbo's mystic Africanism, as well as setting up a dichotomy of old Africa versus the modern "New Negro." At the same time, Fisher's juxtaposition of these detectives and their various modes of intelligence allows Fisher to evoke ambivalence toward the idea of upward mobility and respectability politics in Harlem society. Thus, the similarities between Holmes/Watson's professionalism and practicality and Archer/Dart's own intelligence seems to be intentionally illuminating the black middle class for the novel's readers. Like John Watson, John Archer is also a medical doctor, and at the outset of later story "John Archer's Nose," Archer laments a backwoods family's refusal to treat their baby with appropriate medicine and treatment because of their superstitious beliefs. As an average, educated middle-class man, Archer often chooses the practical over the emotional and adheres to deductive reasoning. In fact, Archer is extremely methodical, and his ability to notice



detail often results in extremely small, but important clues, including a handkerchief shoved at the back of a murder victim's throat, a clue that Archer admits even autopsies would often miss. On Archer's intelligence and detective aid, Dart explains "I'm going to need some of your brains. I'm not one of these bright ones that can do all the answers in my head" (*Conjure* 22). Dart is certainly intelligent, as the text explains later, but Archer has a mathematical and ability of reasoning that surpasses his peers. It seems that by including references to Archer's quicker mind, Fisher is also pointing to education within the Harlem community. Archer is professionally educated, speaks without dialect, and combines features of Holmes and Watson. Archer is neither distinctly Watson or distinctly Holmes, but he provides the best combination of both; he has empathy for others, as well as a high level of intelligence that astounds Dart.

Unlike the white detectives who are represented before him, Perry Dart's character portrays a unique representation of blackness within the police force. While Poe and Doyle's works include the trope of a bumbling police force, Fisher's black detective, Perry Dart, is deductive, practical, and intelligent, while he often consults and relies upon John Archer. Fisher's narrator tells us that Dart was one of the first African American patrolmen in Harlem to be promoted to detective. Dart knows all parts of Harlem, has street-smarts, and is visibly darker than some of the men he works with; his friends like to joke that the white city administration chose him for detective, not because of skill but because "his generously pigmented skin rendered him invisible in the dark;" Fisher expresses the racism Dart experiences within the department, employing this joke that skin color is a "helpful" attribute for hunting criminals at night as blending into the dark landscape (*Conjure* 14). While the majority of characters, including Archer, do not have their darkness described in the novel, but default to African American men, the narrator is explicit here. This description serves to provide commentary on

the hardship African American men face in gaining employment and promotion in the police force; Dart is one of only ten black men who have been promoted from patrol to detective. In addition, he is chosen as a clear, visible token of blackness, as the narrator explains: “As if the city administration had wished to leave no doubt in the public mind as to its intention in the matter, they had chosen, in him, a man who could not have been under any circumstances mistake for aught but a Negro” (14). Dart earns his place through a keen mind and hard work, but his selected promotion by the white administration is also one of strategy. And, even though he demonstrates great intellect and potential, japes are made at detective Dart’s promotion. We are also given an odd description of Dart’s intellect, contrasting it with his race. Fisher writes, “In any case, the somber hue of his integument in no wise reflected the complexion of his brain, which was bright, alert, and practical within such territory as it embraced.” Unlike Dart’s dark skin, his “brain,” or intellect is scientific, practical, and attentive. The narrator draws a contrast between Dart’s background as a black man, his link to “dark” Africa and dark mysticism and to the “white,” rational method of deduction and intellect. The narrator emphasizes that while Dart is visibly black, his intelligence and manners of deduction are white, practical, and Western. Dart’s version of genius then, is much like the white detective, prioritizing science and mathematics over religion and intuition. He and John Archer, both, serve as the middle-class African American elite, educated and rational, and their inclusion, juxtaposed with other characters who favor intuition, together provide a complex image of African American male subjectivity and knowledge.

Through doubling, including multiple detectives and methods of deduction, Fisher’s text is able to question normalized truths, including race, in ways that preceding works of white detective fiction have not. Stephen Soitos has identified four detectives within *The Conjure-Man*

*Dies*: John Archer, Perry Dart, and a duo team of lower-class Harlemites, Bubber Brown and Jinx. Archer and Dart are obvious choices, as Dart's profession is that of detective, while Archer freely consults with him on cases. Bubber and Jinx, via their lower-class stations, are street-smart, knowing every part of Harlem, but are incidental or accidental detectives, untrained in deduction. Bumbling about, Bubber and Jinx seem to be in the wrong places at the wrong time, or in the right places at the right time, out of sheer luck. For example, as clients of psychiatrist N'gana Frimbo, Bubber and Jinx place themselves at the scene of the crime, when Frimbo (or Frimbo's assistant, disguised as him) is murdered. They thus make themselves suspects. Bubber and Jinx, initially unlucky, stumble upon clues that expose the disappeared body and reveal the murder victim is not Frimbo, but his servant. (This servant also doubles as Frimbo in name, as well, as he originates from the same tribe and carries Frimbo's last name.)

Greg Sevik has identified the traditional detective genius in Poe and Doyle as one of rebellion from society and inclined to solitude. Both Holmes and Dupin are reclusive, withdrawn from most of society, with the exception of their bachelor roommates. It is significant, then, that Fisher's detectives interlock and are grounded in a very real sense of community, stretching from offices to the very streets they walk. Frankie Bailey examines crime and community in Harlem narratives, particularly in Fisher's work and in Chester Himes' *A Rage in Harlem* (1957). Poverty and crime in Harlem was known to these writers and to their communities, and Fisher juxtaposes the "puzzle" crime in Frimbo's quarters with the everyday, common street violence and domestic abuse.

Bubber and Jinx typify a certain mode of deduction, intuition and luck, and they participate in aspects of African hoodoo, although they identify with the larger community of Harlem and are active within it. Bubber reads the moon, and his reading of three deaths proves to

be true by the end of the narrative. He also identifies superstition and intuition as integral to his own performance of blackness; he tells Jinx: “I knowed somebody’s time had come...Y’ see, the moon don’t lie. ‘Cose most signs ain’t no ‘count. As for me, you won’t find nobody black as me that’s less suprastitious” (Fisher 29). Planetary signs and African hoodoo remain important for established residents in Harlem, as evidenced by the number of African Americans who visit the conjure-man, and as Bubber explains his own “training” in reading these signs. Bubber explains further: “Red moon means bloodshed...Well, they’s one moonsign my grandmammy taught me befo’ I was knee high and that’s the worst sign of ‘em all. And that’s the sign I seen tonight” (30). Bubber traces an ancestral tradition of superstition and sign reading passed through his matrilineal line and one for which he is proud. The moonsign he sees is a full moon, with a black cloud that moves in front of it and takes the shape of a human skull: “blottin’ out the moon...That’s death on the moon...and it’s never been known to fail” (31). As the person who sees the sign, Bubber claims *he* will be the person to witness death three times, which also proves true. The narrator never resolves the issue of intuition and hoodoo within the text, but Bubber’s claims and reasoning further interrogate reliable methods of knowledge and deduction.

The irrational/rational split has been a common theme in traditional white detective fiction, especially within Sherlock Holmes. Scholars have noted the valorization of reason and the Enlightenment within Poe and Doyle, with highly rational characters, such as Dupin and Holmes, who grapple with romanticism’s influence. Greg Sevik writes, “In the eighteenth century, the concept of Enlightenment meant both the discarding of old, arbitrary rules imposed by church and state as well as the establishment of new ones based on rational principles” (24). Sherlock Holmes is so convinced of the universal applicability of his reasoning skills and rules that he writes an article detailing his methods. His genius can seemingly be replicated, and yet,

Watson never can replicate them. Holmes remains at a level of intelligence that is strictly rational, but it is also unachievable by others. Fisher's detectives, however, operate successfully through numbers, deduction, intuition, and luck.

Bubber and Jinx prove to be signifiers as they provide comic relief, often participating in the *dozens*, a well-known aspect of African American male bonding. With the use of characters like Jinx and Bubber Brown, "the traces of Gothic and noir fiction are balanced by the sophisticated banter that is more drawing room than crumbling manse or mean streets" (Bailey 31). Bubber and Jinx also speak in dialect, reflective of the African American detective tradition, which regularly employs dialect-speaking characters. This detective duo's back-and-forth insults, particularly over heritage, is a rising game that appears explosive, but the narrator explains:

"Thus as always, their exchange of compliments flowed toward the level of family history, among other Harlemites a dangerous explosive which a single word might strike into instantaneous violence. It was only because the hostility of these two was actually an elaborate masquerade, whereunder they concealed the most genuine affection for each other, that they could come so close to blows that were never offered. Yet to the observer this mock antagonism would have appeared alarmingly real" (33).

Bubber and Jinx thus participate in insulting jokes about each other's mothers. Their "elaborate masquerade" appears real to outsiders, as evidenced by "a cry of apprehension" by a woman watching them argue, but the two never come to actual blows (34). Instead, the game is well known to the bonded friends, who conceal their affection for one another through their insults. It is a performance, but one that also discloses their suppositions concerning blackness and identity. Bubber attempts to insult Jinx by linking him to "primitive" Africa, when he says, "You ought to be back in Africa with the other dumb boogies" (33). Bubber identifies Africa with a lack of intelligence and education, but Jinx responds, "African boogies ain't dumb..they' jes' dark. You ain't been away from there long, is you?" In his response, Jinx also points to Bubber's blackness: Bubber is darker than Jinx in skin tone, and he is also more superstitious than Jinx.

For Jinx, hoodoo is distinctly African, and the members of Harlem who participate in it must be recently immigrated (or, at least this is his point of insult). As a final insult to Jinx, Bubber insults Jinx's grandfather, saying, "Well- yo' granddaddy was a hair on a baboon's tail. What does that make you?" (34). It is Bubber's mocking of Jinx's patriarchal line, and a derogatory depiction of an African ape that horrifies their audience, whose members are "wholly unaware of what was going on." Bubber and Jinx provide comic relief in their bumbling, but they also allow Fisher to signify on the white tradition through their use of the dozens, even as they point out prejudices within the Harlem community. The paired banter between Jinx and Bubber and then Dart and Archer, evoke a communal sense of blackness in Harlem, often making jokes at each other's heritage or japes about other groups within or outside the community. Through their casual banter, Archer and Dart, Bubber and Jinx, cement camaraderie with one another and establish Africans like N'gana Frimbo outside of their community's circle, as different and deviant.

*The Conjure-Man Dies'* African doctor/psychic is a clear combination of Soitos's black detective tropes. Using the "trickster" figure, adapted from African folklore, Soitos identifies the ways in which Frimbo combines tropes of disguise, masquerade, and hoodoo with the typical detective. Frimbo, through his use of scientific analysis, as well as mysticism and shamanism, reflects a double consciousness and complexity of the African American man. His knowledge of Western science and rationalism allows him to serve as the trickster figure, like Henry Louis Gates' signifying monkey. Frimbo is privy to Western concepts of genius and plays or signifies upon them, in a way that other detectives do not understand.

For Soitos, this tension between traditional white respectability and African mysticism draws from Du Bois's concept of double consciousness as disunity in identity as a black person

in a society dominated by whites. And, as Emad Mirmotahari notes, “N’gana Frimbo’s experiences in Harlem typify the quandaries that face the Western-educated African who stands both outside and inside Western cultural and intellectual paradigms” (270). While Soitos focuses on culture, I identify Frimbo’s status as an intuitive and scientific genius as another effect or aspect of this double consciousness. Frimbo is complex as a detective genius because he refuses to fit into the established detective tradition that propagates science and deductive reasoning over the supernatural; instead, this detective exhibits both a practical, scientific genius, but also (and sometimes dominantly) an emotional genius and intuitive intelligence. This, emotional intelligence appears subaltern, as Frimbo comes from a minoritized group in northern Africa. It is certainly inaccessible to strict professional, middle-class society like Dr. Archer, but Frimbo finds it simple enough. Explaining his ability to see “invisible,” details pertaining to other’s memories and emotions, Frimbo says:-,

“this complex mechanism which we call the living body contains its broadcasting set and its receiving set, and signals sent out in the form of invisible, audible, radiant energy may be picked up and converted into sight and sound by a human receiving set properly tuned in” (*Conjure* 225).

While Frimbo’s ability to intuit other human beings’ thoughts and feelings seems to him a practical matter, it might as well be hoodoo or fakery to those around him. Others do not have the same intuitive systems accessible to their brains, but Frimbo understands it simply as a matter of being “properly” tuned in. He is the only one in the novel, though, capable of picking up these “signals” and converting them. Archer certainly cannot intuit Frimbo’s background, and must be told Frimbo’s story, because he relies upon scientific and mathematical modes of genius; however, Frimbo understands people. While Crafton notes the detective narrative debates the

power of the scientific intelligence versus intuition, Frimbo complicates this debate as he exhibits the ability to combine the two, and sometimes overwhelming the latter.

Through development of a complex and sometimes array of detective characters, particularly N'gana Frimbo, Fisher grapples with issues reflected in Harlem life: issues of identity, what it means to be black, what it means to be American, and what it means to be African. Soitos writes, "the conjure man, juggles two cultures at once. As a graduate of Harvard, he combines scientific rationalism with his traditional African belief in and practice of mysticism and hoodoo" (94). Frimbo is composed of these tensions- black, African, educated by whites at Harvard, professional, and mystical. At a time when Harlem was in flux with these issues as migration increased from the south and parts of Jamaica, Haiti, and Africa, Harlem Renaissance writers such as Fisher sought to celebrate the wide range of blackness and beauty in their increasingly growing community and to create a new black consciousness, linked to Africa (Soitos 98). Frimbo serves as this link and as a bridge from old Africa to new tradition. This multiplicity- of education and science, spirituality and mysticism, American, and African also reflects the New Negro movement during this time- a celebration of the complexities of being black and a concern with representing multiple black identities.

One of the most well-known lines from Fisher's novel is spoken by N'gana Frimbo, and its words emphasize the novel's chief concerns. Speaking with Dr. Archer, Frimbo de-mystifies the confusion surrounding his death and the person seeking to kill him. Regarding his plan to reveal the suspect and murderer of his servant, Frimbo tells Archer:

"That is no mystery. It is a problem in logic, and perfectly calculable...But genuine mystery is incalculable...The profoundest mysteries are those things which we blandly accept without question. See. You are almost white. I am almost black. Find out why, and you will have solved a mystery" (230).



Solving a crime, Frimbo explains only requires logical reasoning. It is something that can be solved, and therefore, not a mystery. For Frimbo, real mysteries are something that cannot be calculated. He then points Dr. Archer to the true mysteries- those systemic constructions that compose society and interaction that we accept, that we do not question, and that we do not change. As a member of the black bourgeoisie in Harlem, Frimbo identifies Archer's place in the societal structure as "almost white." Archer is accepted by his peers as a professional, a scientific man, someone respected, and therefore, "barely" black. Archer's nature is still dual- he is, very much, a black man in white-dominated America, and therefore, someone who carries double consciousness. Frimbo, too, is dual, through his Western education and his adherence to ancestralism. The difference, however, between Frimbo and Archer is that Frimbo is in some ways still a traditional African man. He has only recently left his country, and he has kept up his customs, including a required burning of his servant's body. Frimbo is an African king, transplanted to Harlem. His proximity to "dark" Africa and tradition thus classifies him in Harlem's societal structure as "almost black." Frimbo then follows his discussion of racial classification's mysteries with: "The rest of the world would do better to concern itself with why Frimbo was black." In other words, rather than focusing on who is trying to kill him, society should question its racial classification system. Through this exchange of dialogue, and through the character of Frimbo, Fisher thus focuses his detective narrative on issues of race. Racial classification becomes the novel's biggest mystery, a mystery the reader is urged to contemplate.

Ultimately, Frimbo's character is privy to the Harlem community, but also an outsider. He is composed of "white" and "black" attributes. A member of the African diaspora and recent immigrant to Harlem, he does not quite fit into the black bourgeoisie, but he is also disconnected from his home village. His transmutation of the detective genius, as one strongly composed of

intuitive intelligence, does not quite fit the dominant standard. In the end, his intuitive intelligence is not sufficient to protect him from death. Remarking on Frimbo's intuition, Bubber says, "Smart guy, that Frimbo...Y' know, I wouldn't mind bein' kind o' crazy if it made me that smart" (*Conjure* 314). Bubber recognizes the link between Frimbo's intuition and his resulting emotional intelligence. However, Jinx also notes that it is Frimbo's emotions that result in his downfall; Frimbo does have an affair with a married woman, that results in the husband seeking revenge, and it is his need to maintain tradition that leads him to hide and burn his servant's corpse, initially making him a prime suspect in his servant's murder case. Thus, while Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies* intervenes in the white literary tradition and establishes a beginning for the blues detective, readers also learn the intuitive detective genius (Frimbo) is limited by his adherence to mysticism and Africanism. We might read Frimbo's death as a repression of emotional intelligence or excessive intuition. Still, there is a visible resistance in *The Conjure-Man Dies* to binaries and to these binaries that create a dominant, white tradition of elitism.

Robert Crafton recognizes the book as a sort of hybrid, interested in architecture and urban interests, but also engaging with forensics, anthropology, philosophy, medicine, psychology, sociology, and story-telling (55). I find the story's concern with multiple detectives and thus, multiple forms of detection, emphasizes this hybridity. Just as N'gana Frimbo is revealed to be complex and dual, the novel itself is multiple. It is thus able to remain grounded and authoritative, while describing and advocating different forms of intelligence.

Modern detective series still grapple with intuition versus scientific and numeric deduction, intuitive genius versus scientific genius. However, most police procedurals are still dominated with narratives that too often find white, heterosexuals as the default. As Crafton details in his book, the tradition is also still very much concerned with law and social justice, as

well as race, gender, and sexuality. *The Conjure-Man Dies* anticipates the police procedural with which we are familiar today; it includes collection and examination of physical evidence and testimony, forensic evidence that includes blood samples and dental work. The novel also anticipates future African American detective fiction, as it establishes one of the first interventions into the white dominated tradition.

Rudolph Fisher's intervention into the traditional detective genre signifies upon the Western tradition of Doyle and Poe to expose society's real mystery, that of racial construction; as Frimbo says, "The rest of the world would do better to concern itself with why Frimbo was black" (230). Frimbo combines scientific methodology with mysticism, but his true genius is composed of his emotional and intuitive intelligence. Not even professional and educated John Archer can access this sort of intelligence, although his proximity to it causes him to question his systems of knowledge and understanding of humanity. When N'gana Frimbo dies, his emotional intelligence dies with him, but he momentarily surpasses the "white" detective novel characterized by extremely practical and rational geniuses like Sherlock Holmes. Fisher's portrayal of multiple detectives and multiple aspects of blackness complicate the reader's understanding of knowledge and humanity, while advancing the New Negro Movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Without works such as Fisher's, the blues detective of the African-American mystery tradition might look rather different. Race and genius have a complicated status in *The Conjure-Man Dies*, but Fisher also establishes a distinctive African American and masculine subjectivity. Fisher's adherence to duality and multiplicity in the text is thus vital for intervening in the white literary canon that has for so long relegated African-American characters to racist tropes and incidental background noise. Through examination of this

resistance, we might work to recover these silenced narratives and to concern ourselves with:

“why was Frimbo black?”

## 2 *Hagar's Daughter* and the Detective Genre as Interrogation of Race and Gender

*Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1900-1902), is the first work of detective fiction written by an African American woman, Pauline Hopkins, first appearing in *Colored American Magazine*, while Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932) is the first detective novel written by an African American that deals with exclusively black characters. Both these works make use of the previously white and masculine- dominated detective tradition, signifying upon the genre's tropes, to resist racial constructions and establish African American subjectivity. I find that by investigating epistemological systems through crime, including juxtaposing science with intuition and hoodoo, these writers improvise on the detective tradition, arguably with Hopkins relying on Mark Twain and Fisher relying on Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle. The writers' investigation of racism and discrimination through crime differs strikingly in style and character representation, one that I argue illuminates their particular placement in history and shifting expectations of literature, as well as differing concerns with gender. Pauline Hopkins intervenes in the white tradition of detective fiction to illuminate issues of race and of gender by centering women at the heart of her narrative, including ambiguously raced women and lower-class domestic workers. At first glance, *Hagar's Daughter* appears embedded in the dominant tradition, but I find Hopkins successfully inverts detective tropes and revises Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* to explore her novel's true "crime": discrimination and prejudice against African Americans, particularly African American women at the turn of the century.

Initially released serially in *Colored American Magazine*, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* was published under Hopkins' pseudonym, Sarah A. Allen. *Colored American Magazine* was a journal written with African Americans in mind as its central

audience, and one in which Hopkins published three novels, several short stories, and numerous commentaries and editorials. As Hazel Carby notes, Hopkins' role was central in the magazine's production; Hopkins wrote prolifically for the publication and held strong editorial roles. The magazine described itself as offering African Americans "a medium through which they can demonstrate their ability and tastes, in fiction, poetry and art, as well as in the arena of historical, social and economic literature," providing "a monthly magazine of merit into every Negro family" (xxxix). Hopkins understood the magazine and her stories as central vehicles for social justice, and that purpose is clear in her texts' open condemnation of racism and political apathy by Northerners.

As a preceding work to the African American detective tradition, *Hagar's Daughter* has received little critical attention as a piece of detective fiction, except by Stephen Soitos, although the text is often mentioned by scholars in passing and especially as a significant contribution to African American popular fiction (Carby xxix). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. helped to recover Hopkins' work, and much of it has been republished through the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Stephen Soitos locates Hopkins as an initial work of the African American detective genre, conscious of racism and social justice. Hazel V. Carby and Susan Hays Bussey explore the text as anti-racist propaganda. In addition, Bussey identifies *Hagar's Daughter* as a "racial discovery plot involving characters who learn of their racial heritages unexpectedly and reveal them to others unwillingly" (300). Still, critics have focused on Hopkins' novels' identity politics and adherence to racial uplift, often criticizing *Hagar's Daughter* for its focus on white characters, respectability politics, and its use of minstrelsy. Hazel Carby has argued this criticism ignores the historical context's implications for Hopkins, saying the pressing threat of racialized violence, including "mob violence" and "lynch-law"

influenced Hopkins to write with white audience members' prejudices in mind and with what Hopkins understood as a pressing need to "faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history" (xxxvi). In a pervasively racist world, Hopkins struggled to write in ways that she believed would change conceptions of African Americans' intelligence and humanity to whites who relegated them to caricatures and stereotypes, including a literary tradition that perpetuated these stereotypes. In addition, while *Hagar's Daughter* takes place mostly among white characters, Carby explains Hopkins uses the mask of whiteness here to "write a 'black' story that unravels in the heart of elite Washington society. In conventional terms, if an elite were to be the subject of fiction, black characters would have to remain on the periphery as servants" (xxxviii). I find that by employing African American characters who pass as white, Hopkins finds a loophole to a tradition of whiteness in literature; she creates central, elite characters with ambiguous racial backgrounds to illuminate oppression of African American subjectivity, particularly the subjectivity of African American women.

RaShell Smith-Spears addresses Hopkins' use of racial uplift for the black middle class in *Hagar's Daughter* with the purpose of what Richard Yarborough describes as "'facilitate[ing] the uplift of her race by presenting Afro-American readers with moral guidance and instruction through exemplary characters'" (qtd. in Smith-Spears 22). However, Smith-Spears also argues that Hopkins was attempting to show African Americans were just as culturally advanced as other races. Smith-Spears writes, "Because they were often educated, cultured, and socially graceful, Hopkins and others who believed like her felt that they were the example of blackness that white society should see and accept" (22). Smith-Spears also complicates the presence of minstrelsy within the book, as being a reflection of Hopkins' contemporary literary tradition.

I find Hopkins pulls from her literary moment, including detective genre conventions employed by Mark Twain. While Sherlock Holmes first appeared in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887 and would have been available to Hopkins, rather than pulling from Conan Doyle, I find *Hagar's Daughter* reads like Mark Twain. While Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle are widely recognized as prominent leaders of the detective genre, Twain initially may seem to be out of place. However, as Frankie Y. Bailey notes, Twain is also cited by editors as a touchstone for crime and detective fiction, with his contribution of *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* in 1894. On *Pudd'nhead Wilson* Bailey writes, "Commentators also disagree about how the book should be classified- as a tragedy, farce, detective novel, or a poor effort at all of the aforementioned" (some critics found the book's structure and plot inconsistent and messy) (6). It is unclear whether Hopkins would have read Twain's detective novel, but the text would have been circulating preceding Hopkins' publication, and it is fairly likely that she would have been aware of it. It is also clear that, while critics may have a difficult time characterizing Twain's narrative, it remained influential enough to receive acknowledgement for further impact in crime and detective fiction. In addition, the similarities between *Hagar's Daughter* and Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* are striking, and Hopkins' novel appropriates Twain's style more visibly than it does either Poe or Doyle.

Surprisingly, scholars have not addressed Hopkins' similarities to Mark Twain or to what I identify as his mystery and detective novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894); however, Hopkins' work is like Twain in both literary device, multiple aspects of plot and characterization, and writing style. Among other characters, Hopkins employs a scientific and legal-minded white man of high social status as a lead detective, Detective Henson, but I find that she complicates this tradition through an African American female detective. She also makes use of minstrelsy,



multiple and false identities or doubling, and tragic mulatto literature. Hopkins' use of narrative in *Hagar's Daughter* is startlingly similar to Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In writing style, the narrator's more formal use of language reads like a 19th century novel, with African American vernacular written much like Twain; an ex-slave in the novel, Isaac, is quoted as speaking in such vernacular: "'Dey'll hab ter see Marse St. Clar, tain't me. He sol' me. I runned 'way. I come home, dat's all. Kain't I hab suthin' to eat?'" In addition to dialogue, the ability of black women within the text to masquerade and pass for other races and the opposite gender is also reminiscent of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. For example, multiple women within *Hagar's Daughter* gain access to other realms of social status through language, dress, and small changes of appearance, like Twain's Roxy character. Concerns with race, gender, and class are investigated in these texts just as much as any crime, with the text centered around African American women passing as upper-class white women who cause both characters and audience to question race and gender identities. Hopkins' use of and signification upon Twain and literary conventions allows her to resist racial and gender constructions as her characters' identities are destabilized.

*Hagar's Daughter* contains two main threads of narrative, the first taking place at the start of the Civil War, between 1860 and 1862, and the second narrative picking up with seemingly new characters twenty years later. Pre-emancipation, the first part of the publication ruminates over the secession of the South as it follows racial injustice stemming from slavery. Ellis Enson, first son in an aristocratic Maryland family, falls in love with a neighboring, beautiful, and respected woman named Hagar Sargeant. Ellis and his brother, St. Clair Enson, quickly become representatives for the North and South; Ellis is a relatively benevolent slave owner who later becomes a symbol of law and order as his conceptions of race and racial justice change, while St. Clair is "sensual," "cruel to ferocity," a murderer, and supporter of the

Confederate South (Hopkins 20). When St. Clair Enson learns his older brother has married and produced a child with Hagar, he schemes with his friend and local slave trader, Walker, to ruin and murder his brother and gain the family fortune. St. Clair and Walker's plan propels the plot for the rest of the novel: Walker reveals Hagar's past as an African American child who was enslaved, but was since adopted by two white parents and passes as white. In response, Ellis attempts to flee for Europe with his wife and child, but a mutilated body found in the nearby forest (and supposed to be Ellis) relegates Hagar and her newborn daughter to the status of the rest of the household's enslaved population. When Walker attempts to move and sell Hagar and her daughter into slavery, Hagar jumps into the Potomac River, and both are thought to have perished.

Twenty years later, Hopkins' narrative picks up with seemingly new (but understood by the audience to be doubled/recycled) characters who are one by one revealed to be supposedly "dead" or missing characters. St. Clair Enson and slave-trader Walker masquerade as General Benson and Major Madison, respectively, as they attempt to hide their histories as Confederate supporters and as they scheme to steal millions from wealthy Washington families. Major Madison also manipulates his adopted daughter, Aurelia, an African American woman who passes for white and wields her sexuality to help him in his plots for blackmail. By the book's end, it is also revealed that Hagar Enson is alive and married to a well-respected millionaire, Senator Zenas Bowen, under the name Estelle Bowen. Hagar's own child is later revealed to have been saved and adopted by Senator Bowen, although Hagar is unaware of this for most of the book. Senator Bowen's daughter, Jewel, is thought to be white by all the book's characters, including herself and Estelle/Hagar, until the text's end, when Hagar finds a baby blanket she personally crafted for her daughter. This reveal of Jewel's racial background, as well as her

mother's results in Jewel's estrangement from her husband, Cuthbert Sumner. Ellis Enson, in turn, has survived the initial attack by his brother and Walker in the woods and has remained in hiding post-Civil War as Detective Henson. Two other characters equally important include African American domestic workers, Aunt Henny Johnson and Venus Johnson. Aunt Henny works as a cleaner in St. Clair Enson/General Benson's office and becomes witness to his murder of a lover, while Venus Johnson is Aunt Henny's granddaughter and serves as a domestic worker in the home of the Bowen family. Venus Johnson moves from domestic worker to detective when Jewel Bowen and Aunt Henny go missing, and Venus adopts the guise of an African American boy as she uses intuition to search and detect. This complex narrative thus has multiple twists and reveals that makes it difficult to summarize and confuses readers as it destabilizes identity, as several characters are knowingly and unknowingly passing for other identities, including race and gender.

The doubling and unmasking of multiple characters unfolds as a central theme for the novel, a doubling that Stephen Soitos has noted later remains a key part of black detective fiction's signification upon tropes. Soitos identifies doubling through masks, mistaken identities, and disguises as an aspect of double consciousness. Soitos pulls the "double-consciousness" detection trope, or the "masking" trope from Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, arguing that within African American fiction, the use of double-consciousness and masking points to the revelation of hidden meanings; these hidden meanings highlight African American subjectivity and "confirm the ability of black Americans to reinterpret and revise existing Euro-American forms with heightened consciousness" (37). Doubling works here to destabilize identity, but particularly racial and gender identity, as well. Doubles in Hopkins' text include the text's two

villains, who are later exposed for their consistent nefarious natures, but also women, notably the two women passing as white and an African American domestic worker.

*Hagar's Daughter* signifies upon the traditional white detective found in the white tradition, including Twain's title character. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain's lead detective, David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, is an educated white man, initially distanced from the community he moves into (and labeled a "pudd'nhead," or idiot), and a bachelor. Pudd'nhead Wilson has a skilled mind, and when Roxy contemplates switching her son for the other child, she thinks: "Dey ain't but one man dat I's afeard of, en dat's dat Pudd'nhead Wilson. Dey calls him a pudd'nhead, en says he's a fool. My lan', dat man ain't no mo' fool den I is!" (Twain 17). Twain establishes his white detective as a center for exposing his narrative's mystery. Hopkins also includes a white bachelor detective, but she signifies upon Twain's device. Ellis Enson becomes Detective Chief Henson, keeping his identity secret and remaining mostly removed from his surrounding community. He bears a "long, livid scar" across his face, one the narrator notes "a sabre might have made that deep, dangerous cut" and one that obscures his identity, even from his own brother and estranged wife (Hopkins 188). Hopkins complicates this detective through his doubled identity, (even his names ring similar, "Enson" and "Henson," as well as his evil brother's name revised name, "Benson") but also through his reliance on African American detectives. Detective Henson relies heavily on Venus Johnson, for example, from her initial use of intuition, or hoodoo, in identifying General Benson as a criminal and Enson Hall as his improvised prison to her physical removal of Benson's victims from Enson Hall. Before Henson employs Venus Johnson, however, he holds African American detective agents in his service. The narrator describes the importance of these agents, including Venus: "Chief Henson was particularly pleased with the ability shown by his colored detectives," who excel in solving clues

and advancing cases (239). While he himself examines crime details from his office and prosecutes, he does not navigate the outside world, and his chief agent, Smith, is an African American man who communicates the investigation's details via telegram. When Venus locates and saves Jewel and Aunt Henny, the telegram Smith sends Henson is telling; it reads: "All O.K. Just as we thought. Come on and bag the game" (234). One might read the "we" in the telegram as Detective Henson and Smith, giving Henson credit for his own abilities, but Smith has been working with Venus Johnson. Given that context, the telegram emphasizes the importance and agency Smith and Venus Johnson hold as investigators. These African American detectives thought correctly, and they solve the case, leaving it to Detective Henson to "bag the game," or reap the rewards of their labor (he will, after all, take the case to trial.) Hopkins complicates the traditional white detective through her inclusion of African American detective figures. Ellis Enson/Detective Henson is highly intelligent and wields power in his role, but he also depends upon his connections in the African American community. Evidenced by the narrator's commentary in the pages preceding: "His [Detective Henson's] vast experience did not aid him;" Henson relies on black labor and his detective's intuition to make breaks in his cases (222). While Twain crafts a singular white lead detective, Hopkins employs doubles in her African American detectives to signify upon that tradition and establish African American subjectivity within the realm of detection.

Patricia Linton describes the typical detective figure as an insider/outsider, ambiguously positioned within a story (18). Within the detective genre, detectives are commonly marginalized in some way, in the sense that they remain amateur sleuths and often social outsiders; Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, for example, and Poe's Auguste Dupin are socially inept and only maintain close friendships with their detective sidekicks. Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson is a bachelor

somewhat alienated by his community. Through their knowledge but also, importantly, their difference, these characters are able to deduce and detect clues that others cannot see. Venus Johnson, certainly, is marginalized in multiple ways- as a woman, domestic worker, and as an African American. This marginalization allows her to remain in the background, masked, as she searches for Jewel and Aunt Henny.

While Hopkins' portrayal of dark-skinned African American women may seem minor to some, and her use of types is certainly problematic, I find much of the novel's plot, and ultimately, the demise of the villain, St. Clair Enson, rest on the narrative's African American women, including grandmother Henny and Venus Johnson. Scholars including Susan Bussey have criticized Hopkins' book for its representations of black women, Bussey identifying deception as mode for self-determination within the novel, rather than liberation. Bussey claims that through concealment of identity, particularly mixed-race identity, characters gain social status and lose social status when those identities are revealed. Bussey writes, "Furthermore, Hopkins relegates her dark-skinned characters to minor roles, then objectifies them in such stereotypes as the simple-minded old mammy and the rebellious young buck. These depictions are double edged, sometimes subversive and sometimes complicit, but the Black characters are nonetheless eclipsed by mixed-race protagonists" (300). Venus, in fact, is much more complex than Bussey allows, as she passes through spatial and gender boundaries.

Hopkins' use of masquerade and gender performance improvises on Twain's tradition to provide agency to her African American character, Venus Johnson. Twain includes characters who wear disguises and cross gender boundaries, notably in his character of Tom, who dresses as a woman to disguise his entry into Judge Driscoll's home. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, however, Tom's masquerade allows him to commit a crime. Twain's narrative illuminates the performance

of gender, and Hopkins appropriates that performance, as well, to provide her African American female detective with agency and to establish justice. Venus Johnson is an African American woman, a domestic worker from the Bowen household who is sent by Detective Henson with an older black man, Smith (disguised as a drunk) to search for Jewel Benson. Venus's cross-dressing as a young boy, in combination with her race, actually allows her to move from one city to another without being noticed. Once Venus wears her disguise, the narrator refers to her as "the lad Billy" and "the boy" who "peers" into Enson Hall and discovers the text's missing victims (Hopkins 233-4). The narrator's shift from female pronouns and descriptors to male further illuminate constructions of gender. In description, Venus becomes male when she dons "Billy's" clothes. She is no longer Venus Johnson to readers, but she becomes Billy. This performance becomes habit, becomes lived, and it allows Hopkins to question gender as performance. By extension, Venus's performances of gender also push the reader to question performance of race.

Stephen Soitos also argues that the use of minstrelsy within African American detective fiction is an expression of the double-consciousness/masking trope key to the genre's signification upon the tradition's whiteness. Soitos writes, "By using what I term double-consciousness techniques, black detectives can speak beyond the limits of their perceived position as female or male minstrels- that is, as detectives who are seen as inefficient in their assumed roles" (37). Soitos then explains the incorporation of the "minstrelsy of the Negro servant" as a mask, one in which African American characters "take the opportunity to signify" upon their white superiors. Previous critics have identified Hopkins' domestic workers, including Venus Johnson and Aunt Henny, as examples of minstrelsy. By applying what is originally Stephen Soitos' term "masking," including the mask of minstrelsy, I extend his reading of

minstrelsy to find that Hopkins actually signifies upon the white superiors employed in the text. That is, while critics have argued Hopkins' use of minstrelsy maintains a racist trope, I see its use within *Hagar's Daughter*, actually subverts the dominant white tradition to expose it and point to African American subjectivity.

Initially striking critics as another racist trope, the use of minstrelsy in the character of Venus Johnson is also strategic, an incorporation that I note signifies on that expectation through her performance of gender and race. While Venus speaks in a stereotyped, exaggerated dialect with her own family, the narrator reveals that she also code switches; that is, Venus is aware of the performance of race and class, and she uses that performance to her own advantage. When speaking with Detective Henson about the disappearance of Jewel and Aunt Henny, Venus momentarily becomes emotional, and the narrator says, "Venus forgot her education in her earnestness, and fell into the Negro vernacular talking and crying at the same time" (Hopkins 224). As an educated African American woman, Venus has access to dialect and Standard American English, and she uses code-switching to her advantage throughout the text.

Through this manipulation of language and performance of blackness and gender exhibits further subjectivity and agency than other critics have recognized.

Venus successfully navigates the public sphere as a detective and allows Hopkins to critique the white male detective's efficacy. It is Venus who finds and saves the novel's kidnapped white woman, Jewel, not Detective Henson, who remains in Washington working in an office; not Jewel's husband, Cuthbert Sumner; or any other masculine character. While others have read Venus as a marginal character, overshadowed by multiracial individuals like Aurelia and Hagar/Estelle, she actually becomes the narrative's most important and active sleuth. Venus comes to Detective Henson with her fears about General Benson and her father, Isaac, who have



kidnapped Jewel. She tells Henson, “When Miss Jewel didn’t come home, and that note came instead, I just made up my mind it was Venus for General Benson, and that I’d got to cook his goose or he’d cook mine...the sly old villain...*I* believe the old rascalion has got her shut up somewhere down in Maryland, and dad’s helping him” (226). When Venus shares her testimony with Detective Henson, she establishes subjectivity and assurance in her own detective skills; she identifies Benson as a “sly, old villain,” through her intuition and by observing his behavior with Jewel Bowen. She correctly locates Jewel as most likely being secluded on Benson’s family plantation, the Enson home, which she knows because of her familial heritage. Her use of “*I* believe” also emphasizes her contribution to the case, and her understanding of herself as an agent. Because of Venus’s initial “detective” work as a domestic worker observing her employers’ affairs, Detective Henson gains the “break” in the case he needs, and she is willing to risk her life to save Jewel Bowen and Aunt Henny. Venus thus initiates the proper avenue to find Jewel, crafting a successful detective who is both African American, female, and someone who successfully employs intuition. This intervenes on the white detective tradition’s trope of a lead white, male, and scientific detective.

While Aunt Henny’s character can certainly ring as a stereotype, I find Hopkins’ use of Aunt Henny as another improvisation upon minstrelsy; her belief in hoodoo and superstition seeks to understand a white man’s cruelty, and she is closer to real life than fiction when she locates St. Clair as the “conjurer” for Hagar’s subsequent destitution. Aunt Henny also exhibits Soitos’ conception of hoodoo as a vital part of African American detective fiction. She is an oral storyteller, and she passes the family’s history, including folklore, down through her stories. She tells of a curse before St. Clair Enson was born, one in which a thunderstorm “tored up eberythin’” and the devil showed his face to St. Clair’s mother “an’ grinned” (63). Following

that display, Aunt Henny remembers St. Clair's mother going into convulsions and fainting. She then claims St. Clair is the son of Satan; if Aunt Henny's is a false story, it is a re-writing that helps her make sense of St. Clair's long-term and consistent cruelty, one that is not a reported part of his brother's nature. Aunt Henny also makes references to other elements of hoodoo- her "Unc' Ned" was a conjure man, making spells with snake skins and other reptiles. Finally, Aunt Henny tells her daughter, Marthy, that Hagar does not have African American ancestry, but she believes St. Clair Enson "conjured" her himself (65).

In a world in which the white gaze dominates, Hopkins' decision to establish Venus as a subject and detective capable of agency and movement, as well as the power to "see" or locate the novel's female protagonist, intervenes in the tradition and empowers a black gaze. Hopkins is more aware of this assertion of subjectivity in her creation of Venus and of Aunt Henny, than previous critics have given her credit. Through her manipulation of invisibility and detection, Hopkins appropriates the gaze that white supremacy and racial violence has withheld from African American domestic workers. Bell hooks, in her essay, "Whiteness in the Black Imagination," discusses the domination of white supremacy pre- and post- Emancipation; she writes, "One mark of oppression was that black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better- less threatening- servants" (168). Included in this "mantle of invisibility" and erasure of subjectivity for African Americans was the appearance of sight, or, fully meeting a white person's gaze. Bell hooks continues:

"To be fully an object, then, was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality. These looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks...of relegating them to the realm of the invisible...To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality" (168).

The “invisibility” that domestic workers and freed people, like Venus and Aunt Henny, would have experienced at the hands of whites, is revised by Hopkins to allow Venus mobility. Venus is able to hide in plain sight and absorb information that allows her to locate, act, and save Jewel. As Venus tells Mrs. Bowen (her employer, to whom she strategically speaks in dialect), “I peeked in through that window and saw Miss Jewel an’ gran sitting there talkin’... Well, you know Mis’ Bowen, I ain’t a bit slow, no’m,” and Venus then details how she improvises means for Jewel and Aunt Henny’s escape (240). In telling Mrs. Bowen in dialect about her self-directed action, but also her initial ability to locate and *see* Jewel in the Enson mansion, Venus asserts her own gaze and agency as an African American woman who is also a domestic worker. Hopkins’ character is not simply moving passively; Venus and even Aunt Henny are actually able to assert their own gazes. In locating Jewel and moving her through the old mansion in which she is imprisoned to safety, Venus “looks directly,” or asserts her own subjectivity, her own equality.

The theme of passing, in combination with this doubling, destabilizes racial categorization, as well. Are Hagar and her daughter African American or white? Walker’s claim of Hagar’s black ancestry is never actually proved, but the narrator characterizes it in such a way that it seems true. This unproved claim leaves the reader consistently wondering if Hagar does in fact have black ancestors, or whether Walker’s claim is a ruse, further de-essentializing race and placing a focus on class and environment in shaping characters’ attributes. Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* also includes doubles and characters who pass; Roxy passes her own son for the slave owner’s son, and she also passes for a white woman. In *Hagar’s Daughter*, both Hagar Sargeant/Estelle Bowen and Aurelia Madison (sometimes called Amelia) move through elite American society as white women. However, Twain’s characters who pass also have their

histories revealed at his story's end, and Roxy, who has maintained a great level of agency in the narrative, is punished. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain takes steps to de-essentialize race, as Roxy exchanges her son and her owner's son and the two boys grow up to be shaped by their environments, rather than by something innate; however, when this exchange is exposed, Tom (Roxy's son) is sold "down the river" and Chambers, the true (and white) Driscoll heir, receives his inheritance, affirming an unjust racial hierarchy and in some ways essentializing race (Twain 143). Hopkins revises this essentialism to provide a satisfactory life for her African American characters, including Hagar/Estelle and her estranged (and white) husband, Ellis Enson/Detective Benson.

Hagar/Estelle Bowen's inclination toward intuition and detection is reflective of the African American literary tradition and allows Hopkins additional signification on the white tradition; Rudolph Fisher, as well, employs detectives who use hoodoo and intuition as means of deduction, thereby signifying on the white tradition's adherence to science and rationalism. Hagar/Estelle is consistently a person described as beautiful, good, and moral; she is a kind and nurturing stepmother, who raises her stepdaughter, Jewel. Hagar/Estelle has remarried a member of the Washington elite post-Civil War, Senator Bowen, and she lives with African American servants. Senator Bowen finds Hagar/Estelle when she is working as a waitress in California, but her upper class demeanor and beauty draws her to him. When they marry, it is Estelle who pushes Bowen into politics, recognizing "her husband's sterling worth in business and morals," and insisting he use his money and gifts to better the country (Hopkins 81). The narrator describes Estelle Bowen's "woman's mission in making her husband's career" as one that is an "exercise of her own intuitive powers" (82). Mrs. Bowen detects hidden character flaws in other characters, including General Benson/St. Clair Enson, who does not remember her but finds her

uncanny; the narrator tells us: “He [Benson] felt uneasy in her presence, that under her rather haughty manner a keen sight was hidden that read his motives. Senator Bowen was more to his liking” (Hopkins 139). Senator Bowen sees nothing devious about the book’s villain, and even before Benson remembers Mrs. Bowen as Hagar, he feels she sees through him. When Benson, Aurelia Madison, and Major Madison scheme to break Jewel from her suitor Cuthbert Sumner with scandal, Mrs. Bowen counsels Jewel to listen to Sumner and feels “deep in her heart was a doubt of the specious pleader,” Aurelia Madison (Hopkins 136). Mrs. Bowen serves as a mode of reason for Jewel (and gives advice Jewel does not take) but she also recognizes something devious about Aurelia. Mrs. Bowen tells Jewel she understands, as she calls it, Aurelia’s “nature:” “I believe her false. I have a presentiment that there is something wrong” (137). Mrs. Bowen is the only character to vocalize distrust of Aurelia Madison, and she also recognizes Benson as a “bad man,” long before the trial that reveals his identity to the rest of the book’s characters (142). Benson/Enson is correct to attribute Hagar/ Mrs. Benson with a “keen sight,” and, although she is not an actual detective, Hopkins does give her the ability to intuit and detect dishonesty in ways others cannot.

Environment shapes these characters, bringing race to the forefront of the detective novel, signifying on the white tradition’s lack of representation of African American female identity, and de-essentializing race. Like Twain’s creation of Roxy, an African American woman who is capable of passing for white, Hopkins’ Aurelia Madison figures as a tragic mulatta, but Hopkins provides her with more agency than the traditional trope. In Twain’s narrative, Roxy switches her own son for her owner’s son, because the two babies appear equally white and interchangeable, and she cannot bear losing her son to slavery; Roxy realizes “Her child could grow up and be sold down the river!” and determines ““Dey sh’an’t, oh, dey *sha’n’t!*- yo’ po’

mammy will kill you fust!” (Twain 13). Twain’s character, in her attempt to save her own son, places her offspring in a coddling and privileged environment that makes him scheming, mean, and a representative white slave owner Roxy desired to protect him from. It also results in a different sort of separation from her child, one in which she is owned by him. In Hopkins’ narrative, she further investigates the role of environment in shaping morality and character through the use of doubles that would be seemingly exchangeable. Like Twain’s Tom and Chambers, Hopkins includes two women, Jewel and Aurelia, who both appear as white as one another, and thus also destabilize essentialism.

Jewel and Aurelia are foils for each other, and Aurelia’s need to pass as white and gain upward mobility illuminates the precarious place multiracial women hold. The juxtaposition of these two white women also pushes the reader to see environment as key to shaping character, rather than an essentialism of race. In *Traces, Codes, and Clues*, Maureen Reddy identifies Aurelia Madison as a “spider-woman” figure who ensnares men and distracts detectives with her sexuality (26). At the end of the novel, Aurelia is revealed to be biracial, possibly Hagar’s lost daughter, raised by Walker/Major Madison as his daughter and used by him as a tool to gain wealth and power. Aurelia is tasked with breaking Cuthbert Sumner from Jewel Bowen so that General Benson/St. Clair Enson can wed her, but she is also in love with Sumner, as the two had a brief love affair in New Orleans. Thus, Aurelia is self-motivated in her scheme to earn Sumner as her husband and gain superior social status to Jewel, and she wields her sexuality in society as means to that end. In the chapter appropriately titled “Spider’s Web,” Aurelia successfully carries out a plot to separate Jewel from Sumner; she places Jewel in the conservatory at a ball and arranges to be alone with Sumner, confesses her love for him, and push him out of sympathy to hold and kiss her (Hopkins 123). Aurelia’s self-determination is motivated by class constructs,

and while she is not evil, Hopkins is clear to describe her as having had a “lonely, reckless life,” that carries “in her heart a spark of what passed for love” for Jewel (121). Aurelia, however, desires to have everything that belongs to Jewel. This is also reflective of Aurelia’s act of passing; Aurelia passes for white, passes as Major Madison’s daughter, but she is of mixed-race ancestry and is displaced. She is not loved and does not have financial security. The education of Jewel, as a white woman and daughter of a United States senator, has all the stability Aurelia Madison does not, including familial love, and the love of a mother. Aurelia’s lack, rather than her race, ferments jealousy and her immorality. Later in the novel, the narrator muses, “Terrible though her sins might be- terrible her nature, she was but another type of the products of the accursed system of slavery- a victim of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ that has made ‘countless millions mourn’” (238). Aurelia’s acts to “ensnare” men are acts of agency, but she is also compelled to “spin her web” in order to ensure financial and emotional security. The narrator is also clear to place blame on Aurelia’s conduct with society, the “accursed system of slavery,” rather than allowing the reader to find fault with the bloodline. Aurelia’s experienced oppression at the hands of men like Walker/Major Madison and the societal system that would relegate her to a further oppressed racial category prompt her to self-hate and loneliness, at the same time exposing imagined constructs of race as arbitrary.

*Hagar’s Daughter* intervenes further in the detective tradition’s essentialism by portraying multiracial women as both good and bad, moral, and ambiguously moral. Hopkins constructs two multiracial women in her novel, one kind and nurturing, the other sexual and scheming, and their bloodline is not essentialized. Although the reader at one point believes Aurelia Madison to be Hagar/ Estelle Bowen’s biological daughter (she is a multiracial woman adopted by Walker with no known parents), Aurelia Madison seems nothing like Hagar or Jewel,

who is later revealed to be Hagar's biological daughter. Instead, Aurelia's history with slave trader Walker/Major Madison inculcates something in her that supersedes anything biological, and the constant confusion about Hagar's missing daughter further refuses the reader to pin a set identity on the characters. This construction focuses the reader on environment and situation in character development, rather than inherent attributes stemming from any racial line. The narrator tells us, too, that Estelle Bowen has been in charge of her stepdaughter, Jewel's education and raised her in taste and good manners (82). In fact, Estelle Bowen and her step-daughter are often compared to each other by observing characters, and Jewel and Aurelia are compared. Regarding Estelle Bowen/Hagar and Jewel, one man comments, "I should have thought them of one blood," while another says "you must confess that they are alike" (114). In their carriage and manners, shaped through education available to them because of their class privilege, Estelle/Hagar and Jewel are cultured to be alike. Hopkins provides class and education, or environment, as the key factor to identity, rather than bloodline and race.

In appearance, as well, the passing women in *Hagar's Daughter* disrupt racial stereotypes. The only tie between Aurelia and Mrs. Bowen is the narrator's description of them both as having dark eyes with heavy lashes; Mrs. Bowen is described as having a "beautiful cold face" that is extremely white, while Aurelia is "vivid," "startling and somewhat bizarre, perhaps but still marvelously, undeniably lovely" (115). Aurelia is described as wearing bright, daring clothing, and there is something about her that is exotic and attractive, but when she is next to Jewel, Aurelia makes audience members uncomfortable. The narrator says, "Truly this girl [Aurelia] was an exquisite picture, but it bewildered one so that the eye rested on Jewel's slender, white-robed figure with pleasure, and intense relief" (116). Visually, as well, then, Aurelia and Jewel are foils for each other. Jewel is pretty, flowerlike (frequently called



“Blossom” by Sumner), and makes white audience members comfortable in her appearance and carriage. Aurelia, however, provides a dangerous sort of attraction, one that “bewilders” and frightens. There seems to be a dangerous part of Aurelia’s nature that is reflected in her visage, which problematizes appearance and race. But, if Aurelia’s “darker” nature becomes visible physically, it does not seem to be something that has been passed to her through her mother. If anything, through Hagar/Estelle Bowen’s guidance, Jewel is cultured and kind; through absence of a mother figure and through her proximity to Walker/Major Madison and financial insecurity, Aurelia Madison is compelled to manipulation and destruction. The issue here, Hopkins illustrates, is one of class, education, and love, rather than essential attributes passed through racial bloodlines.

Hopkins’ narrative shows that the “crime” of racial prejudice and of slavery does not solely affect the African Americans who experience racism, but also the white people around them, including those who perpetuate racism and racial oppression. Walker and St. Clair Enson, for example, are revealed as Confederate supporters and members of the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln, and they are arrested at trial. Perhaps more surprising though, is Cuthbert Sumner’s own racism, when he stands as a morally upright character for most of the text; this racism results in his separation from the woman he loves and perpetual loneliness. When Cuthbert Sumner learns that Aurelia Madison is African American, he exclaims, “But a white man may be betrayed into marrying her. I certainly came near to it myself...I am thankful for my deliverance” (160). Rather than Aurelia’s dishonesty, it is her racial background that disgusts Sumner. If Sumner experiences an act of “deliverance” as he avoids marrying Aurelia Madison, it is because the thought of being married to a black woman is itself the betrayal and an act of damnation. Aurelia Madison’s ability, and women like her, to successfully pass as white and

marry white men so disturbs Sumner that he stays awake the subsequent night, overwhelmed by “darkness blacker than the blackest night,” dreaming that he is trapped in a “deep, dark pit” (165). Sumner’s entrenched racism is revealed through his dream: proximity to a black body is actualized in his nightmares, as it entraps him in extreme darkness, and he feels himself consumed by blackness. Sumner’s confrontation with an African American woman who passes triggers his repressed racism and exposes his fear of the uncontrolled black body.

Through her portrayal of Sumner’s racism, including this dream, Hopkins reveals the pervasive (and arbitrary) construction of race. Instead of being consumed by the black women he fears so deeply, Sumner isolates himself from the woman he loves, and his racism destroys his life. *Hagar’s Daughter* expresses the futility of racial categories and its potential for harm that is not restricted to one side of the arbitrary color line. When Cuthbert Sumner attempts to repel and break from Aurelia Madison forever, he also attacks her racial background, screaming, “Let us end this scene and all relations that have ever existed,- if you were as pure as snow, and I loved you as my other self, *I would never wed with one of colored blood, an octaroon!*” (238). Sumner is not only adamant, but vicious in his response; even love, he thinks, could not prompt him to mingle bloodlines with an African American woman. His racism is later condemned by the narrator and the story. Cuthbert Sumner experiences intense repulsion and anxiety about Jewel’s identity, because of her step-mother’s mixed-race ancestry (and later, her own multiracial identity), her family’s proximity to blackness, and their subsequent fall from Washington society. This expressed racism proves fatal and tragic for both Cuthbert and Jewel, as it results in their separation and Jewel’s death from heartbreak. In the end, both Detective Henson/Ellis Enson and Cuthbert toss white society’s expectations and condemnations aside to reunite with the women they love. Ellis and Hagar are allowed a happy ending almost immediately, as they

embrace upon seeing each other, but Cuthbert's change comes too late; Jewel dies months before Cuthbert's redemption arc. Hopkins' narrative is clear in its moral: it is the anxiety and rejection of blackness that forms the novel's central issue. If Cuthbert had accepted his wife and her family for their association, they could have been happy. His racial prejudice dooms him and Jewel Bowen to tragedy.

Hopkins also destabilizes race as Mrs. Estelle Bowen/Hagar Enson-Sargeant, a seemingly white but in actuality passing African American woman, interacts with working class African Americans. In fact, the narrator tells the reader that as Aunt Henny and Venus tell Mrs. Bowen their stories surrounding Jewel and Aunt Henny's kidnapping, Aunt Henny is an "honored guest" in Mrs. Bowen's home: "Mrs. Bowen's attention was evenly divided between her step-daughter and the old Negress. Venus waited on the company and for the time all thoughts of caste were forgotten while the representatives of two races met on the ground of mutual interest and regard. Again and again Venus was called upon to repeat the story of her adventures" (Hopkins 240). The narrator's summary of this encounter disrupts societal understanding of race in multiple ways. First, although in this scene Mrs. Bowen has not yet been revealed to be an African American woman passing as white, the narrator judges her as a representative of the white race, as do Aunt Henny and Venus Johnson. If the reader believes Mrs. Bowen is white, she is representative of an upper class, educated, white woman who speaks the English standard. Aunt Henny and Venus are representative here of lower-class, working African Americans. And, while the narrator identifies their interaction in this as relatively equal, because Mrs. Bowen's attention is "evenly divided" between Aunt Henny and her step-daughter, Venus Johnson is still serving "the company," reminding the reader this meeting "of mutual interest and regard" is temporary. Furthermore, Venus Johnson continues to use dialect with Mrs. Bowen as a form of

seeming subservience: “Yes, Mis’ Bowen...when I peeked in through that window and saw Miss Jewel an’ gran sitting there talkin’, I was plum crazy for a minute” (240). Her use of dialect is also strategic; as Mrs. Bowen’s African American employee, she is expected to remain subservient, regardless of her act of bravery in saving her employer’s daughter. In this scene, Hopkins provides Venus and Aunt Henny with a powerful moment of storytelling and power, but that power is fleeting, demonstrating the expectations white employers place on their black employees. This power dynamic seems further arbitrary when the reader is reminded of Mrs. Bowen’s ambiguous racial heritage. If Mrs. Bowen, Jewel, Aunt Henny, and Venus are representatives of two races, what does this mean when Mrs. Bowen is revealed to be biracial? Who is representative of the “two races?” In addition to calling Mrs. Bowen’s racial identity into question, this scene complicates and attempts to deconstruct essentialism of race.

It is that invisibility and the cultural dominance of the white gaze that attempts to contain African Americans, but Hopkins’ use of Aunt Henny demonstrates the potential for resistance against that gaze. Through her status as a domestic worker, Aunt Henny learns St. Clair/General Benson’s secrets, including his murder of his secretary and manipulated ex-lover, Elise Bradford. As Aunt Henny dusts St. Claire/Benson’s office late at night, she is not noticed by St. Clair, even when he poisons Elise Bradford. He does not see his black workers, or feel that Aunt Henny could be watching him; for St. Clair, Aunt Henny is an object, rather than a subject. As is revealed at the court trial, Aunt Henny sees St. Clair and Elise Bradford drinking wine together, and when her curiosity is piqued, she “took another look...I was a peekin’ at him...I seed dat villyun drap somethin’ white inter de glass” (255). Here, Aunt Henny’s gaze moves from glances, from “peekin’,” or narrow and short, hidden glances, to a full and complete vision of murder. She makes the judgment here of St. Clair; she sees him and evaluates him as a “villain,”

a murderer. When Aunt Henny sees Elise Bradford throw up her arms and cry, as she tells it, “*My God, Charles, you’ve pizened [poisoned me],*” she faints, telling the court, “it takes somethin’ to make a colored woman faint...I los’ all purchase of myself” (256). Aunt Henny, an elderly woman who previously experienced years of enslavement, admits here that she has seen many disturbing things, but it is full exposure to a white man’s murder of a white woman that prompts her fainting spell. The shock, resulting from her final uninhibited gaze, has such heavy impact that she “los’ all purchase” of herself, and she loses consciousness.

St. Clair Enson/General Benson is Hopkins’ recreation of the malevolent slave holder and white supremacist, and he represents a deterioration of the South, both as he is exposed and punished, and as his own plantation falls into decay. St. Clair realizes what Aunt Henny has seen and heard, and he orders his servant, Isaac, to murder Aunt Henny (who is also Isaac’s mother-in-law). Instead, Isaac secures Aunt Henny in the same “prison” to which he restricts Jewell, the dilapidated Enson mansion. St. Clair’s attempt to contain Aunt Henny and silence her voice is reflective of the terror African Americans post-Emancipation faced at the hands of white men. Once she has seen too much, and once that gaze has been intercepted, she becomes a visible subject, capable of exposing St. Clair and dismantling his power. And, St. Clair’s first reaction to contain this woman’s voice is to permanently silence it. As such, St. Clair becomes representative of Hopkins’ understanding of the white men who have continued to violently violate and silence black women. The narrator describes the Enson plantation in which Enson/Benson entraps Aunt Henny and Jewel as a haunted place in steady decline:

“Enson Hall reminded one of an ancient ruin. The main body of the stately dwelling was standing, but scarcely a vestige of the once beautiful outbuildings remained; the cabins in the slave quarters stood like skeletons...War and desolation had done their best to reduce the stately pile to a wreck. It bore, too, an uncanny reputation. The Negroes declared that the beautiful woods and the lonely avenues were haunted after nightfall. It had grown

into a tradition that the ghost of Ellis Enson ‘walked,’ accompanied by a lady who bore an infant in her arms” (Hopkins 228).

Post-Civil War, Enson Hall reflects the haunting the South faces in the aftermath of slavery and continued oppression of African Americans. The mansion itself is standing but in twenty years looks like a relic, an “ancient ruin” of its former glory. Without its formerly enslaved bodies to maintain its upkeep, it becomes “scarcely a vestige” of the past, and although its outlying buildings are intact, the narrator is clear to point to the slave quarters and the slaves who were unjustly entrapped and forced to labor. The slave quarters’ description as “skeletons” brings African American bodies to the forefront, as a continual haunting, and the supposed ghost of the “lady who bore an infant in her arms,” Hagar, reminds the villagers nearby of the intentional and tragic separation of African American women from their enslaved children. Hopkins’ inclusion of Enson Hall as Jewel and Aunt Henny’s prison illuminates the white tradition’s continued oppression of black bodies, particularly African American women’s bodies, and Enson/Benson’s continued attempts to cling to that past of slavery. The narrator thus expresses a tradition that attempts a continuation of hiding and silencing women.

Hopkins employs African American testimony to point to and disrupt the white testimony the white detective tradition relies upon, and it is this legal testimony that unveils the criminal in *Hagar’s Daughter* and exposes the book’s hidden identities. In Twain’s narrative, Pudd’head Wilson exposes Tom Driscoll and Chambers’ identities through basic pre-forensics evidence, the use of thumbprints. Twain’s use of the courtroom scene describes a typical method of scientific deduction in a white tradition: “He [Pudd’head Wilson] had made up his mind to try a few hardy guesses, in mapping out his theory of the origin and motive of the murder- guesses designed to fill up gaps in it- guesses which could help if they hit, and would probably do no harm if they didn’t” (Twain 133). Through hypotheses, and attempts to fill the “gaps,” along

with painstaking comparisons of fingerprints collected over twenty years, Wilson combines luck and deductive reasoning, which culminates in a shocking reveal in the space of the courtroom, one that Wilson himself narrates and which results in “awed silence” (141). Hopkins improvises in her courtroom reveal scene, and rather than providing forensic evidence, her scene gives voice to an African American woman and victim. Aunt Henny’s court scene exposes the court system and the detectives that operate in it, those who relegate African Americans to objects, rather than subjects. Through her testimony, Aunt Henny is the authority and voice to another woman’s murder, as well as her own attacker and employer. By doing so, Aunt Henny also exposes General Benson’s identity, that of St. Clair Enson. Hopkins does not idealize the reception of Aunt Henny’s testimony at trial, however; it takes the supportive testimony of Detective Henson/Ellis Enson for the crowd to accept it. Instead, Hopkins exposes the failure of the law to uphold the authority of a black woman. The Attorney-General “attacked the defense fiercely,” and the narrator tells us, “Then ensued a scene unparalleled in the history of courts of justice,” but one which rings familiar to the readership: Aunt Henny’s evidence in the face of a white man is not merely called into question, but condemned by the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General says, “On what would you base such an unheard of precedent? On the evidence of a Negress?...In the same spirit that has actuated my legal brother, while deprecating violence of any kind as beneath the dignity of our calling, I would feel myself justified in sounding the slogan of the South- lynch-law!” (Hopkins 257). The trial’s crowd reacts viscerally and violently; Hopkins writes, “Instantly a chorus of voices took up the refrain- ‘That’s the talk! No nigger’s word against a white man! This is a white man’s country yet!’” (257). In this courtroom scene, a black woman’s testimony and assertion of self so incenses the white crowd that the Attorney-General and crowd openly supports lynching. Hopkins is clear in this portrayal:

African Americans may be free from enslavement, but they are recognized as objects, rather than subjects, and relegated to a white gaze. Aunt Henny's testimony, as a black woman, is disruptive and threatening to white men's dominance, and it is only when a white man, Detective Henson, gives his testimony supporting her narrative that Aunt Henny is taken seriously. Still, Hopkins' readership sees this injustice and discrepancy, and, in this scene, the "crime" at the reader's forefront is the hypocrisy exhibited by the Attorney-General and Washington society.

The crime that remains at the novel's end is the crime against African American women's bodies, specifically. Eugenia DeLamotte discusses the serialized novel as an African American gothic romance with a detective story, as well as a call for social justice. DeLamotte identifies a community of characters who operate as a detective team that crosses divisive ideological lines within the text, including race and gender. Through a Gothic setting, DeLamotte argues slavery is revealed as the narrative's original crime. I find this claim supported through various characters in the text, but I would add another crime that figures more dominantly in *Hagar's Daughter*: the continued oppression of African Americans, particularly African American women, and oppression especially perpetrated by the North. Through Elise Bradford's revelation to Cuthbert Sumner, on Aurelia Madison and mixed-race women the verdict runs as follows:

“Living, they [mixed-race women] were despised by whites and blacks alike; dead, they are mourned by none. You know yourself...that caste as found at the North is a terrible thing. It is killing the black man's hope there in every avenue; it is centered against his advancement. We in the South are flagrant in our abuse of the Negro but we do not descend to the pettiness that your section practices...But black blood is everywhere- in society and out, and in our families even; we cannot feel assured that it has not filtered into the most exclusive families” (Hopkins 159-160).

This passage is telling of the novel's purpose in its portrayal of North-South relations with African Americans. As a white woman, Elise Bradford recognizes classism and racism that African



Americans, including mixed-race individuals such as Aurelia Madison, face. She categorizes the North's covert racism as more insidious than the South's violence against black bodies, because of Northerners' claims of equality but practiced segregation and oppression. Even women like Aurelia Madison, who appear white, cannot advance in society once their heritage is revealed; they exist in a liminal space, in between the accepted distinction of black/white. Aurelia Madison, then, is another tragic mulatta, doomed to destitution and death, once her background is revealed. Furthermore, Elise Bradford expresses the mystery at the center of *Hagar's Daughter*- who can tell who contains white or black blood, and once that is revealed, why should it matter? As Elise Bradford expresses it, "black blood is everywhere- in society and out, and in our families even," and with that phrase, she also alludes to the sexual exploitation and rape of enslaved women. Elise Bradford expresses pity for Aurelia Madison, and that movement motivates the readership to consider her tragic fate, as well as that of Hagar Sargeant-Enson/Estelle Bowen, and by extension, the African American woman.

Thus, Pauline Hopkins' novel provides a detective story that investigates a female African American subjectivity. Through incorporation of literary tropes, including the tragic mulatta, minstrelsy, and particularly detective genre conventions, Hopkins intervenes in the white tradition. *Hagar's Daughter* pushes readers to empathize with African American women and their oppression. Prejudice and caste cause Aurelia Madison and Hagar Sargeant-Enson to hide their mixed-race ancestry; Cuthbert Sumner's own racism destroys his marriage and results in tragedy. While the crimes and schemes of the detective story's villains provide main plot devices, it is the mystery of identity, including race and gender constructions, which impress upon the audience. In a white and male-dominated historical moment, Hopkins provides complex images of African American female identity through the context of detective fiction; her

intervention claims a place for those women, as she says “black blood” or black women, are “everywhere” and deserve the same agency as their white counterparts.

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