JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION
Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2019
ISSN 2472-0837

Utopia and the Gendered Past in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; Or, The Hidden Self*

Jalondra A. Davis, University of California, Riverside

Abstract: This article examines the gendered implications of what I call Afrotopia: the imagining of an ancient, powerful African civilization untouched by colonialism, in Pauline Hopkins 1903 serial, *Of One Blood; Or, The Hidden Self.* Many, in tracing a geneology of Afrofuturism, have identified this novel as a precursor to the contemporary form. As such, this article interrogates the novel's, and dominant critical readings' association of contemporary black femininity with realism and racialized trauma, and challenges unquestioning representations of Afrotopia as a liberatory space. It argues that gendered violence and black women's autonomy often get overlooked in the flight away from the racial past, and calls for more critical engagements of Afrofuturist visions in order to maximize the genre's political potential.

Keywords: Afrotopia; Pauline Hopkins; Afrofuturism; racial purity; passing

> "The Queen is here!" exclaimed a voice. In an instant all present prostrated themselves upon the floor. Reuel alone stood erect, his piercing eyes fixed upon the woman before him. Grave, tranquil and majestic, surrounded by her virgin guard, she advanced gracefully, bending her haught head; then, gradually her sinuous body bent and swayed down, down, until she, too, had prostrated herself, and half-knelt, half-lay upon the marble floor at Reuel's feet. (Hopkins, 1903, "Magazine Novels" p. 567)

Throughout the twentieth century, African American writing about Africa was a reservoir for the political desires and spiritual longings of African descendants in the United States (Gruesser, 2000, p. 1). Frequently, black popular history, academic enterprise, fiction, and nonfiction have overlapped in reference to Africa as not just a geographical, but also a metaphysical, utopian site. Africa has been seen not only as an ancestral homeland, but also as a place where a world currently denied to African Americans—a world of wellness, abundance, dignity, and splendor—might be realized. The scene above, from Pauline Hopkins' serial novel *Of One Blood, Or, The Hidden Self* (1903), displays one such act of imaginative recovery as a scorned and world-weary African American scientist named Reuel stumbles upon a hidden African kingdom and is later betrothed to its virgin queen. Through all of its majesty, this scene's depiction of the "erect" Reuel and prostrated queen recalls the gendered and sexualized codes of Africanist utopian desire. This betrothal scene is often read by scholars as a productive turn away from American racism and the domestic project of racial uplift towards a Pan-African vision of global blackness, and calls the assumed egalitarian and democratic features of African-based utopias into question. This paper explores the gendered dimensions of what I call Afrotopia—a particular form of black science fiction that imagines an isolated, advanced African civilization untouched by the ravages of European colonialism and the traumas and humiliations of enslavement. Where such imagining can be a politically productive and sometimes psychically necessary enterprise, it also often elides the complexity and autonomy of "real" black women, while associating them with the degradations of a disgraceful racial past.

Science fiction critics such as Tom Moylan (2000) recognize utopia both as an independent form and a tradition best understood within science

fiction studies (pp. xv-xvi). Utopias construct temporal, spatial, or metaphysical alternatives that can de-familiarize and potentially disrupt the violence of the "real world." Though utopias have often been assumed to be progressive and resistant to the dominant order, a critical look at traditional genealogies of utopian science fiction reveals its deep imbrication with the logics of conquest, racism, and eugenics. According to Ahmad, (2009), classic utopias often presume that society will steadily improve under the management of technological progress and capitalist cosmopolitanism (pp. 6, 21, and 25). However, the anticolonial and nationalist utopias of the turn of the century, overlooked by those traditional genealogies, differ spatially and temporally. Spatially, anticolonial utopian fictions envision utopian sites outside of the boundaries of the United States not to propose distant curiosities for exploration, but to suggest the potential psychic and political power of transnational identities (Ibid, p. 131). Temporally, African American utopian fiction often turns towards the past rather than the future. The past is where the apocalyptic break that created a new world for people of African descent is located, so it stands to reason that that is also where African American writers return for pre-apocalyptic models of black life. In terms of gender, sexuality, and family formation, the impulse to "return" often implies the need to retrieve and recuperate black life from the disorganizing effects of slavery.

Studies of Afrofuturism frequently celebrate how black science fiction destabilizes the association of Black people with a fixed, realist racial past and interrogates popular culture's investment in static, archetypal performances of black personhood (Ron Eglash, 2002; Jackson & Moody, 2011). In their definition of Astro-Blackness, Anderson and Rollins (2015) claim, "Astro-Blackness is an Afrofuturistic concept in which a black person's state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe" (p. 1). The observation that Astro-Blackness represents a release from a "confining and crippling slave mentality" captures one recurring theme in Afrofuturist studies, a linear, liberatory narrative that represents outer space and the future as new spaces of possibility that can liberate the confined slave subject of the modern era from a "slave mentality." While not arguing with the contention that Afrofuturism opens up new possibilities, representations, and ways of engaging existing reality, I am wary of the reinforcement of a narrative in which enslavement can only be read as a dark past from which to rise.

Rather than a singular radical break with slavery that results in a liberated, unpolluted black being freed into space and the future, I propose a critical grappling, to see what can be recovered as well as what should be left behind. The fictions gathered into characterizations of Afrofuturism as freedom from racialized subjection are themselves more skeptical, uneasy, and critical than such characterizations would suggest. I challenge some of the critical and popular investment in Afrofuturism as a site of progressive blackness, unmoored from the racial traumas of the past and present. This investment threatens to overlook how often black science fiction is deeply concerned with the past and skeptical about a progressive narrative of liberation. When Hopkins' genre-blending African utopic novel has been critically read with a focus on its antirealist elements, it has been assumed that the Afrofuturist part of the storyline (the protagonist's repatriation to an African utopia) is the most progressive. In other words, as literary realism has been connected to the realities of enslavement and racialized, sexualized trauma, literary speculation has been tied to liberation. I am interested in collapsing these boundaries, in looking at how the "real" and "unreal" in Afrofuturism

are always intrinsically connected, and how the refusal to thoroughly critique Afrofuturist visions actually inhibits their political potential. I argue that the characterization of Afrofuturism as an escape from the racial past reproduces a gendered and epistemic violence towards the subjects that occupy that past.

I adapt the term "Afrotopia" from the title of Wilson Jeremiah Moses' extensive study *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (1998). Moses' study places more recent iterations of Afrocentricity within the long tradition of Ethiopianism in African American intellectual, political, and spiritual thought. Ethiopianism is a cyclical view of black history that identifies African diasporans as descendants of a great African civilization, in which original African greatness is lost but destined to be restored. According to Moses, "The Afrocentric tradition is related to utopian ideas of progress because it promises a glorious destiny for African people in the future. Ironically, however, it looks backward to a utopia in the past when Africans were the most advanced people on earth" (Moses, 1998, p. 237). This paper examines the coherence between Ethiopianism, black utopian SF, and "gendered remembering," a practice which naturalizes heteropatriarchy within the celebration of a proud African identity. As an acknowledged precursor to contemporary African American science fiction, *Of One Blood* should be critically analyzed for its tensions and contradictions. The novel raises questions about the literary, critical, and political treatment of subjects that are most marked by enslavement; therefore, these subjects cannot be safely recuperated within the Ethiopianist teleology that permeates both Pan-African and Afrofuturist discourses. Though Hopkins provides space and potential for both an endorsement and critique of Afrotopia's gendered dimensions, critics have overwhelmingly accepted the logic that 'pure' African identity acts in opposition to a post-slavery subjectivity irrevocably tied up with the sexually violated black female body. The two female love interests in *Of One Blood*—the majestic African queen Candace and "tragic mulatto" Fisk Jubilee singer Dianthe Lusk—become mirrored embodiments of their respective spatial and temporal locations, and for the possibilities for black manhood within those spatial and temporal locations. In rereading this novel, I argue for an interrogation of the assumed progressiveness of Afrotopia, and for the generative possibilities of diasporic blackness for utopian thought and practice.

Of One Blood follows the protagonist, Reuel Briggs, a medical student with mystical powers who is haunted by the spirit of his mother and his own depression. Reuel passes for white and lives among white people including his best friend, Aubrey Livingston. Reuel and Aubrey both become obsessed with Fisk Jubilee singer Dianthe Lusk, who Reuel, through a combination of science and mysticism, brings back from the dead and later marries. Aubrey sends Reuel on a mission to Africa to discover the lost treasures of Ethiopia, then fakes Dianthe's death and marries her under another name. Readers eventually learn that Dianthe, Reuel, and Aubrey are the children of Mira, an enslaved woman with mystical powers, and her owner (and half-brother), Aubrey Livingston Sr. Through a series of plot machinations, the siblings are raised in different households and know nothing of their biological relationship.

Hopkins' portrayal of an incestuous love triangle of differently racialized siblings at the turn of the century combines plot conventions popular in the sentimental and gothic fictions of her time with national racial and sexual anxieties. Miscegenation and incest were closely connected in antebellum and Victorian thought, law, and literature, both enacting an improper mingling of blood that threatened systems of privilege and inheritance. In sentimental fiction featuring white characters, fan-

tastic plot devices were needed to achieve the unlikely estrangement, reunions, and unwitting acts of incest of close relatives. For Hopkins, however, slavery readily provided for these possibilities. According to Christina Sharpe (2010), "Slavery provides both a time and space (real and fantastic) where to commit incest or amalgamation is to break the same law and the imminent rupture and onset of forgetting that break around which some cultural or national formation has taken hold" (p. 28). Hopkins' conflation of miscegenation and incest serves as a pointed critique of white southern patriarchy, which legalized and naturalized both taboos in the unchecked power of generations of slaveowners over generations of Black enslaved women—some their own biological daughters and the offspring or mistresses of their male relatives (Salvant, 2008, p. 663). For African Americans, miscegenation and incest were enabled by slavery's violence upon Black families; thus, these concepts served as major sources of anxiety in the Victorian era struggle to leverage the integral, sexually-ordered Black home and family as sites of both resistance and inclusion.

I argue that the sexual anxieties of post-abolition black thought are largely attached to the black, female, reproductive body. Through early colonial law, which sets in motion the transmission of slave status from mother to child, the black female body becomes the central object of antebellum sexual and reproductive exploitation (Angela Davis, 1981; Dorothy Roberts, 1993; Adrienne Davis, 2002). According to Kassanoff (1996), the "black maternal body functioned as a site of significant New Negro intervention" (p. 172). In articulating a new Black manhood and less conciliatory politics, New Negro intellectuals sought to wrest African American women's bodies from the control of white men.

While the siblings in *Of One Blood* are all products of rape and miscegenation, the novel's focus on Reuel's attempt to claim normative masculinity constructs Aubrey as the representation of antagonistic white masculinity, and Dianthe as the soiled terrain over which they do battle. Hopkins preserves Reuel's sexual integrity, and therefore the possibility of his redemption from slavery's sexualized violence, by separating him from Dianthe on the morning of their marriage—before its consummation. But her subsequently consummated marriage to Aubrey signals two things: Reuel's failure as a patriarch in the postindustrial American context, and Dianthe's imbrication into the very cycle of incest and miscegenation that threatened African American efforts to rescue their kinship from slavery's traumatic displacements. As a woman and the locus of reproduction, Dianthe cannot be allowed to survive. Removing her body from the narrative also removes the possibility of her reproducing the sexual shame of slavery and the threat that such shame poses to a black masculinity's attempt to adhere to dominant masculine norms. By way of "Hopkins' proto-Faulknerian miscegenation plot," Dianthe is replaced with a seemingly preferable (and "more [socially] appropriate") alternative of black femininity when Reuel discovers the magnificent underground Ethiopian civilization of Telessar, to which he is a long-lost heir, and is betrothed to its virgin queen, Candace. In this unconquered, hidden city in "Africa, perhaps, he will escape the 'mongrelization' that [Edward Wilmot] Blyden thought destructive of African purity in the United States" (Sundquist, 1993, p. 572).

I argue that a preoccupation with purity—a mingled concept of racial and sexual purity that juxtaposes Candace's blackness and virginity against Dianthe's mixed-race ancestry and sexual vulnerability—is one reflected not just in Victorian-era New Negro thought, but also in more recent and contemporary readings of the novel. In order to read Reuel's marriage to Queen Candace as redemptive and progressive, critical readings tend to dismiss his violence against Dianthe, overlook

Utopia and the Gendered Past, continued

her specific representation of blackness, and hold her responsible for her own sexual victimization. In this analysis, I begin with a re-reading of Dianthe, and her relationship to Reuel, as a pathway to my central argument, that the desire to celebrate Afrotopia as a pre-racial, pre-patriarchal space overlooks its very reliance on racialized, gendered memory and violence, which constrains the productive possibilities for New World blackness.

Just as *Of One Blood; Or, The Hidden Self* has two distinct titles joined as one, it also combines two distinct settings and corresponding genres. Where one plot is sentimental fiction, resembling Hopkins' other novels in its mixed-race characters and love triangles, the other is a fantastical revision of the African adventure story. Most readings of Hopkins' African plot interpret it as an expression of Pan African and emigrationist sensibilities, a refutation of black inferiority through the retrieval of African identity, and a proposition of utopian possibilities for full personhood during the violent rollback of the fragile gains of abolition and Reconstruction. I don't necessarily disagree with these readings, but I do want to draw attention to their gendered and sexual implications. According to Dohra Ahmad (2009), "The novel's two plots, the American and the utopian, may frequently seem mismatched; but their coexistence in the same book show how ancient glory has degenerated under the system of slavery 'in this new continent,' and why utopia is thus so necessary" (p. 138.). Here, readers see that Afrotopia is envisioned as a resurrection of "ancient glory," directly opposed to the degeneration that is black life under enslavement. The most generous critical readings of Hopkins' Afrotopia tend to reproduce a feminization of the racial past that excuses masculine violence against the (for lack of a better term) "real" woman who most readily exemplifies the product of that past.

The novel's hero, Dianthe, (named for the wife of militant abolitionist John Brown) seems, at first glance, to be a classic tragic mulatta. Taken advantage of by an unscrupulous employer, she is injured and rendered amnesiac by a train wreck, to be revived through Reuel's combined mystical and medical power. Her true identity kept from her, Dianthe agrees to marry Reuel only to be abandoned. Dianthe is then abducted and forced into marriage by Aubrey, who eventually kills her. Hopkins' Dianthe has presented a consistent problem for critics attempting to read the novel in terms of its productivity for black political thought and desire (Schrager, 1996, p. 193). Jennie A. Kassanoff's discussion of Of One Blood in the context of the masculinist politics of New Negro discourse is one of the most critical studies of gender in the novel. Kassanoff (1996) writes of Dianthe, "It is curious that Of One Blood circulates so persistently around the tragically passive female form. As the eroticized object upon which Reuel and Aubrey practice their unethical feats of mesmerism, Dianthe Lusk represents a fundamental problem in the text" (p. 173). In her seminal analysis of black women's turn-of-the-century domestic novels, Claudia Tate (1993) characterizes Hopkins' portrayal of Dianthe as a sharp departure from the black female domestic novel's depiction of female agency. In Tate's study, Of One Blood marks a decline in the faith in domestic romance as an allegory of political desire by shifting to romantic tragedy, but it correspondingly shifts away from a heroine-centered to a hero-centered narrative strategy (p. 208). As Of One Blood, in its expansion beyond the domestic courtship story, also exceeds the domestic site of the United States, it suggests promise for African American personhood beyond the confines of the United States and, correspondingly, beyond the domestic novel's frustrated aspiration to full citizenship and humanity in the post-Reconstruction era. Following this, one might suggest that the turn from the heroine-centered text and female-centered concerns to more mas-

culine struggles coincides with broadening plots and black political strategies.

However, this suggestion threatens to reproduce the idea that female narratives are somehow less political and that masculine narratives are somehow less domestic. In the context of this paper, "less political" means less concerned with the collective challenges, conditions, and destinies of black people, while "less domestic" means less concerned with anxieties surrounding courtship, the home, and family formation. Actually, the very interdependence of the dual plotlines in *Of One Blood* reveals the utter inextricability of the domestic and the political. But, more pertinent to my analysis, I also want to push back against the idea that *Of One Blood* represents such a significant departure from female agency, particularly in the figure of Dianthe. Rather, I suggest that her agency is not legible within binary logics that construct Dianthe as an embodiment of vulnerable and violated black life within the United States in opposition to Queen Candace's embodiment of the pure and autonomous Afrotopia. This binary logic informs readings of the novel that tend to minimize the struggle between Reuel and Dianthe in the interest of a treating Reuel both as a noble hero and the novel's central figure of African diasporan identity.

To rethink Dianthe as merely passive and manipulated, we might first look at her as a laborer. She enters the novel as a gifted and skillful soloist with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Readers learn that after her accident, Dianthe left the group to work for a traveling mesmeric physician who offered her "a large salary" (Hopkins, 1903, 1988, p. 474). Though we do not get Dianthe's narrative perspective to learn the reasons for this abrupt departure, we can see it as an expression of her independent will and desires. As a single black woman at the turn of the century, Dianthe would have had few opportunities to make a comfortable living for herself. When we consider that the siblings Reuel, Aubrey, and Dianthe seemed to have inherited an inclination for the metaphysical, we might see her interest in this line of work as driven by this affinity. She enters the employment of a female practitioner, perhaps believing herself to be safer in such a situation. In the critical rush to identify Dianthe solely as an object of manipulation, this choice as an expression of independence and desire is often overlooked. Unfortunately, this employment does not end well for Dianthe, exemplifying the work force as often a site of exploitation, rather than liberation, for black women. When Reuel and Aubrey discover her, she is suffering from a traumatic brain injury from a train wreck and mental damage from excessive mesmeric experimentation. Reuel revives Dianthe from a near-death state but, rather than help her to recover her identity, he withholds it, further incapacitating her ability to function independently. From this point forward, we should read her behavior not as female passivity but instead, as that of a young woman with memory loss and mental illness, struggling to survive and to reclaim her personal, as well as racial, history. Reuel and Aubrey both take advantage of her isolation and disability.

Critics tend to read Reuel and Dianthe's relationship as a purely motivated, romantic courtship (Schrager, 1996, p. 194). Yet, it is actually an exploitative power arrangement, pragmatic on both sides. Dianthe consents to marry Reuel not out of passion but out of a desire for safety, which his adoration of her suggests that he will provide. Reuel only achieves this consent through deception and the forceful negation of her full personhood. Reuel admits as much when he claims the injured Dianthe as an "opportunity" to achieve the sexual and domestic desires that he doesn't believe he can earn on his own merits:

> "I'm not unselfish; I don't pretend to be. There is no sin in taking her out of the sphere where she was born…I have not the manner nor the charm which wins women. Men like me get love from them which is half akin to pity, when they get anything at all. It is but the shadow. This is my opportunity for happiness; I seize it." (Hopkins, 1903, p. 479)

Reuel openly declares his intention to marry Dianthe before she can recover her identity, and goes to great lengths to keep her identity concealed from her. This intention is provoked not only by his feelings for her, but by his awareness of her trauma-induced vulnerability as an "opportunity." He refers to the "sphere where she was born" as having no value whatsoever, despite the value it may have had for her. Dianthe looks white enough to pass, yet she is aware of and willingly identifies with a black identity. While Reuel frames his denial of Dianthe's blackness as protection, it is ultimately about self-preservation—to help Dianthe restore her identity would not only help her to regain her independence (and enable her to not choose him), but it would also expose his hidden racial identity. While appearing white like Reuel and Aubrey but choosing not to live as white, Dianthe exhibits a courage and an understanding of the multidimensional content of blackness that Reuel lacks. Passing as white can be perceived as resistance against the legal and social demands that determine identity according to a one-drop rule, or as a survival strategy that cannot be separated from the oppressive constraints of white supremacy. But passing also has psychic costs that Reuel's depression and anxiety make clear: a loss of community, his constant fear and self-policing, and his inability to achieve true intimacy with others (as opposed to Aubrey, whose unawareness allows him to pass without such emotional consequences). Blackness in *Of One Blood* is not merely a troubled biological or legal category, it is a vibrant sociality and performance that unites the traumatic and the fulfilling, which Dianthe exemplifies in her mastery of what W. E. B. Du Bois called "the sorrow songs." Dianthe's voice simultaneously expresses anguish, pain, beauty, and history; it is a sensory experience of blackness.

Just as Reuel lives in terror of being discovered, he fears Dianthe's recovery of her musical passion, which is linked to her memory and identity. At one point, while watching her enjoy music, Reuel observes, "Dianthe's voice was completely gone along with her memory. But music affected her strangely, and Reuel watched her anxiously" (Hopkins, 1903, p. 491). Reuel here states his concern for Dianthe in terms of her delicate health, but he is actually worried that she may recover her voice, her memory, and her full personhood. The next moment, Reuel leads her away, allegedly "mindful of her infirmity" to "escape the music." This is an example of how the very strategies of protection applied to women are actually aimed at masculine self-protection; it is Reuel, not Dianthe, who threatens to suffer from exposure to music and the recovery of her memory. By removing her from music, he literally suppresses her voice, which represents an autonomy that cannot coexist with the patriarchal masculinity that Reuel is attempting to exercise. It is in this moment, as he removes her from music, that he proposes to her. Her reaction is not that of a woman deeply in love: "while she believed in him, depended upon him, and gathered strength from his love, what she gave in return was but a slight, cold affection compared with his adoration." Her response to his proposal is a gesture of defeat and weariness, rather than desire: "With the sigh of a tired child [she] crept into his arms, and into his heart for all time and eternity" (pp. 491-492).

Rather than mutual love, this scene demonstrates Reuel's abusive control and Dianthe's resignation. Her submission is not produced by her natural passivity, but through layers of trauma and manip-

ulation. Literally removed from music, her identity, and the source of strength that her mind was grasping to regain, Dianthe turns to the source in front of her: Reuel. Throughout the entire scene, readers never hear Dianthe's voice, the voice that her connection with music threatened to liberate. Reuel's selfish attempts to "protect" Dianthe by silencing her voice are pivotal in the tragedy that befalls the couple. After his failure to find employment, Reuel's decides, without consulting her, to go on a dangerous but highly paid anthropological expedition to Africa, orchestrated by his false friend, Aubrey Livingston. Dianthe still has the power of intuition and knows that something is amiss with Aubrey, reacting enough to him that others can casually perceive it (Hopkins, p. 501). Yet, Reuel, ignores her concerns and chooses to leave her in Aubrey's care. When she protests his departure on the day of their wedding, he dismisses and again, silences her, as he "closed her lips with warm lingering kisses" (Hopkins p. 499). Whether there was ever a conversation about how she felt about Aubrey is something we can only speculate, but Reuel's decision-making with regard to the African expedition, while perhaps well-meaning, is yet another example of his refusal to engage Dianthe as an equal. It demonstrates his prioritization of patriarchal desire—to provide according to the standards of respectable domestic life—over the safety that Dianthe seemed to desire most in the aftermath of her traumatizing injuries. Later in the novel, Dianthe confronts Reuel: "The friend into whose care you gave me has acquired the power over me that you alone possessed, that power sacred to our first meeting and our happy love. Why did you leave me in the power of a fiend in human shape, to search for gold? There are worse things in life than poverty." (Hopkins, p. 579) In these few lines, Dianthe admonishes Reuel for his sublimation of her voice, his capitalistic value system, and his exploitation of her vulnerability. As we can see from reading the deceptions of their courtship and Dianthe's unenthused capitulation to his proposal, we might even read the phrase "happy love" as sarcastic.

When Reuel leaves, Dianthe begins to recover her musicality, and with that, tentatively, her identity. According to Shana Redmond (2014), "Music is a method…It is more than sound; it is a complex system of mean(ing)s and ends that mediate our relationships to one another, to space, to our histories and historical moment" (p. 1). Music is Dianthe's method for engaging and making sense of her world, and it reconnects her to her history and a broader community. Shortly after he departs, she, seemingly possessed, plays and sings "Go Down Moses" to an audience of Livingston and his friends. Dianthe's performance of "Go Down Moses" can be read within Redmond's analysis of black anthems. Redmond locates the roots of the black anthem in the importance of music in black counterpublics to African American spirituals: "The Afro-Anglophone tradition of resistance among the enslaved is heard in the spirituals and field hollers, which carried messages of rebellion and techniques of survival" (2014, p. 10). Nicole N. Aljoe (2012) also identifies "Go Down Moses" as an African American anthem, and compares Dianthe's performance to the climactic aria of Verdi's opera, Aida. In Aida, the enslaved Ethiopian heroine sings longingly for freedom and her homeland. Arias were powerful, challenging inserts to operas, that suspended the narrative as the soloist demonstrated her vocal mastery (pp. 286-287). This performance disrupts Reuel and Aubrey's patriarchal control and re-centers Dianthe as a master of her art form and an agent within her own life. Yet, Hopkins revises the aria, a form traditionally reserved for soloists meant to stand out from the surrounding action and characters. Dianthe does not sing alone. In this performance she seems to be both possessed and accompanied by the spirit of her mother, who was enslaved at the Livingston mansion:

> A weird contralto, veiled as it were, rising and falling upon every wave of the great soprano, and reaching the ear as from some strange distance. The singer sang on, her voice dropping sweet and low, the echo following in, and at the closing word, she fell back in a dead faint. (Hopkins, 1903, p. 502)

Through this mingled aria, Dianthe begins to recover not just an individual but a plural voice, suggesting that the black identity represented by her voice is not just individual and constraining but collective and empowering. As Dianthe exercises her power of voice and learns more from the spirit of her mother and from meeting her grandmother, she begins to gain greater clarity. Only after recovering her memories firsthand and determining her identity for herself does Dianthe act to resist. Dianthe manipulates Aubrey then attempts to kill him. However, Aubrey overpowers Dianthe and forces her to drink the poison she had prepared for him, ultimately causing her own agonizing death. Most critics' accounts of Dianthe's death narrate it simply as murder or suicide. In actuality, this scene, which turns Dianthe's attempt at resistance against her, reveals that she is neither just a victim of Aubrey's violence, nor her own despair. Instead, she challenges him and struggles for her life. Her death in the arms of Reuel, who arrives too late to save her, is a judgment on him as well as Aubrey. While Reuel does not physically abuse or rape Dianthe, his mental abuse renders her vulnerable to the violence she suffers at Aubrey's hands. Readers should acknowledge that Reuel's villainy is different from Aubrey's because of their differing contexts. White supremacy limits Reuel's options and places far greater pressure on his choices. He leaves Dianthe to pursue riches in Ethiopia because of the ways that race limits his resources. However, one might argue that these additional pressures demand that black men and women are even more vigilant about engaging as equals in order to meet such challenges and pressures with the joint force of their ideas, experiences, and critical judgment. Black people's exclusion from traditional gender norms (and lack of the structural conditions that support the perpetuation of those norms) provides an opportunity for other methods of negotiation. More often, however, this exclusion from dominant gender norms provokes a longing to perform such norms. Normative gender performance then gets constructed as a form of resistance to the white supremacy that makes dominant constructions of gender both desirable and impossible to achieve. This impossibility of patriarchy and, seemingly, of love itself, is linked to the setting of the post-Reconstruction United States. It is only when Reuel leaves this setting that he has the opportunity to fulfill the vision of heteronormative patriarchy that he sought with Dianthe. The Afrotopia becomes a site of unfettered masculinity and black personhood excised of the kind of sexualized trauma that becomes attached to Dianthe's body.

This brings the discussion back to the epigraphic scene, of Reuel's betrothal to Queen Candace. The ceremony takes place after Reuel is (falsely) notified that Dianthe was killed in a boating accident. Candace lives with her attendants in the innermost cloister of Meroe, home only to the city's virgins. In Tellessar, virgin queens rule for a time, retire, then appoint their successor to rule alone until the crown prince returns. The scene of Reuel and Candace's meeting and betrothal is a dramatic departure from his American life. He is no longer the poor student who could not gain the love of a beautiful woman without deception, or earn enough money to support her. In the presence of Candace, he is suddenly important, powerful, and authoritative. He expresses a confidence in this sexually-charged scene that he has not demonstrated before, and Candace readily defers her power to him, literally sitting at his feet: "she, with a gesture of dissent, sank upon the cushions that

had served her for footstools" (Hopkins, 1903, p. 568).

Interrupting his despair, Reuel is suddenly offered the opportunity to marry a beautiful woman and live as the king of a nation. Ironically, the African ancestry that he had spent so much of his life denying is the only quality that secures this fantastic destiny. It is no wonder that Reuel moves on rather quickly from the woman he had professed to love for a lifetime: "Dianthe was gone. The world outside held nothing dear to one who had always lived much within himself. Why not accept this pleasant destiny which held its alluring arms so seductively to him?" (Hopkins, p. 570). This passage is telling in its sexualized conflation of the throne of Tellessar with Candace's body. The throne, and Candace, offer Reuel an identity untroubled by the various humiliations of black life in America. Instead of grappling with a world that excludes black people from the very modes of gendered being that are held up to them as examples, in lieu of struggling with a complex woman's autonomy, Reuel has a virgin literally prostrating herself at his feet. The convenience of this destiny, and how quickly Reuel seems to move on from Dianthe in order to accept it, makes it difficult for me to concur with critical claims that Reuel's final acceptance of an African identity is some kind of moral triumph.

Nevertheless, this is prominently how Reuel's discovery and embrace of his royal lineage is read; as a reading that coincides with an abandonment of Dianthe as a locus for chattel slavery's sexual perversions. According to Shawn Salvant (2008), "In several critical readings, the shift from the American to the African setting in the novel's final act has been considered a morally cleansing recontextualization because the change of venue leaves Dianthe behind (dead) and abandons the context of American slavery from which the incest problem stems" (p. 669). Adenike Davidson (2008) interprets the tragedy of the American storyline as representing "the difficulty for African Americans to structure safe and productive racial homes" (2008, p. 86). Though she does extensively critique Reuel's mistreatment of Dianthe, Davidson ultimately lets him off the hook by locating his redemption in the experience of journeying to an African homeland, discovering a proud African identity, and establishing a home with Queen Candace. Emphasizing "the necessity for establishing and protecting the proper racial home as a foundation for the Black nation" (2008, p. 85), Davidson claims:

> Because Aubrey and Dianthe are unaware of/or ashamed of their African heritage, they cannot reap its royal benefits. Although Reuel, Aubrey, and Dianthe are all of one blood, it is assumed that only Reuel receives and accepts a psychological transformation and experiences empowerment due to his direct experience with a positive ancient African history and culture (Davidson, 2008, p. 102).

The words littered throughout this analysis— "positive," "safe," "productive," and "proper"— serve as code for a home centered around the patriarchal, heterosexual nuclear family, somehow presuming that this particular family formation negates the possibility of violence, and is a necessary foundation for change in the conditions of black life. This perspective reveals the close relationship, at least in terms of familial discourse, between white and black nationalisms and an acceptance of the heteronormative and classist assumptions embedded into nationalist thought. While in some places, Davidson chides Reuel for denying Dianthe's blackness (2008, p. 89), in others, Davidson also elides the complex blackness within the diasporic experience by locating "psychological transformation" and "empowerment" only in this precolonial Afrotopian identity. She links that identity with the fact of Candace's virginity, polarizing

the "exploited" Dianthe against the "protected" Candace. She suggests that, in the United States, while black women are exploited through black male's collusion with the white power structure, "in the global nation the black woman is empowered by her sacred and protected position that the black male (and the community) places her in" (Davidson, 2008, p. 103). Davidson seems to suggest that intraracial sexism is only a result of collusion with white supremacy, and that movement to the Afrotopia, where such white supremacy is removed, can evacuate it. This suggestion does not question how the very ideas of "sacred" (which connotates sexual purity) and "protected" (which suggests control) are themselves patriarchal discourses. Similarly, Melissa Asher Daniels reads Candace as a powerful alternative image to Dianthe,

> Providing an alternative portrait of black femininity that challenges the historical narrative of rape and sexual abuse, Hopkins presents readers with a chaste female monarch…Powerful and revered, the physically charismatic Candace contrasts with Dianthe's ethereal, passive, and tragic mulatta (Daniels, 2013, p. 171).

Ahmad makes a similar claim in her study of anticolonial utopian literature: "Queen Candace had guarded Telassar as it awaited its male heir, with the help of a coterie of virgins who serve as a symbolic compensation for the centuries-long violation of African women in America" (2009, p. 145). Again, readers witness that Candace's chasteness allegedly compensates for Dianthe's exposure to sexualized violence. In the context of African American people's historical struggles against sexual violation, there may be something psychically comforting about the image of a black virgin queen. Yet, this image valorizes the impulse to "protect" that was actually central to Dianthe's demise. Simply valorizing virginity does not allow for a critical consideration of the incestuous relationship between discourses of purity, sexual violence, protection, and control. It suggests that Candace is a progressive, preferable version of womanhood to the soiled, abused Dianthe, a black woman cleansed of racial violence and elevated to the pedestal. This dichotomous study of Dianthe and Candace and its patriarchal implications recalls Shanara Reid-Brinkley's (2008) analysis of *Essence* magazine's chatboards, responding to images of black women in hip hop videos. Reid-Brinkle writes:

> "Real" black women are constructed as "queens," or women who are deserving of respect. The "queen" identity recycles the ideology of the "cult of true womanhood" in which women who perform their genders appropriately are placed on a pedestal as representatives of the purity and goodness of the race (Reid-Brinkley, 2008, p. 247).

Readings of Dianthe and Queen Candace that construct Candace as the pure oppositional feminine presence to Dianthe, and a worthier counterpart to the would-be king Reuel, sound strikingly like Reid-Brinkley's analysis of the queen/ho discourse. This discourse is a specifically black cultural configuration of the virgin/whore dichotomy that reproduces, rather than challenges violence against women. Though Dianthe is read more with pity than with judgment for her failure to achieve sexual purity, it is suggested that her inability (or rather, lack of opportunity) to access the siblings' ancient African identity makes her vulnerable to sexual victimization. Even Kassanoff's study—one of the few to probe *Of One Blood*'s engagement with the gendered discourse of the New Negro—occasionally demonstrates the logic that Dianthe's inability to access a glorious African origin is key to her vulnerability: "Hopkins implies that because Dianthe is unable to retrieve her original identity, she is compelled to accept the passive subjectivi-

ty forced upon her by the novel's men" (Kassanoff, 1996, p. 173).

While Dianthe is temporarily incapacitated by psychological trauma and by Reuel's and Aubrey's manipulations of her memory loss, she does eventually recover her memory and resist. Her attempt to kill Aubrey is the most courageous act in the novel. It is not motivated by the discovery of an ancient African past, but emerges, through a reconnection to and with the assistance of a female lineage, the rediscovery of a collective black female voice. Rather than demanding that Reuel deal with history, represented by his inadvertent marriage to his sister, and rather than allowing her to survive so that Reuel must grapple with his betrayal, his abuse, and even his incestuous desire, the narrative does away with Dianthe altogether. It then removes him to a site where he can live out an unfettered masculinity.

The textual evidence in the Tellessar betrothal scene works against the claim that the relationship between Reuel and Candace represents a greater relationship of equality, or as Melissa Asher Daniels claims, a "post-patriarchal" fantasy (Daniels, 2013, p. 171). In the one scene where readers see Candace, she vacates her seat of power to Reuel. He is a young unknown man who has been living as white in a distant land and has no governing experience; yet, she literally places herself at his feet. That critics continue to emphasize Dianthe's passivity, while overlooking Candace's eager submission, is a feature of their unwillingness to read the turn to Tellessar more critically. Gendered interactions and discourses seem less subject to critique in Afrotopia in a way similar to the treatment of gender and sexuality in Ethiopianist thought more broadly.

Rather than a linear, future-oriented ideology often seen in science fiction utopias, Ethiopianism envisions a constant and divinely or naturally-ordained rise and fall of peoples and their societies. But, perhaps countering Ahmad's suggestion that anticolonial utopianism rejects developmentalism (a faith in ongoing progress), Ethiopianism also embraces a progressive narrative, predicting a new rise of Africa and its descendants to a previously glorious status. In terms of gender, family, and personal relationships, one of the ways that progress is affected is through retrieval of black gender, sexuality, and family formation from the disorganizing effects of slavery. This retrieval implies not a transformation of gender, sexual, and familial norms, but a return to precolonial models—models that usually reify patriarchy and heteronormativity. According to E. Francis White (2001), these models of pre-apocalyptic African life are constructed through uncritical use of anthropological documents that reflect alliances between European colonial governments and the more powerful members of various African societies: elders and men (Location, 1373). The encouragement to adopt, rather than interrogate and transform these "traditional" ways uses the past to "construct utopian and repressive gender relations" (White, 2001, Location, 1132).

These comments on Afrocentric thought regarding gender are not meant to digress, or to collapse Ethiopianism, Afrocentricity, and black utopianism as identical and interchangeable. Yet, recognizing some (not all) expressions of Afrocentricity as more recent iterations of a long tradition of Ethiopianism, and recognizing the influence of Ethiopianism on African American literature depicting Africa (and its criticism), centers the gendered critiques of Afrocentricity that are relevant to my interest in the novel. Literary Afrotopias share impulses and aims with the broader body of Ethiopianist and Afrocentric thought. They reflect the desire to counter images of African and black inferiority and pathology, restore history and identity to diasporic peoples subjected to forced displacement and acculturation, and highlight Africa's contributions to world history and civilization. Also, they often contain its problems: an upholding of polarities between "civ-

ilization" and "barbarity," an ahistorical idealization of the African past, and the premise that restoring normative gender, sexual, and familial relations, protective patriarchal manhood in particular, is key to black liberation. I continue to believe that black efforts to "return" to Africa, physically, metaphysically, and literarily are extremely important—but we must engage such projects critically, with awareness of the other potentialities that Hopkins also embeds, however deeply, in her novel. Dianthe's voice, struggling to free itself throughout the novel, calls on Black people to consider what might be if transformation, rather than the restoration of gendered being, is the goal. It calls on Afrofuturism and Afrofuturist studies to hold memory and remaking in balance to carry forward the inextricable traumas, lessons, and beauties of diasporic black life.

References

Ahmad, D. 2009. *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Aljoe, Nicole N. (2012). Aria for Ethiopia: The Operatic Aesthetic of Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*. *African American Review,* 45(3), 277-290. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23783540

Bergman, J. (2012). *The Motherless Child in the Novels of Pauline Hopkins.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Collins, P. H. (2009). When Fighting Words Are Not Enough: The Gendered Content of Afrocentrism. In Stanlie M. James, S. M., Foster, F. S., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (Eds.), *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (pp. 127-153). New York: The Feminist Press.

Daniels, M.A. (2013). The Limits of Literary Realism: *Of One Blood*'s Post-Racial Fantasy by Pauline Hopkins. *Callaloo*, 36(1), 158-177. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/stable/24264794.

Davidson, A. (2008). *The Black Nation Novel; Imagining Homeplaces in Early African American Literature.* Chicago: Third World Press.

Davis, A. (2009). Don't Let Nobody Bother Yo' Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery. In Stanlie M. James, S. M., Foster, F. S., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (Eds.), *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (pp. 215-239). New York: The Feminist Press.

Davis, A. (1972). *Reflection on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves.* The Massachussetts Review, 13(1/2).

Jenkins, C. M. (2007). *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kassanoff, J. A. (1996). "Fate Has Linked Us Together": Gender and the Politics of Representation in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood*. In Gruesser, J.C. (Ed). *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins* (pp. 158-181). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Moses, W. J. (1998). *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moylan, T. (2000). *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction Utopia and Dystopia.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Redmond S. (2014). *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora.* New York: New York University Press.

Reid-Brinkley, S. R. (2008). The Essence of Res(ex)pectability: Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video. *Meridians*, 8(1), 236-260.

Salvant, S. (2008). Pauline Hopkins and the End of Incest. *African American Review*, 42(3-4), 659-677.

Schrager, C. (1996). Pauline Hopkins and William James: The New Psychology and the Politics of Race. In Gruesser, J. C. (Ed.). *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Sharpe, C. (2010). *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Sundquist, E. J. (1993). *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Tate, C. (1993). *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of Century.* Oxford UP.

White, E. F. (2001). *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Electronic Edition.

White, E. F. (2002). Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse, and African American Nationalism. In Glaude Jr., E. (Ed.). *Is It Nation Time: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Nationalism*, pp. 130-155.tions/13.7/2017/02/10/514466107/can-we-trust-science.