Howells, Dickinson, Lewis: An exercise in reading the interracial canon

Craig Andrew Magee
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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HOWELLS, DICKINSON, LEWIS:

AN EXERCISE IN READING THE INTERRACIAL CANON

by

Craig A. Magee

Bachelor of Arts
Gustavus Adolphus College
1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

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ABSTRACT

Howells, Dickinson, Lewis: An Exercise in Reading the Interracial Canon

By

Craig A. Magee

Dr. Robert Dodge, Examination Committee Chair
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Howells, Dickinson, Lewis: An Exercise in Reading the Interracial Canon has two purposes. First, it offers detailed readings of three American novels: An Imperative Duty by William Dean Howells (1891), What Answer? by Anna Dickinson (1868), and Kingsblood Royal by Sinclair Lewis (1947). These readings are accomplished within the context of the "interracial canon", a set of writings dealing with the expression of various aspects of interracial relationships. The interracial canon, as well as its specialized vocabulary and unique theoretical outlook, is roughly sketched in an introduction and several appendices.
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PREFACE

PART ONE

"Race", Race and Interrace, or: a Few Words about Words

In the past few years, I have had the good fortune to publish several articles in *Interrace*, a bimonthly magazine devoted to issues of concern to racially mixed people. An uninitiated reader might be surprised at the scope of this journal. My own articles, for instance, have discussed topics ranging from transracial adoption to the theological problems of interracial marriage, from Shakespeare's *Othello* to the censorship of interracial novels.¹ The editor, Candy Mills, manages to strike a balance between the appeal of popular culture and the demands of an academic approach while tackling a variety of controversial issues. My frequent submissions have provided a rare opportunity to participate in the work of a daring and talented journalistic visionary.

I do, however, have one complaint regarding Mills's editorial practices. All racial terms that appear in *Interrace* are bracketed with what I call scare quotes, or to put it another way: "scare quotes". An individual is never considered white or black or any other racial label; they are "white", "black", "Native American", "interracial". Not only do scare quotes hamper the enjoyment of one's reading, but they can also add shades of

¹ My most recent article, for example, appears in the January/February *Interrace*. It is entitled "Lillian Smith and the Denial of Racism", and it is about the censorship controversy
unintended meaning to an author's text. While this procedure is not without precedent\(^2\),
the magazine's necessarily frequent use of racial terms dictates a frequent use of these
intrusive punctuation marks.

While I disagree with this policy, I understand some of the thinking which
supports it. There are times when America's racial vocabulary seems ludicrously
inadequate. Consider, for example, the most infamous interracial news story of the past
decade. Interracially married actor and football legend O. J. Simpson was accused of
murdering his white wife in 1994. The resulting investigation and trials dominated
headlines for more than two years. As part of Simpson's defense, accusations of racism
were made against the Los Angeles Police Department. In particular, Detective Mark
Fuhrman's audio-taped use of racial slurs helped support claims of an anti-black
conspiracy. I remember watching numerous television reporters struggle with this aspect
of the story. On the same network that another Simpson, the childish cartoon character
Bart, uttered words like "ass", "damn" and "hell", journalists resorted to equally childish
euphemism: "Mark Fuhrman said the 'n' word." The American language had failed them.

Scare quotes, as awkward as they may be, effectively identify this flaw in the
language. Once one accepts the idea of race as a valid category, one is forced into the use
of a variety of racial terms. Even the most sensitive and liberal-minded people can find

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\(^2\) Anthropologist Ashley Montagu, to name a particularly influential writer, rarely wrote
about race without using scare quotes. Both his racial punctuation and his racial theorizing
are evident in his essay "The Concept of Race" in which he argues "If we are to succeed in
clarifying the minds of those who think in terms of 'race' we must cease using the word"
(24).
themselves struggling over word choice. Which is more polite: African-American or Afro-American? Are there any meaningful differences between Black, black, and "black"? All the available terms assume that there is a significant reality-based racial difference deserving of a separate vocabulary. Only the scare quotes hint that the significant difference is more a matter of linguistic and social convention than of impartial scientific judgment.

Any writer who addresses racial issues is thus faced with a bit of a dilemma. On one hand, clumsy grammatical and mechanical structures amount to a writer's flag of surrender. On the other hand, the available American lexicon of race is not only inadequate but also quite insulting. In point of fact, I must confess to a necessary surrender of sorts in that my direct quotations contain the insulting racial terminology of the original authors. Indeed, the insulting aspect of racial terms is especially troubling for the topic of this thesis. I am discussing the Black/White interracial aspects of three American novels: What Answer? by Anna Dickinson, An Imperative Duty by William Dean Howells and Kingsblood Royal by Sinclair Lewis. The novels first appeared, respectively, in the 1860s, 1890s, and 1940s. Both the subject matter and the historical context of these books complicate the racial vocabulary. Obviously, the infamous "n" word appears frequently in many novels contemporary with the three I have selected. The interracial factor introduces a veritable dictionary of additional words: mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, redbone, high-yellow, and a host of additional terms for every possible fraction of ethnic mixing.

Indeed, one can not overestimate the extremes to which ethnic mixing inspires
obsessive cataloging and classifying. The following list of Linnaeus-like complexity is an all too typical example:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PARENTS</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
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<td>Albino</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Spaniard</td>
<td>Albino</td>
<td>Torna atras</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Torna atras</td>
<td>Lobo</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Lobo</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Zambaigo</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Zambaigo</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Cambujo</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Cambujo</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>Albarazado</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Albarazado</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>Barcino</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Barcino</td>
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<td>Indian</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>Chamiso</td>
<td>Coyote</td>
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One can only imagine the enormous effort required to maintain such a system.

Unfortunately, one need not imagine the all too common racial biases required to invent this linguistic nightmare.

Thanks to the work of Maria P. P. Root, this paper is able to make some effort toward countering the nightmare of racial language. With one exception, I have taken the liberty of adopting Root's glossary of interracial terms. The exception is that Root does

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³ The glossary is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix One.
not define the term "interracial". I use "interracial" in a sense that is similar to her definition of "multiracial" which she describes as "the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes" (xi). I would expand both "interracial" and "multiracial" to include not only descriptions of people, but also descriptions of relationships between people. Thus, a multiracial or interracial relationship is one involving "people across all racial mixes".

PART TWO

The Big Picture. Interracial Culture/Interracial Canon

With that said, it must be admitted that this thesis does not cover "all racial mixes". In point of fact, its focus is more exclusive than inclusive. While America offers a plethora of potential interracial topics, I have focused on quite a small aspect of what amounts to a sub-genre within the country's extensive interracial canon.

Such a statement may surprise a number of readers. After all, a phrase like "interracial canon" smacks of recent fads. Surely, this is merely the latest twist regarding political correctness and/or multiculturalism. Surely, it is but a politically -- or, worse, personally -- motivated sleight-of-hand used to discuss books that would not otherwise deserve a second glance. It is specialization to the point of absurdity, and any attempt to use the sacred word "canon" in regards to such a project is as insulting as the racial epithets said project purports to oppose.

The interracial quality of literature is, in fact, already firmly established. Like
Ralph Ellison's invisible man, the interracial literary character is eminently present even while being unacknowledged. No greater example of this exists than the Bible. In the Book of Numbers, Moses marries an Ethiopian woman; those who object to this marriage are punished by God with leprosy. Samson is briefly, albeit unhappily, interracially married. Esther's marriage to the Persian Xerxes allows her to prevent senseless slaughter of her fellow Jews. While the biblical list of interracial/interethnic relationships is quite long, few readers of the sacred book consciously recognize the interracial aspects of such stories. No text is more central to Western culture than the Bible; it is a text permeated with interracial elements; yet to describe it as interracial would be sacrilege.

American literature is not that much different. Time and again, writers who have addressed the interracial aspects of American culture have been awarded the highest respect; yet to describe these writers as interracial artists would be literary heresy. Indeed, it is still possible to find respectable historians in respectable journals making egregious errors in regards to interracial culture. "This is not a subject that has received much attention in popular literature", writes Shirlee Taylor Haizlip (48); if she had said "respect" instead of "attention" her mistake would have somewhat lessened in magnitude. In Appendix Two, I have attempted to eliminate such mistakes by providing lists of authors who are both traditionally and interracially canonical. The point is that interracial

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4. The exact Biblical references are as follows. For the story of Moses's marriage to an Ethiopian, see Numbers 12. In regards to Samson, I am referring not to Delilah but to one his lesser known wives; one of the nation of Israel's governing judges, he marries an unnamed Philistine woman in Judges 14. Esther's story appears, of course, in the Book of Esther.
works ought not to be condescendingly filed under labels like political correctness or multiculturalism. Instead, they should be considered an intrinsic part of mainstream American culture.

I offer three American examples to demonstrate the centrality of what I have come to call the American interracial canon. From an historical viewpoint, an interracial love story is one of the founding myths of the United States. I am speaking, of course, of the Pocahantas legend. The marriage of Native American Pocahantas to a white European became a central trope of the American imagination, a trope largely connected to the white European male's marriage to North American real estate. Another important American myth is that of the melting pot. Here again, a crucial American image is tied to interracial and/or interethnic marriage. In fact, the very term "the melting pot" comes from a now forgotten play by the same name in which the author argues for intercultural marriage. My third and final example is that of William Faulkner. Many would place

5 One hardly knows where to begin listing the number of ways Pocahantas has impacted American culture. Mary Dearborn's study is a good starting point for the interested interracial researcher. Joyce Flynn's bibliographic survey provides an overwhelming number of references concerning the interracial representation of Pocahantas in American drama. On a personal note, Disney's animated version of the story has so educated the American public that my three year old daughter once lectured me for trying to tell her about Pocahantas without mentioning John Smith.

6 The play is Israel Zangwill's The Melting Pot (1908). I have not been able to obtain a copy, and I am dependent on Joyce Flynn for the following description.

The Jewish hero David sees the melting pot as fusing and reshaping Americans from all races, "Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, — black and yellow —" and writes his American symphony, in which many different kinds of sounds orchestrate into a glorious swell of sound, in its honor. (428)

Concerning the image of the melting pot, it is Flynn who tells me that the play "introduced
him at the very center of the American canon, and few would doubt that such novels as *Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* are utterly dependent on interracial tensions for their artistic impact.⁷

**PART THREE**

Choosing Three Novels.

Once one accepts the reality of the American interracial canon, one can easily make some generalizations regarding it. Faulkner, in fact, points to one of those generalizations. Novels concerning black/white miscegenation are almost always written by Southern writers and they concern the sexual problems of slavery and/or slavery's aftermath. Much literature of the American West offers the figure of the Native American "half-blood" which, generally speaking, provided a trope for white theorizing regarding what it meant to be civilized or savage.⁸ Other generalizations could be made regarding the exoticism of South Sea islanders in the literature of American colonialism, or about Asian brides in the literature dealing with wars against Japan, Korea and Vietnam. It would seem that virtually any contact with a race other than White American spawned a sub-genre of interracially oriented literature. It would stand to reason that these sub-genres all have distinguishing characteristics which define their cultural

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⁷ One discussion of Faulkner's interracial aspects is Eric J. Sundquist's *Faulkner: the House Divided.*
⁸ See, for example, William J. Scheick's study: *The Half-Blood; A Cultural Symbol in 19th-
function.

Since this thesis discusses black/white miscegenation, then logic would obviously dictate that the characteristics of the Faulknerian novel would apply. I must be writing about Southern authors; I must be writing about slavery. Not so: I have deliberately chosen the road less traveled. I do this to demonstrate that the above generalizations diminish the impact of the interracial canon. One can no more make accurate generalizations about interracial literature than one can make accurate generalizations about the whole of American — or, for that matter, world — literature.

Thus, the authors are not Southern. Dickinson is from Philadelphia, Howells writes about Boston, and Lewis offers his racial theories from the standpoint of a Minnesotan. Slavery and its consequences are not a significant plot element in any of the novels; all the major characters — black or white — are solidly middle or upper class with decidedly non-slavery oriented lineages. It is as though the authors deliberately removed themselves from racial expectations in order to make some other point.

PART FOUR

Theoretical Background

What, exactly, is that other point, and how does one find it? To be sure, one can find more than a few points concerning racial propaganda merely by looking in the obvious places. When Anna Dickinson asks for an answer in her title, a reader expects to

find one in the body of the novel. Lewis, writing at a time when novelists were making the best-seller lists with "race message" books, was no doubt interested in producing a message -- not to mention a best-seller -- of his own. The point, then, is that of a straightforward polemic. Racism: bad; tolerance: good.

Those of us who earn our living via literary criticism can be thankful that the point is not that simple. Some interracial novelists, Thomas Dixon for example, were interested in constructing a diametrically opposed message. For Dixon, racism was quite the constructive policy. For other writers, the job of assigning a specific racial philosophy amounts to mere guess work. After repeatedly confronting the infamous "n" word in Huckleberry Finn, one might be tempted to label Mark Twain a racist, but then one reads Pudd'nhead Wilson and comes to the opposite conclusion.

The business of opposites is the business of interracial literary theory. After all, the very subject matter of interracial stories is the bringing together of characters from opposite backgrounds. White falls in love with Black, complications ensue, something new emerges. In some stories -- Kingsblood Royal and An Imperative Duty are examples --, the merging of black and white is not a matter of externally confronting the Other, but rather of discovering an internal Otherness in one's own personality. The previously comfortable and unified single entity discovers an extremely uncomfortable and disunited two-ness.

The most famous quotation regarding racial two-ness comes from W. E. B. Du

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9 Richard Wright was a literary celebrity of the time, while Lillian Smith's Strange Fruit was in the process of becoming one of the most commercially successful novels of the
Bois:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one black body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (194)

Using the quotation for literary criticism is admittedly removing it a considerable distance form its original context. Still, Du Bois offers a twist of dialectic logic that can be quite useful for analyzing interracial texts.

In its most simple form, dialectic logic can be expressed in a short mathematical statement: thesis + antithesis = synthesis. For the purposes of the present discussion, the statement can be modified to read as follows: black + white = interracial. Of course, each of these three words assumes complex meanings, meanings generated by social, political, and historical forces. This is to say nothing of the artistic and literary forces applied by the authors. The authors are, in point of fact, not merely shaping the terms, but they are also applying the "plus" sign; they are not simply stating the dialectic formula, they are practicing it within their texts.

If one is discussing texts with more than one point of view — in this case, those of black and white — Bakhtin is the name that immediately comes to mind. As Dale Peterson notes, there is a "powerful attraction of a Bakhtinian 'dialogic' analysis of cultural signs, despite its off-putting proliferation of polysyllabic neologisms" (89). Those polysyllabic neologisms do indeed seem to apply to interracial texts. The dialogic is synonymous with the dialectic, and the dialectic is synonymous with the interracial century.
As I sample Bakhtin's writings, I find numerous phrases that apply to the interracial dialectic process. The polyphonic novel offers a "new multi-voiced world" (6). There is a "unification of utterly heterogenous and incompatible materials" (13). In a crucial passage in Bakhtin's interpretation of Dostoevsky, he writes:

This persistent urge to see all things as being coexistent and to perceive and depict all things side by side and simultaneously, as if in space rather than time, leads him to dramatize in space even the inner contradictions and stages of development of a single person, causing the characters to converse with their doubles, with the devil, with their alter egos, with caricatures of themselves ... It can be said that Dostoevsky strives to make two persons out of every contradiction within a single person, in order to dramatize the contradiction and reveal it extensively. (23)

Bakhtin is describing a process of artistic hybridization, and hybridization is a word that is most apt for any interracial discussion.

I offer two hybridizations of my own as the theoretical foundation for the current discussion. The above passage can be hybridized to read as follows:

This persistent urge to see all races as being coexistent and to perceive them side by side and simultaneously leads the interracial author to dramatize in space even the inner racial contradictions of a single person, causing that person to confront their racial opposites. It can be said that the interracial author strives to make one race out of every racial contradiction within a single person, in order to dramatize the contradiction and reveal it extensively.

A hybridization of Du Bois supplements this interracial literary theorizing:

It is a peculiar reading experience, this interracial literature, this sense of always looking at one's race through the eyes of other races, of measuring one's racial self by the tape of a world that insists on the singularity of racial identity. The text ever expresses its two-ness -- white, black -- two unreconciled plots, two warring themes within one text, in which the artistic strength of the author alone keeps it form being torn asunder.

These two hybridized passages thus provide a standard by which this thesis will judge the
artistic hybridizations of three novelists.
CHAPTER ONE

William Dean Howells: Setting the Example

America is a land of both literal and literary dualities. In fact, literal/literary can itself pass as one of many similar dichotomies: real/ideal, truth/falsehood, fiction/nonfiction. Since Columbus created the first American dualities (native/non-native, old world/new world) in 1492, the American continent has offered a geographical and chronological menu of bipolarity. The list of examples (literally?/figuratively?) never ends.

To know America and American literature one must know the split personality of both. To study their dual natures in detail, one must study their most representative instances. If these propositions are valid, then it seems reasonable that the American Civil War, the time of the greatest literal bipolarity, would offer some of the best opportunities to study literary bipolarity.

When the Civil War period is expanded to include the troubled years leading up to it as well as the aftermath of Reconstruction, one particular genre, the novel of miscegenation, appears to be especially effective in capturing the dualities of America. Dealing with the sexual union of blacks and whites, the theme of miscegenation, immediately offers an obvious pairing of opposites. In addition it was a theme handled with such frequency that certain of its elements, the "tragic mulatto" character for
example, became cliches. Virtually every major writer of the times -- as well as scores of
minor writers -- wrote at least one piece addressing this topic. The list ranges from
Harriet Beecher Stowe's pre-war polemical novels to Mark Twain's 1894 Pudd'nhead
Wilson with multiple sets of twins adding extra layers of bipolarity. A set of other
authors addressing the subject is nearly congruent to a set of important regionalists and
realists: Rebecca Harding Davis, Albion Tourgee, George Washington Cable, Kate
Chopin, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Charles W. Chesnutt, William Dean Howells.

For a variety of reasons, this first chapter takes a look at the novel An Imperative
Duty published by the last person on the above list, Howells, in 1891. As prolific critic
and powerful editor, Howells was historically, if not always artistically, arguably the
most influential writer of his time. In addition, An Imperative Duty is an unjustly
neglected book; I will argue here that the book does indeed have more than its share of
artistic and literary flourishes, especially when viewed in the light of the interracial
canon. In its own Howellsian way, the novel captures the tragedies, both real and
imagined, of a racially divided America.

To begin with an immediate example of how Howells captures this division, one
need not look past the title. The two major words are complimentary; one could say they
are almost redundant. In fact, they have subtle shades of meaning that create the first of
the novel's bipolarities. The word "imperative" tends to refer to an order, something
demanded by a force outside of one's self. "Duty", on the other hand, carries with it a
sense of obligation, an internal motivation. Imperative/duty, external/internal: Howells
wastes no time in communicating America's double personality.
To fully understand Howells's treatment of this double personality, it is necessary to historically contextualize it. That the Reconstruction era was especially typical of the country's dual nature there seems to be little doubt. Historian Joel Williamson in The Crucible of Race has defined this period as a number of interacting dichotomies that in themselves produced a dissonance/relief chronological pattern of duality. He frames his picture of conflicting opposites within the political Conservative versus Radical battle, but he paints with broad philosophical brush strokes:

Radicals tended to be realists in the classical Aristotelian sense. Without denying the truth of the idea of a thing, Radicals were inclined to give primacy to the reality extent in the thing itself. They saw life as affording practical choices. Radicals were intolerant of disjunctions in their lives, and they worked to gain power to manage the immediate world in which they lived. Conservatives, on the other hand, tended to be idealists in the classical platonic sense. Reality for them lay in the idea of the thing rather than the thing itself. They viewed the world that we seem to see about us as a dim reflection, a shadow of the higher, truer, and ideal world toward which mankind was progressing, slowly unevenly, and over the generations. (285-286)

These philosophical basics are but the foundation upon which Williamson builds the details of Reconstruction, all of then delineated in a pattern of contrasting pairs:

North/South, urban/rural, industrial/agrarian, and, of course, black/white.

To confirm this historical analysis one need only glance at primary sources from the late 1800s. Thomas Nelson Page, himself a writer of interracially oriented novels, offered the following interpretation of North/South relations:

What adds to the anomaly is the pregnant fact the future of these two sections must hereafter run together ... Yet their views have up to the present been so divergent, they have, indeed been so diametrically opposed to each other, that if one is right, the other must be radically wrong. (143)

While his essay specifically addresses the problems of race relations, Page has almost
incidentally defined a divided nation. Furthermore, he has unconsciously hinted at the most basic of racial issues.

While the word "pregnant" in the above passage is not intended to have biological/sexual meanings, it is nonetheless another pregnant fact that interracial sexuality was -- and, some would say, still is -- one of the cornerstones of America's race problem. Again contemporary sources confirm this. No less a figure than Frederick Douglass wrote, "The history of the repeal of the intermarriage law shows that the prejudice against color is not invincible" (215). Decades later, Marcus Garvey also connected racism to sexuality:

So long as white men believe that black men want to associate with, and marry white women, then we will ever have prejudice, and not only prejudice, but riots, lynchings, burnings, and God to tell what next will follow. (557)

On the opposite end of the spectrum from Douglass, white writers often described the threat of the Negro rapist against the sanctity of white womanhood. Indeed, Thomas Dixon, in such books as The Leopard's Spots and The Clansman (later made into the extremely influential film The Birth of a Nation), made a considerable fortune by romanticizing the KKK's battle against black/white sex.

When one reviews the literature of miscegenation, the two themes of bipolarity and sexuality dominate the discussion. Earl Bargainer observes that Thomas Nelson Page frequently used marriage between Northerner and Southerner as a symbolic reunification of a divided nation. Angela Mitchell makes a comparison between the male novel of miscegenation, William W. Brown's Clotel, and the female version, Harriet Wilson's Our Nig. Male/female, North/South, black white: the symbolic possibilities
have not gone unnoticed:

As a national allegory, this theme sometimes suggests white America as a father figure, black America as a mother, and the offspring as the problematic, truly American heir who is denied his/her birthright and inheritance by his/her father. (Sollers 305)

In short, a sort of double consciousness dominates the American mind.

With the mention of double consciousness, W. E. B. Du Bois immediately comes to mind. His oft-quoted articulation of this concept appears in the introduction of this thesis. The words take on a special interracial relevancy when one realizes that Du Bois, like Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, was himself of racially mixed descent.

Indeed, the entire preceding discussion of historical and literary themes takes on a special relevancy to An Imperative Duty. The novel reflects these themes and, in some cases, shares specific details with above cited examples. A brief review of the criticism on An Imperative Duty begins to show this.

"Begins to show" may be, in fact, an overstatement. The novel, quite frankly, has been almost entirely overlooked. General reviews of interracial literature (Kinney, Matthews, Mencke, Sollers) devote only a few paragraphs to the book. These few paragraphs include a summary of the plot, perhaps an attempted explanation of the title, and an evaluation of the novel as a fairly routine, if more finely crafted, example of the miscegenation genre. In some cases, the novel's brief review is meant to serve as evidence for a broader argument. Matthews, for instance, wishes to demonstrate the inadequacy of American race literature and offers an embarrassingly misguided and
narrow reading of An Imperative Duty as support. To be sure, one cannot expect much
from these abbreviated treatments, and, to a certain degree, they are accurate. Elements of
the book are routine, and Howells occasionally uses "the tortuous jugglerly [sic] of
language" to which Matthews objects (175).

Still, it is what Howells does with these routine elements and juggled words that
makes An Imperative Duty a far from routine book. Those few critics who have
produced fuller treatments of the novel usually find at least one especially valuable
aspect. Cady, Howells's biographer, says "If Howells was devoted to ideas about race
which now seem outmoded, he was pioneering them in the right direction" (160). Elsa
Nettles identifies some of that pioneering by explaining how the sermon of a black
clergyman in Chapter VIII foreshadows Booker T. Washington's famous Atlanta speech
by five years. If Howells was indeed anticipating the ideas of major civil rights leaders, it
hardly seems proper to dismiss his work as merely conventional.

Before discussing further Howellsian race-oriented anticipations, the views of one
other critic deserve attention. Thomas Ford asserts that An Imperative Duty efficiently
poses a threefold problem with an even more efficient single solution.

1. What can be done about an oversensitive Puritan dedication to duty? 2. What
can be done about attitudes, behavior, and action arising from emotional reactions
and irrational motives? 3. What can be done about the problem of race in
America? (534)

Consistent with Howellsian realism, the answer, according to Ford, is "to apply reason,
logic, common sense" (535). The fact that the protagonist, Dr. Olney, is a scientist
confirms Ford's neat and tidy scientific reading.
Dr. Olney is probably the best point to begin both my own extrapolation of *An Imperative Duty* as well as a refutation of previous critical errors. Howells uses Olney's arrival in Boston to begin the novel, while Ford uses Olney's profession to conclude an argument. Howells's beginning undermines Ford's conclusion because Ford overlooks important details concerning Olney's character. An examination of these details, as well as other important details in Howells's art, places the narrative within its proper historical and critical parameters.

These details begin to accumulate immediately. The first paragraph of *An Imperative Duty*, quoted here in full, sets thematic and stylistic patterns for the entire novel.

Olney got back to Boston about the middle of July, and found himself in the social solitude which the summer makes more noticeable in that city than in any other. The business, the hard work of life, was going on, galloping on, as it always does in America, but the pleasure of life, which he used to be part of as a younger man, was taking a rest, or if not a rest, then certainly an outing at the seashore. He met no one he knew, and he continued his foreign travels in his native place, after an absence so long that it made everything once so familiar bewilderingly strange. (137)

A close reading of this paragraph reveals that Howells is not concerned with a straightforward problem-and-solution story. Rather, he is framing his narrative within the complicated and convoluted two-ness of the Reconstruction era.

Nearly every detail of this opening paragraph expresses either bipolarity or a state of liminality between bipolars. "Olney got back to Boston" from Europe: an old world/new world contrast. He arrives in "the middle of July" bisecting not only the month but the summer season as well. In the next sentence, Howells offers a
business/pleasure comparison. Olney finds little pleasure for two reasons: he is no longer "a younger man" (thus delineating a youth/old age contrast), and pleasure itself seems to be at rest, on an "outing at the sea-shore" where opposites of land and sea meet. Even Howells's grammar contributes to the doubleness with compound sentences and dependent clauses.¹⁰

One important detail, Olney's state of "social isolation", is missing from the above analysis. Although in his native city, "He met no one he knew." Given the strong presence of two-ness, his singleness appears to be especially problematic. Before the end of the first chapter, Howells reveals the reasons and functions for this troublesome oneness.

While revealing these functions, Howells also continues the onslaught of doubleness and introduces issues of race and sex. Olney, as he roams the streets of Boston, further develops his comparisons between the old world and the new, but his observations acquire a special focus. "He noticed it especially in the women, and more especially in the young girls" (137). Clearly, Olney's loneliness is of a romantic/sexual nature, a theory confirmed when Olney begins to notice the couples he passes on the street.

¹⁰ One simply cannot overestimate the full force of doubleness in Howells's language. His use of various dialect passages provides two, and occasionally more than two, contrasting speech patterns. Words are consistently presented in pairs: "at once both course and weak" (138), "both of gentleness and gentility" (141). He sometimes uses portmanteau words; "memoriferous", for example, combines "memorable" and "odoriferous" (146). Joining two twinned sentences, the semicolon serves as Howells's favorite punctuation mark. When read closely, this language oriented duality combines with the dualities of images and ideas to create a strange and almost schizophrenic atmosphere. The "tortuous jugglerly of words"
Howells, consistent with the earlier cited passages from Douglass and Garvey, immediately links race and sex. Olney compares Boston's white couples to its black couples. In an interesting inversion of racial/sexual stereotypes, he finds the blacks more refined than the shameless white couples. Perhaps this is because his eyes have once again been drawn to the women:

He thought that some of the young colored girls, as he met them walking with their decorous beaux, were very pretty in their way. They had very thin, high, piping voices, that had an effect of gentleness and gentility. With their brilliant complexions of lustrous black, or rich cafe au lait, or creamy white, they gave avidness to the spectacle which it would not otherwise have had. 141)

Olney, far from being the cool voice of scientific reason, is instead a lonely and alienated man who apparently lacks for significant female companionship.

Nor is Olney's isolation his only problem. Due to the collapse of the Union Pacific Railroad, his finances are ruined. If being broke and isolated are not stressful enough, one need look only so far as his medical specialty to comprehend the full measure of his mental vulnerability. He is "a specialist in nervous diseases" and has returned to America because he "he could be more profitable where nervous diseases most abounded" (143). Howells has placed a divided and depressed character in a divided and seemingly psychotic land.

Luckily for Olney, his hunch that his services might be needed in Boston immediately proves correct. Mrs. Meredith, a woman he knew briefly in Italy, summons him to treat her insomnia.11 Mrs. Meredith is the guardian and aunt of Rhoda Aldgate, becomes an artistically consistent expression of doubleness.

11 If the point has not already been made, Howells's use of doubleness and liminality is absolutely thorough. Here, insomnia is the border between sleep and wakefulness. Earlier,
and these two, together with Olney, comprise the novel's only major characters.

If the cast seems sparse, the plot of An Imperative Duty is even more so.

Basically, there are two major ingredients in its composition. Mrs. Meredith must decide if she has "an imperative duty" to tell Rhoda that she is one-sixteenth black before her upcoming marriage to one Mr. Bloomingdale. The second thread of the plot is Olney's growing love for Rhoda. All the action of the novel depends on these two developments.

Olney's love for Rhoda is particularly interesting in that his initial reaction to her blackness is far from affectionate. Mrs. Meredith, seeking advice as to whether or not Rhoda needs to know her true parentage, tells, or rather "gasps out", a full disclosure."

Olney recoiled from the words, in a turmoil of emotion for which there is no term but disgust. His disgust was profound and pervasive. (164-165)

Later, Olney seems utterly bewitched by her African blood:

It was the elder world, the beauty of antiquity, which appealed to him in the lustre and sparkle of this girl; and the remote taint of servile and savage origin gave her a kind of fascination which refuses to let itself be put into words: it was like the grace of a limp, the occult, indefinable loveliness of a deformity, but transcending these by its allurement in infinite degree, and going for the reason of its effect deep into the mysterious places of being where the spirit and the animal meet and part in us. (223)

Not only do all the previously described elements of two-ness of both language and image reside in this passage, but these elements also reveal that Olney is himself of two minds when it comes to his ideas of blackness.

reference was made to Olney's investment in the Union Pacific, a link between opposite ends of the country. (He loses his money by committing the sin of singleness, putting all of one's financial eggs in one basket.) Chapters III, IV, and XII begin in a doorway, another liminal image. Important events almost invariably occur at liminal times: dusk, dawn, noon, or half-past the hour. The list is endless as Howells intricately weaves two-ness onto every page.
Rhoda can be described in much the same way. Before she is made aware that she is part black, she frequently expresses fondness, admiration and respect for blacks. At one point she goes so far as to say, "I never see one of them without loving them" (153). After Mrs. Meredith reveals the truth, a different variety of words can be found in Rhoda's vocabulary:

She never knew before how hideous they were, with their flat wide-nostriled noses, their out-rolled thick lips, their mobile bulging eyes set near together, their retreating chins and foreheads, and their smooth shining skin; they seemed burlesques of humanity, worse than apes because they were more like. (191)

Here, indeed, are "two warring ideals within one black [?] body."

A few pages later -- and years earlier than Du Bois -- Howells uses that most appropriate of phrases for such a state of mind: "double-consciousness".

In the double consciousness of trouble she was as fully aware of everything about her as she was of the world of misery within her; and she knew that this had so far shown itself without that some of the passers were noticing her. (195)

Remarkably, the use of the phrase is almost exactly as Du Bois would have it: an inner battle between opposites as reflected by the uninformed mirror of those without. If certain elements of An Imperative Duty can be said to foreshadow Booker T. Washington, then the book's pervasive duality definitely foreshadows Du Bois.

There is yet one more duality to explore. Aside from its already established oxymoronic quality, the book's title has two distinct meanings. The obvious meaning refers to the duties of the characters. Should Mrs. Meredith tell Rhoda the truth; does Rhoda have a duty to serve the black race? The second line of questioning is a bit less obvious: what is the duty of the author?
Earlier, this chapter referred to the cliche of the tragic mulatto, but the literature of miscegenation contained more than one such convention. Because of the supposed burden of blackness, a suicide was most certainly expected. The elements of melodrama -- tragic love, neglected and forgotten children, accidents of impossible fate -- were expected to energize the plot. Any author treating the subject seemed to have "an imperative duty" to follow the unwritten rules of miscegenation literature.

At first glance, Howells seems to follow these rules. After revealing the truth of Rhoda's blackness, Mrs. Meredith dies of an overdose of the sleeping potion which Olney gave her for her insomnia. Rhoda cancels her upcoming marriage to Bloomingdale and vows to live a tragic and solitary life while serving the people of her new race. When discussing Rhoda's racial heritage all the characters speak in the exaggerated tones of overdone romance. Indeed, the characters seem to be as aware as Howells that there is "an imperative duty" to follow the conventions of race literature; the women are said to "judge the world by the novels they have read" (158), and interracial novelist George Washington Cable is once cited as a race expert.

What Howells thinks of these conventions is revealed in two practically identical quotations which frame the novel. Nearly the first words spoken by Olney come in response to the inquiries of a slow-witted porter. Impatient with the porter's seemingly pointless questions, he bluntly asks, "Why? What of it?" (145). At the book's end, Olney proposes marriage to Rhoda, and she rejects him on the grounds of race. He responds, "What of it, if I love you?" (227). Howells, ever concerned with the double-ness of his subject matter, has taken Olney's previously negative statement of irritation and
tranformed it into a positive statement of love. What of it? "It" has caused me to love you.

This, finally, seems to be Howells's reaction to all the emotional energy spent on problems of race difference, on the problems of a divided country, on the artificially constructed separation of two opposite but complimentary poles. In other words, the environment of An Imperative Duty is that of a naturally and frequently occurring twoness which is painfully denied or neglected because of misdirected romantic impulses. Howells deflates the mistaken impulses -- without, incidentally, deflating or under-appreciating romantic feelings -- with a simple question: what of it? He further deflates the melodrama when Mrs. Meredith's suicide is ruled an accident and when Rhoda and Olney agree to what amounts to a rather conventional marriage. The conclusion is neither the catharsis of tragedy nor the sweepingly happy ending of a romance; it is, rather, the simple and natural union of opposites: male/female, black/white -- two lovers.

If one goes back to Williamson's philosophical summary of Reconstruction, one sees how deeply Howells's simple "what of it?" cuts across the borders of opposing belief systems. Olney's question springs from a Radical tendency to be "intolerant of disjunctions" in his life. He must see "the reality extent in the thing itself" -- see the doubleness of life -- in order to afford the practical choice of not uselessly fighting against it. Yet such a choice must be made in the idealistic Conservative spirit if Olney is to believe that his upcoming marriage is an example that "mankind was progressing".

An Imperative Duty makes a realistic, optimistic, and artistically sound assertion that such progress is possible.
CHAPTER TWO

Anna Dickinson's What Answer?, a failed hybrid.

Malcolm Cowley asked of Sinclair Lewis's interracial novel Kingsblood Royal:

Should we admire it because it is an effective tract, written in the best of causes; because it is angry and accurate about the indignities suffered by Negroes even here, in the supposedly open-minded North .. Or should we throw the book aside because, though important in view of the facts it presents, it is less important as a work of fiction? ... One's sense of social justice and one's literary conscience don't always agree. (100)

One is tempted to express the same concerns regarding Anna Dickinson's What Answer?, but the temptation is brief. Dickinson's novel is of such poor quality that it barely meets the minimum standards of either art or propaganda. The plot is melodramatically unbelievable even by the usual standards of melodrama. Characterization manages to be both predictably stereotypical and erratically inconsistent. At times the narration and the dialogue approach unintelligibility. What Answer? is, to be quite blunt, a bad book.

So, why bother to discuss such a bad book? As with all branches of art, literature can be pictured in a metaphorical pyramid. The bottom of the pyramid is the most massive part of the structure. Here is most of the raw material; here is the foundation. The pinnacle can be occupied by only a few special stones, but the pinnacle cannot exist without the bottom layers. These bottom layers contain essentially the same sand and rock as the top layers, but this sand and rock is not quite deserving of exalted status. Perhaps the surface of the stone is not as polished, perhaps the stone is contaminated with
a raw material inconsistent with the overall design of the structure. Whatever the reason, more stones go to the bottom of the pyramid than go to the top. Still, the sheer force of numbers provides sufficient reason to seek an understanding of this less elevated material; if we know why and how the stone mason erred, we might be able to appreciate the work of more skilled artisans.

An Imperative Duty, with its polished style and carefully balanced presentation of two-ness, belongs near the top. Having considerably more experience as a writer than Dickinson, Howells was able to negotiate his way through the melodramatic pitfalls of interracial writing. Dickinson, much to the detriment of her book, fully embraced melodrama without providing some sort of counter balance. She writes about two-ness but seems not to understand it.

Perhaps she can be forgiven the faults of melodrama. Impossible plot twists, improbable acts of fate, devotion to hopeless and romantic causes, the purple rhetoric revealing such strange events: for her, these were matters of everyday life.\footnote{All of Anna Dickinson's biographical information is gleaned from Giraud Chester's Embattled Maiden. It is not a book that has enjoyed much circulation; if one wanted to confirm the facts of her life story, one would be advised to check any number of encyclopedias or biographical dictionaries, particularly those which focus on historically influential women. The articles in such reference works invariably cite Chester as their most important source. It is also worth noting that What Answer? receives scant attention even in Chester's comprehensive biography. There are but four paragraphs on page 106, and they are mostly negative. Indeed, Chester goes so far as to quote the following from a Nation review: "Whatever a novel should have it lacks, and whatever a novel should not be it is ... a thoroughly bad novel."} By the time she was 20 years old, Anna Dickinson had stumbled upon success as a public speaker. Her first touch of fame came in typical melodramatic fashion: a featured speaker at an
important event was too ill to perform; she, having some small reputation as a local speaker, was asked to substitute almost literally at the last minute; her speech, as might be expected in a bad novel, won the hearts and minds of the public and established her as one of the most entertaining rhetoricians of the day. Indeed, she was not merely entertaining. Her speeches were credited with securing Republican seats in crucial Civil War elections.

Considering this was a time when women could not vote, this sort of electoral influence might be enough to strain the credibility of a reader. Dickinson did not stop there. She helped formulate the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. She wrote and appeared in her own plays. She was a female Hamlet. She was a star on the public speaking circuit at a time when public speaking was a central aspect of popular culture. In later life, she was publicly accused of being insane which resulted in her institutionalization. A dramatic hearing over her mental health resulted in a hung jury. Like a true heroine, she slowly slid into anonymous poverty, and she died poor and neglected.

All this does not yet capture the spirit of her life story. Not quite halfway through his book-length biography of Anna Dickinson, author Giraud Chester begins Chapter 6 with the following paragraph:

She took to the lecture platform, and for the next ten years she traveled up and down the country, twice invaded the South, ventured across the lawless prairie to the rough towns of California riding the caboose of the first transcontinental train, tramped through the new Mormon encampments of Utah, periodically revisited New England, New York, Washington, and Philadelphia, and took time out to write a novel, reject three suitors, and scale the highest mountain peaks of Colorado. (85)
This is enough adventure for several books.

*What Answer?*, though it certainly contains many unbelievable elements, does not achieve this standard of over-the-top adventurousness. Indeed, there is a certain amount of pleasure in an over-the-top reading experience, and one feels that Dickinson was aiming, at least in part, for that effect.

"At least in part": this phrase tells all. Malcolm Cowley asks if these kinds of literary works are either art or propaganda; either/or questions directly relate to the issue of two-ness. *What Answer?* participates in both genres. At least in part, it is propaganda; at least in part, it is a novel. A critic can quite easily discern the two distinct parts, but a Howellsian artistic blending is not exactly evident.

That Dickinson failed to miscegenate genres is clear in all aspects of the novel. One may as well begin analyzing this failure at the most obvious level, that of plot.

Indeed, if the various plots of *What Answer?* were successfully blended, it would be much easier to summarize the story. As it stands, one can describe bits of pieces of plots that never actually achieve the full status of a developed narration.

*What Answer?* purports to tell of the wartime adventures of William Surrey, son of a successful businessman. True to the romantic tradition, he is handsome, brave, morally upright, and the object of desire for many an interested lady. The story begins as he walks into his father's factory and confronts Jim Given, apparently a foreman or perhaps a laborer of some exceptional status.

Given is a problematic character. One's first impression of him is that he is a repulsive racist. He complains to William Surrey about Abe Franklin who works for the
Surrey family as an accountant. Franklin is racially mixed, and Given reports that he and his fellow laborers refuse to hold subservient positions to anyone with black blood. Given is later provided with an entirely different kind of racial logic to the point that the reader is confused as to the identity of his character. He falls in love with Sallie Howard, the seamstress of the racially mixed Francesca Ercildoune, and he seems honored to have a wife under the employment of a quadroon.

Either Given's change of heart or Franklin's struggles could have been the problems that generate the novel's plot. In fact, Dickinson allows the reader to spend a chapter or two with Abe Franklin during which we meet his mother and understand a bit more about how he came to be an accountant. He magically disappears from the book, and Givens magically reappears as a soldier. Franklin's situation is left unresolved; Given's situation is more or less resolved but unexplained. Dickinson seems to have a grasp on the inherent duality of an effective interracial story, but she lacks the skill to unify the disparate elements in her book.

There are two reasons why this is especially frustrating. The first reason stems from the observation that Dickinson apparently understands the doubleness of her subject matter. Biographically speaking, there is justification for asserting that she grasps the principal of two-ness. Of Dickinson, Chester writes:

Indeed, she seemed to be two different people. Left to herself she was certain of failure and weighted down by an immeasurable sense of despair and doubt; facing an audience from the platform, with all eyes on her, she was the very epitome of success and certainty and inspired such confidence that listeners often were borne past the bounds of rational behavior ... The private Anna Dickinson and the public Anna Dickinson were two distinct individuals. (37)
It would seem she has an intimate knowledge of two-ness. Still, given her later mental health problems — that is, given her apparent failure to achieve a balance between her two selves — one is possibly asking too much for her to achieve artistic balance.

Unfortunately, there is a second reason for critical frustration which prevents one from taking such a sympathetic approach. Occasionally she demonstrates an absolutely brilliant use of interracial doubleness. This is best seen near the middle of What Answer?, the middle being a perfect location to stylistically show the two halves of an issue. After several chapters during which Dickinson cannot decide whether to pursue the stories of William Surrey, Abe Franklin, Sam Given, or Francesca Ercildoune, she finally decides to introduce the interracial romance that will dominate much of the remaining pages.

Followers of Bakhtin's dialogical theories should be especially impressed with the way Dickinson introduces this theme. It takes two voices, quite literally, to tell Surrey of Francesca's racial heritage. Surrey is off fighting the Civil War when he receives a letter from his mother. Enclosed is a second letter from his Aunt Augusta. Together these two documents inform Surrey that his lover is of two racial backgrounds; her father is a mulatto making her a quadroon. To add to the effect of doubleness, Augusta purports to be offended not so much by Francesca's race, but rather by her duplicity in keeping her identity a secret.

The rest of the book's doubleness is not nearly so effective although there are a few more moments of respectable quality. I have already mentioned Jim Given's double attitude toward the issue of race. Without doubt, he is introduced as a racist. Equally
without doubt, this attitude seems to fade and perhaps altogether disappear by the end of the novel. While this transition is not discussed, Dickinson gives Sam a fairly interesting bit of racial logic. While it is bit lengthy, I have decided to quote the passage in full both for its argument and because it offers an accurate example of Dickinson's style. The context is that Jim and one of his Captains are debating the nature of interracial sexual unions. At the beginning of this excerpt, Jim is speaking:

"Tain't the living together that bothers squeamish stomachs; it's the marrying. That's what's the matter!"

"Just about!" assented the Captain, with an amused look, "and here's a case in point. Surrey ought to have been shot for marrying one of that degraded race."

"Bah! he married one of his own race if I know how to calculate."

"There, Jim, don't be a fool! If she's got any negro blood in her veins she's a nigger, all your talk won't make her anything else."

"I say, Captain, I've heard that some of your ancestors were Indians: is that so?"

"Yes: my great-grandmother was an Indian chief's daughter, -- so they say; and you might as well claim royalty when you have the chance."

"Bless me! your great grandmother, eh? Come, now, what do you call yourself, -- an Injun?"

"No, I don't. I call myself an Anglo-Saxon."

"What, not call yourself an Injun, -- when your great-grandmother was one? Here's a pretty go!"

"Nonsense! it's not likely that filtered Indian blood can take precedence and mastery of all the Anglo-Saxon material it's run through since then."

"Hurray! now you've said it. Lookee here, Captain. You say the Anglo-Saxon's the master race of the world."

"Of course I do."

"Of course you do, -- being a sensible fellow. So do I; and you say the negro blood is mighty poor stuff, and the race a long way behind ours."

"Of course, again."

"Now, Captain, just take a sober look at your own logic. You back Anglo-Saxon against the field; very well! Here's a Miss Ercildoune, we'll say, one eighth negro, seven eighths Anglo-Saxon. (13) You make that one eighth

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Jim -- or perhaps Dickinson -- has the facts wrong. Throughout the book, Miss Ercildoune is described as a "quadroon", a person of 25% black heritage. Jim is describing
stronger than all the other seven eighths: you make that little bit of negro master over all the lot of Anglo-Saxon." (195-196)

The dialog continues for a few more paragraphs, and it prompts several questions -- not the least of which concerns speculations as to the quality of the dialog in Dickinson's plays.

Seriously, while the possibilities to exploit the irony of racial two-ness are evoked in the above passage, a lack of Howellsian narrative and stylistic skill results in a less than satisfying literary experience. One wonders how Jim became such an expert in the Socratic method. One wonders why a Captain would permit an enlisted man to make him look so obtuse. Most importantly, one wonders about the exact nature of Jim's racial philosophy. What should have been a supremely ironic moment of interracial duality -- a thorough-going racist delivers a radically anti-racist argument even while using racist premises to do so -- is instead just another puzzling incident in a puzzling book. Dickinson failed to wrap her art around the paradoxical two-ness of her subject matter.

There is yet one more significant example of Dickinson's failed attempt at hybridity. I've already mentioned the book's melodramatic nature. Surrey's heroism knows no bounds; he quite naturally loses a limb in battle. The common soldiers get in each other's way toward the attainment of one glorious triumph after another. And it is all for the cause -- the supreme and noble cause! Where does all this heroic energy go? What could possibly be a sufficiently triumphant death for such angelically perfect characters?

Both Surrey and Ercildoune are killed in the draft riots of 1863. Here, again, is a what was known as an "octofoon".
missed opportunity. The chance to balance the absurdities of extreme gallantry with the foolishness of cowardice goes unrecognized by Dickinson. A book thoroughly peppered -indeed, a bit over-seasoned--with soldierly self-sacrifice ends in an episode that refutes the ideals of battle, but the irony is dead-on-arrival.

As might be expected at this point, the fault lies largely with Dickinson's lack of narrative talent. Surrey, not too long previously, had been on the battlefield. How and why he arrived at the scene of this urban tragedy is not at all clear. Miss Ercildoune, a resident of Philadelphia, also attends the New York riots for unexplained reasons. One expects that Dickinson would have included Abe Franklin and his mother except that she had forgotten them by this point.

In a much worse sin, Dickinson taints her anti-racist tract with a dose of some of her own brand of racism. Her description of the rioters reads, in part, as follows:

It is pre-eminently true, — proven by thousands of witnesses, and testified to by numberless tongues, —that the masses, the rank and file, that almost entire body of rioters, were the worst classes of Irish emigrants, infuriated by artful appeals, and maddened by the atrocious whiskey of thousands of grog-shops. (257)

When the culprit is other than a "big, brutal, Irish ruffian" (247), the reader is assured by Dickinson that no true American would oppose mandatory military service:

Let it, however, be written plainly and graven deeply, that the tribe of savages -- the hordes of ruffians -- found ready to do their loathsome bidding, were not of native growth, not American born. (256)

Dickinson, who constructed Sam Given's clever anti-racist logic, could apparently benefit from some logical enlightenment of her own. While "almost the entire body of rioters" were Irish, thousands of non-Irish witnesses were somewhere on the street in order to
report on the rioting; they were all innocent bystanders, no doubt. Additionally, the xenophobic tendencies of the above passages are all the more troubling given that Dickinson's message is supposedly one of racial tolerance. Blacks are perfectly acceptable, she seems to be saying, it is all those unwashed and uneducated peasants that I simply cannot stand.

One contemporary Atlantic Monthly critic seems to have had the foresight to identify the artistic problems involved with presenting race issues to an audience not particularly accustomed to racial philosophizing.

As to the question of intermarriage with the negroes, and the society prejudices against it, we do not think Miss Dickinson presents the point directly. It seems to us that it required no heroic effort in William Surrey to fall in love with a beautiful young girl, who was brilliant in intellect, fair in face, and had no trace of negro blood in her, — who, in fact, became known to her lover as the niece of a rich and aristocratic Englishwoman, — and when she turns out the daughter of a mulatto gentleman, endowed with every personal, pecuniary, and mental gift, the sacrifice of marrying her, even at the cost of all ties of kindred, and many ties of friendship, is greatly mitigated. (134)

In short, this particular critic is calling for a more balanced approach, a bit more two-ness in the story, the dramatic tension that should be inherent in an interracial story: "we can imagine a peculiar zest given to the chase by the fact of that dash of black blood" (134). The critic is William Dean Howells, and it took him nearly twenty-five years to develop a method for sorting racism and classism.

In all fairness, it must be said this kind of prejudice is one to which Northern race writers were susceptible. Even Howells, for all his ability to balance the symbolic two-
ness of his subject matter, occasionally slips into class-based biases. These writers are attempting to show that race is not strictly a Southern problem nor strictly a problem of slavery. It must have been no easy matter to portray pure color prejudice to an audience which assumed they already held a morally upright position.

Dickinson, ever the orator, resorts to a straightforward speech to deliver the point. The speech is delivered by Miss Ercildoune's mulatto father to his son Robert. In typical Dickinson fashion, it is not quite clear why, from a narrative standpoint, this speech is needed; Robert, after all, is quite a minor character in the book, and he would presumably already know much of what his father says. Still, these are the raw ingredients of the Northern interracial writer, and, lacking the skill to present them with an artistically sound double-consciousness, one may as well say them plainly and simply:

Mark the facts. I pay taxes to support the public schools, and am compelled to have my children educated at home. I pay taxes to support the government, and am denied any representation or any voice in regard to the manner in which these taxes shall be expended. I hail a car on the street, and am laughed to scorn by the conductor ... I come within a church to worship the good God who is no respecter of persons and am shown the door by one of his insolent creatures. I carry my intelligence to the polls on election morning and am elbowed aside by an American boor or a foreign drunkard, and, with opprobrious epithets by law officers and rabble, am driven away. All this in the North; all this without excuse of slavery and of the feeling it engenders; all this from arrogant hatred and devilish malignity. (164-165)

Such observations could have hardly have been news to Robert or to any other person even vaguely aware of racial matters. Dickinson, with sound instincts if not with sound literary talent, was responding to Northern racial theorizers who no doubt declared of

Near the end of this thesis's Chapter One, I mention Olney's confrontation with a troublesome hotel porter. This character is the worst kind of Irish stereotype.
racism: it can't happen here.
CHAPTER THREE

Sinclair Lewis's Kingsblood Royal

Anna Dickinson, an orator, used her given talents to summarize her racial philosophy in the speeches delivered by her characters. It would stand to reason that Sinclair Lewis, a satirist, would use humor to address the issue. Dickinson, unexperienced in the techniques of literary irony, would have been incapable of producing passages that professed to say one thing while actually communicating another. Lewis, on the other hand, was an expert at making generally accepted notions look foolish.

By way of proof, one need only compare the speech quoted at the end of the previous chapter with the following passage from Kingsblood Royal. The paragraphs are taken from an American Credo composed by white supremacists in Lewis's fictional town of Grand Republic, Minnesota.

No person has the right to judge or even talk about Negroes except a southerner or a Northerner who owns a winter home in the South. But all Southerners, whether they be professors at Chapel Hill or pious widows in Blackjack Hollow, are authorities upon all phases of Negro psychology, biology, and history ...

All Negroes so revere the godlike white man that no Negro wants to be mistaken for a white man, and all Negroes (which is pronounced Nigras) want to pass and be taken for white. This is called Logic, a favorite subject in Southern (white) colleges ...

All Negroes constantly indulge in ferocious fighting with knives, but all Negro soldiers are afraid of and abstain from ferocity, fighting and all forms of cold steel. This is the branch of wisdom called Folk Ways.

39
Since they are all indolent, no Negro ever earns more than eleven dollars a week, but since they are all extravagant, out of that sum each of them spends eighty dollars every week in the purchase of silk shirts, radios, and the premiums of the Big Creek & Hallelujah Burial Society ...

All Negro males have such wondrous sexual powers that they unholy fascinate all white women and all Negro males are such uncouth monsters that no white woman whatsoever could possibly be attracted by one. This is called Biology ...

Any writer who portrays any Negro as acting like a normal American is either an ignorant Northerner or a traitor who is trying to destroy civilization.

(194-197)

Over the course of more than four pages, Lewis displays his mastery of the interracial approach. While Dickinson focuses on a single voice to deliver her views on Northern racism, Lewis uses a narrator to filter a committee-authored document making serious points with a comic voice.

The previous sentence offers two possible points of transition. The serious/comic dichotomy suggests a foray into the interracial methods of Howells, but the phrase "committee-authored" indicates that Lewis is working with something more complex than duality. The reader must go beyond an appreciation of the Howellsian stylistic mastery of two-ness and enter the ambiguous realm of multi-layered literature. If Howells mastered the symbolic possibilities of the biracial, then Lewis has created literary complexity analogous to the complexity of the multiracial. In short, Kingsblood Royal is a multi-themed novel about multiracial issues.

Lewis seems quite aware that a multi-themed novel about race requires a multiracial setting. A complete list of the racial and ethnic terms which he uses would be quite long. In the span of a few paragraphs on pages 4 and 5 he manages to include passing references to the following: Russians, Arabians, Italians, Lithuanians, Siamese,
Negro, Spanish and Greeks. A similarly ethnically dense paragraph on page 88 mentions the Chinese, Germans, and Mexicans. No Lewis description is complete without at least one ethnic reference. The bank in which Neil works, for instance, is on Chippewa Avenue and has columns of Italian marble. Lewis was determined to include a universe of possible racial identities in his story about one man's discovery of his own identity.

Not that Neil's story is as complex as the above paragraph might imply. In fact, the basic plot of *Kingsblood Royal* can be summarized in a few sentences. Neil Kingsblood, a fairly average white American male in a fairly average white collar job, is asked by his father to do some genealogical research. Neil's father believes the Kingsblood name is indicative of a regal lineage, but instead of royalty, Neil finds ethnicity. His great-great-grand father was black making Neil 1/32 African-American, a seemingly insignificant fraction. Lewis, however, has made it clear that Grand Republic has erected a complex social/racial philosophy in which Neil had been an enthusiastic participant. This fraction of black blood causes him to question that external structure just as it prompts an internal existential crisis of identity. Neil is no longer sure who he is or what his place in society should be. In spite of his impatience regarding the research process, he spends most of the book researching -- and eventually acting, to his financial and social detriment on that research, -- the various aspects of this problem.

The topic of research is as good a place as any to begin a positive appraisal of Sinclair Lewis's authorial performance. A list of newsworthy names in *Kingsblood Royal* is nearly as long as a list of the book's ethnic groups. Richard Wright and Gunnar Myrdal are both mentioned twice. The NAACP and the Fair Employment Practices
Committee are referred to several times. There are guest appearances by personalities not associated with racial issues: Roosevelt, Churchill, Truman, Eisenhower, Gandhi, Einstein. Critic Robert Coard notes that Lewis went so far as to quote at least one contemporary essay. Lewis obviously knows his subject matter, and one observer goes so far as to label the book a "documentary novel ... a sample of the New Journalism" (Coard 12), quite a compliment considering that the New Journalism had yet to be invented in the 1940s.

My own impression of Lewis's research is that it goes beyond what he may have learned in newspaper articles. In an early chapter, Neil believes he has cause to spy on his black housekeeper, Belfreda Grey. When he enters her room, he notices, among other details, that "the pillow was black with hair grease" (13). It is a small detail, perhaps, but an amazingly and surprisingly accurate one. My own experience is that few white women, and far fewer white men, know anything about caring for African-American hair. I have been told that even white hair care professionals are not particularly knowledgeable on the subject. While this is a line that most readers would pass without any special notice, it is the sort of detail that adds an extra level of realism to the novel.

"Such minutiae are not insignificant", writes Warren Beck (98). Unfortunately, he writes from a much different perspective. He is, in fact, in the process of brutalizing Lewis. "How Good is Sinclair Lewis?" his title asks. Not very, answers the body of his essay. In spite of the above paragraphs, Beck attacks, among other aspects of the work, 

15 The quotation appears in Chapter 41 and is from David L. Cohn's "How the South Feels". Coard has traced it to the January 1944 Atlantic Monthly. I would also acknowledge a debt
Lewis's realism. He argues that Lewis cannot construct realistic characters (99). Neil's choice to confess his blackness is labeled "scarcely credible" (98). He even says that "Kingsblood Royal suggests that Lewis knows little of Negroes" (102), a dangerous assertion unless, of course, one is a Southerner or a Northerner who owns a winter home in the South.

This question of realism and believability is a central one for most reviewers of the book. Margaret Marshall says "the glow of reality is missing" and that Neil's behavior is "extremely unlikely" (689). Malcolm Cowley states that he cannot believe the racist reactions of Neil's fellow Minnesotans (100). These critics are especially bothered by the book's violent ending in which a mob attacks the Kingsblood home. Along these lines, critic T. J. Matheson offers the accusation that "Lewis exaggerates the intensity of racist feeling in his fictional context to a scarcely credible level" (14).

In what she calls a revaluation of the novel, Sarah McCullough summarizes the above:

Two of the most repeated attacks on Kingsblood Royal are (1) that no normal white American, finding a trace of black ancestry, would reveal his discovery; (2) that even if said normal American revealed his black "taint", few Northerners (even of the late 1940s) would have reacted with prejudice. (11)

In other words: it can't happen here.

It would seem that Lewis spent much of his career responding to that statement with a resounding "Oh yes it can!" It is especially surprising that he would have to defend Kingsblood Royal against such a charge considering its historical context. Indeed, one of the many potentially constructive ways to interpret the book is to evaluate its place in the
racial environment of the 1940s, a decade which produced Richard Wright, Gunnar
Myrdal and Lillian Smith. In spite of this racial chorus, the book stands accused of
unbelievability.

Unbelievability is given as the reason Kingsblood Royal no longer needs to be read.
Even if there was a time when such tragedies as Lewis depicts occurred, those days are
over:

Today a black is far more likely to be placed in a highly visible (if possibly token)
position in the front of a bank rather than relegated to a back room as Kingsblood
was soon after his revelation of Negro blood. (Coard 17)

If Kingsblood Royal ever had a relevant message, it must be a message that no longer
applies.

At this point, I need to invoke yet another critic so that I may pursue a somewhat
non-traditional line of evidence. In a contemporary review of the novel, Clifton Fadiman
wrote, "I do not precisely know how 'good' Kingsblood Royal is. But I do know how it
makes me feel" (9). This area of personal feeling is the only way I know to judge not only
the "goodness" that concerns Fadiman but also the troublesome problem of believability.

Being interracially married, I feel I know a little about Neil Kingsblood's
situation. My wife and I lived, in fact, less than ten miles from Mankato, a town quite
similar to Grand Republic and the location of one of Lewis's homes.16 While I could

16 Ehrlich and Carruth offer the specific address:

In the summer of 1919 Sinclair Lewis, with his wife grace and their child, lived at 315
Broad Street in the town of Mankato, sixty-five miles southwest of Minneapolis. Lewis
worked here on his novel Main Street (1920), in which the town is mentioned. (342)
relate many incidents that support Kingsblood Royal's plausibility, I will mention just one. An interracial couple had a KKK-style cross burnt in their front lawn. The violent racism of Lewis's "liberal" Minnesota can and does happen.

Living with racism means that one moves in a sort of surreal nightmare. Nothing is exactly what it seems; everything, including one's self, comes into question. When questioning whether Kingsblood Royal is satire, propaganda, a bad novel, or some kind of freakish combination, the critical reader is in the same doubting state of mind as Neil Kingsblood who wonders if his life is a joke, a means of salvation, or an existence as mixed as his own ethnic identity. The novel is more than a mechanical exercise in Howellsian two-ness; it is multi-genred, multi-voiced, multiracial ambiguity, the sort of ambiguity upon which literary debate thrives.

Having said that, it must be admitted that such debate has not thrived. Other than a flurry of contemporary book reviews and a handful of critical essays in the 1970s, "Kingsblood Royal has not been so much misunderstood as ignored" (McCullough 10). At this point, I have merely alluded to the literary possibilities which show that the book should not be ignored. I would hope that following list can be read as a series of questions which point to Kingsblood Royal's under-appreciated complexity.

1. A character named Mrs. Woolcape declares "We colored folks have to understand both our own world and the white folks' world, to be safe" (115). This is as

It may be worth noting that modern day Mankato is about half as populous as the fictional Grand Republic.
clear an expression of Du Boisian double consciousness as one is likely to find. Considering that Neil struggles with his newly divided self image, Kingsblood Royal seems an ideal place to explore the psychology behind Du Bois's statement.

2. Fate dictates Neil's blackness. Beyond fate, it is entirely up to Neil what he decides to do with that blackness. In a sense, he must will himself into a new racial identity or willfully choose to remain white. In either case, he must will his own existence into being, thus making Kingsblood Royal a book to be discussed in terms of existentialism.

3. This is a satire -- maybe. There are certainly moments when Lewis manages to make racism laughable. A soldier complains about the cowardice of a black outfit: "We had to keep pushing'em ahead of us into combat" (89). The American Credo, already quoted at length, contains one bizarre joke after another. There is also Kingsblood's strange observation regarding his black activist friends: "They found nothing quite so funny as their own defeats" (138). The question is: is all this monstrously funny, or just plain monstrous? Perhaps racism and humor simply should not be miscegenated.

4. Another possible avenue of critical debate connects to Lewis's research. One passage makes clear that he had more than a passing acquaintance with the conventions of previous interracial writers. Sophie Concord, a black woman with whom Neil ineffectually flirts, declares:
Mister, don't you realize who I am? I'm that beautiful convent-trained octoroon, that passionate slave-girl with the lambent eyes and long raven tresses, standing on the block with hot blushes, and practically nothing else on ... But one young man there, young Nevil Calhoun Kingsblood of Kingsblood Corners, Kentucky pities her. (150)

Not only is this a Howellsian deflation of interracial melodrama, it is a nice inversion of those conventions in that Neil is actually playing the distressed "octoroon" role normally reserved for female characters. It would be interesting to explore how Lewis further modifies the accepted conventions.

5. Speaking of Howells, Lewis manages some interesting stylistic touches that favorably compare to that author's well balanced two-ness. Considering that Neil's true identity is hidden under his apparent whiteness, Lewis's handling of a mask motif is quite noteworthy. Even physical objects assume masks in *Kingsblood Royal*: "Under the linen table-cloths, there were concealed two card tables, eking out the mahogany" (36); "The bungalow was not actually of stone, but of cement blocks so pressed as to look somewhat like stones" (53). A detailed examination of this recurring mask image would neatly comply with the doubleness of dialogics as well as Bakhtin's concept of carnival.

6. There is a spiritual element in the book which requires some background information in order to be fully appreciated:

In the film *Corrina, Corrina*, Whoopi Goldberg plays the part of a somewhat eccentric nanny who has been hired to look after the newly motherless child of a white man. The film, marketed as one of Goldberg's many zany comedies, must have been a
shock to the few people who saw it. There is no comedy in the death of a parent, and this particular death was complicated by the fact that the surviving spouse was a determined atheist; he had no spiritual tools for coping with grief.

Goldberg's character is far from being an atheist. She is so devoted that she risks losing her job by smuggling the man's child into church against his explicit orders. Her employment situation is made even less secure as romantic feelings between herself and her unbeliever boss begin to grow. She makes her fatal error when she allows the child to miss school. The father takes this as a personal challenge, and it ends both the job and the affair.

In proper Hollywood fashion, there is a happy ending. The man's life is empty without Goldberg. After a final confrontation at her house, it is clear that the two will never be together. He leaves her door, walks to the street, and begins to pray for another chance with this woman he has come to love and need. Sure enough, Goldberg has followed him and sees him praying. Love is restored.

The symbolism here is spread thickly. White people are cold, rational and unfeeling. Blacks are emotional and spiritual. A truly healthy person would combine all these qualities, thus, blacks and whites need each other.

This, in fact, is a common approach in many interracial stories. Foreign Student is another film in which the white male hero must visit a black church to be made whole; his love interest is the daughter of a black minister. In An Imperative Duty, Rhoda Auldgate immediately goes to a black church when she first learns the truth of her
identity. Even in an unexpected interracial example like Moby Dick, there is an early critical moment when Ishmael inadvertently enters a black church.

Kingsblood Royal fully participates in this spiritual symbolism. Neil Kingsblood, the novel's conventionally "nice" white hero who eventually discovers his blackness, is most definitely suffering from spiritual emptiness. He and his acquaintances never discussed any subject more spiritual than the legs of their stenographers, any topic more embarrassing than the Republican party. Only once in his life had Neil possessed a friend with whom he could talk about fear and live and God, and that friend he had known for only two weeks. He had been young Captain Ellerton, whom Neil had met on the transport to Italy. All day, all night they had talked. Ellerton was a designer of machinery, with a taste for Mozart and Eugene O'Neill and Toulouse-Lautrec and Veblen, and he had not seemed impertinent when he had asked, "Do you ever think about personal immortality?" ...Ellerton was killed by a sniper, forty-two minutes after they had landed in Italy. (32) Upon discovering his racial identity, Neil speculates, "I think God turned me black to save my soul, if I have any beyond ledgers and college yells" (74). Clearly, Lewis is exploring the black/white spiritual dichotomy.

7. Finally, it is well worth debating, as this chapter has done, the quality of the novel. Is it as bad as Warren Beck would have us believe? Or should we instead believe the words of Vincent Sheean:

There is a kind of sardonic bitterness in his style ... which reminds one of the most inspired inventions of Charlie Chaplin; there is a breathless speed in climaxes which makes one think of Toscani. (191)

Perhaps we should confess an inability to judge like Clifton Fadiman did.

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17 It is admittedly a bit of a stretch to include Moby Dick in the interracial canon. There are those who would argue that Ishmael and Queequeg are in an interracial relationship, and there are certainly a few textual hints in that direction. At the very least, the two are involved in a very intimate interracial friendship.
Fadiman also said that *Kingsblood Royal* was "the best conversation-starter since Hiroshima" (9), yet Sarah McCullough reminds us that the book has been more ignored than misunderstood. It seems quite obvious that it has been ignored precisely because of misunderstanding. Of course the book is self-contradictory; of course it offers a strange blend of the real and the incredible; of course one does not know whether to laugh or cringe in disgust; of course one does not know how "good" it is: these are all expected and accepted qualities in interracial writing. One does not join opposites without offending extremes -- and this joining is worthy of the best quality of literary discussion.
APPENDIX ONE

The following is a glossary of racial terms as developed by Maria P. P. Root. The text of the glossary is quoted verbatim from Root's The Multiracial Experience, pp ix-xi.

**Afroasian** refers to people of African and Asian heritage.

**Amerasian** is the most inclusive term to refer to anyone racially mixed of Asian ancestry. It is also a transnational term referring to racially mixed Asians in other countries. Subsumed under this term are Afroasian, black Japanese, Eurasian, mestiza (o), and hapa (hapa haole). Amerasian originally referred to children of American and Asian national origin, usually fathered by white Americans. The term has been used broadly with children fathered by American servicemen in Asia.

**Biracial** refers to a person whose parents are of two different socially designated racial groups, for example, black mother, white father. In a less commonly, but perfectly accurate meaning, biracial can also refer to someone who has parents of the same socially designated race, when one or both parents are biracial or there is racial mixing in the family history that is important to the individual. This use of biracial moves us away from requiring equal "fractions of blood" to recognize the prevalence of racial blending throughout American history. However, the social and psychological
experience of the person who uses the term this way may be different from someone who is a "first-generation" biracial.

**Eurasian** refers to people of Asian and white European heritage.

**Hapa haole or hapa** is a term derived from the Hawaiian language. Although it was originally used to designate someone who was partially a stranger or outsider -- Hawaiian mixed with other national or racial heritage -- today it designates someone of Asian or Pacific Island origin mixed with European heritage. Some people are broadening its usage to be more similar to Amerasian.

**Hypodescent** refers to a social system that maintains the fiction of monoracial identification of individuals by assigning a racially mixed person to the racial group in their heritage that has the least social status.

**Melange**, a French term for mixed, is a newer term used by many black/white individuals to indicate being of mixed racial heritage with no racial designation.

**Mestiza (o)** a Spanish origin word, designates racial mixing of someone with Indian and Spanish ancestry. Not commonly used by young multiracial people, it now has a broader meaning, referring to people of Latin and European ancestry. Because of the shared Spanish ancestry, this term is also used by older Filipinos and Filipino Americans to refer
to multigenerationally mixed or biracial Filipinos.

Miscegenation refers to race mixing in intimate dating and sexual relationships. Thus, antimiscegenation means against intermarriage or against race mixing. The last antimiscegenation laws were repealed in 1967 by a US Supreme Court ruling in the case of Lovings vs. State of Virginia.

Monoracial refers to people who claim a single racial heritage. It is also a system of racial classification that only recognizes one racial designation per person.

Mulatta(o), in its current usage, covers someone who is of varying fractions of African and European heritage. Not all racially mixed persons view this as a positive designation. Its original meaning has negative connotations; many believe the word is derived from the Spanish mulato for mule, the infertile hybrid between a donkey and a horse. The suffix suggests a diminutive status. Arabic origins have been suggested for this term.

Multiracial refers to people who are of two or more racial heritages. It is the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes. Thus it also includes biracial people.

Transracial indicates movement across racial boundaries and is sometimes synonymous
with interracial. This term is most notably used in the context of adoption across racial lines.
Challenges to the traditional literary canon are now so common that it has prompted some to declare it dead. Harold Bloom, arguably the most traditional critic in recent memory, entitled the first chapter of his *Western Canon* "An Elegy for the Canon." The politically motivated construction of new canons prompts Bloom to cynicism; "I have very little confidence that literary education will survive its current malaise," he says (517).

Bloom's nostalgic pleas for the return of a traditional aesthetic can almost be described as quaint. In order for his position to have any hope of validity, one must willfully forget the theoretical contributions of Marxists, Feminists, New Historicists, Cultural Materialists, and dozens more. This is to say nothing of Bloom's neglect in regards to minorities. Indeed, the very word "western" in his title reveals a degree of bias. Western countries have exerted enough colonial influence on Africa and India -- to name just two examples -- that to deny them entrance into "western" intellectual circles is an act of hypocrisy.

With that in mind, it must still be admitted that Bloom makes a few valid points. No matter what ideological standards one adopts to judge literary art, the supremacy of at least a few writers remains. Shakespeare, to name an obvious example, seems to cut
across all political and cultural boundaries on the strength of his poetic genius. A
multiculturally motivated attempt to challenge his canonical position -- or the positions of
Dante, Milton, Tolstoi, etc. -- is almost certainly destined for failure.

Thus, a critic who wishes to acknowledge both the aesthetic value of the
traditional canon as well as the ideological points of multiculturalist approaches seems to
be caught in a contradiction. The interracial canon, ever concerned with the joining of
opposites, can resolve this contradiction. In fact, the interracial canon is largely already
in place as a subset of the traditional canon. Shakespeare, again providing a convenient
example, shows how this works. Without challenging his traditional canonical status, a
critic can place him inside the interracial canon by discussing Othello's marriage, Aaron
in *Titus Andronicus*, The Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, or even Henry
V's intercultural romance with a French woman. An interracial perspective, therefore,
does no damage to Bloom's aesthetic principals and, in fact, contributes to the delightful
complexity of the Bard.

This thesis, of course, is not about the Bard, the drama, or English literature; it is
about the American novel. The three novels I have discussed represent three possible
ways in which the American interracial canon can be formed. One, of course, coincides
with the method illustrated by the above Shakespeare example. Howells is a firmly
canonized novelist of the American Realist movement. Including his works in the
interracial canon does not require any major shift in canonical thinking. Sinclair Lewis,
onece one of the most respected writers in the country, is now a questionable canonical
choice. Still, he is a Nobel Prize recipient; if one gleans the ranks of America's Nobel
and Pulitzer prize winning writers, one encounters a number of perfectly acceptable candidates for interracial canonization. Less conventionally acceptable, but still possibly useful for the construction of an interracial canon, are writers like Anna Dickinson. She represents popular culture and the realm of now forgotten bestsellers. Since many such books are deservedly forgotten, one is less tempted to assign canonical status to them.

With Dickinson, Howells and Lewis providing three carefully chosen instances, three avenues — those of popular culture, literary prizes, and the established canon — are opened for the construction of the interracial canon. The purpose of Appendix B is to sketch these three avenues thus providing a sort of canonical context for the preceding discussion of the above named authors.

I have focused my sketch on black/white interracial novels, but one must keep in mind that this is a mere fraction of America’s interracial, intercultural, interethnic, and even interfaith heritage. The American Western, for instance, offers a long list of Native American/White interracial stories while Melville’s Typee introduced the now common interracial trope of exotic island romance. This is to say nothing of the enormous interracial wealth of American drama, poetry, nonfiction, and even film and television.

Films and television are perhaps the easiest way to introduce the difficult-to-catalog popular culture aspect of the interracial canon. It is not difficult to catalog because of rarity; on the contrary, examples are far too numerous to list in anything but a book length bibliography. I will not go into great detail here because I would risk shifting my argument to a non-literary focus. A few examples must to suffice to illustrate the surprisingly large interracial presence in visual media. These examples date back to the
founding of motion pictures. Indeed, D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation, considered by many to be the first film worthy to be ranked as art, features several mixed race individuals and, most unfortunately, a heavily racist subplot in which a black rapist pursues a white woman. Interracial stories have thus been a part of motion pictures from their very beginning. Titles that span the decades include Imitation of Life, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, and Jungle Fever.

Television, generally considered much more conservative than film, has an even larger interracial population. One need only think of Desilu Studios, the Hispanic/White mixture (Desi Arnez and Lucille Ball) that can be credited with inventing much of what television has become. Senator Sonny Bono and Oscar winning actress Cher were another popular interracial couple. Star Trek, more of a cultural phenomenon than a television show, featured the first televised Black/White interracial kiss and continues to be so interracially oriented that even fictional races are often presented in mixed relationships. Given the ubiquitous nature of television, one must once again think of Ralph Ellison's invisible man; even in plain sight, people do not care to notice interracial couples.

Popular books are also difficult to enumerate largely because they truly are invisible. Written at specific times to meet specific needs, they have vanished as the need for them has vanished. The tragic mulatto character, for instance, was once so common as to be a cliche in both novels and plays. Hundreds of such characters were created for the purpose of anti-, and even pro-, slavery propaganda before the Civil War. During the Reconstruction period and well into the Harlem Renaissance, mixed race characters
served as much as rhetorical devices as they did literary constructions.

Written by a celebrity for specific polemical purposes, Anna Dickinson's novel is a prime example of this kind of literature. One must admit that describing the quality of such books as "mixed" is, perhaps, a bit generous. Still, the sheer number of them argues for their one time popularity as well as for their much overlooked importance as part of America's cultural history. It is best to think of them as a sort of foundation upon which better books were built. Without books like What Answer?, there might not be books like Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Uncle Tom's Cabin appeared before the time of the major literary prizes. Granted that literary prizes can be just as capricious as bestsellerdom, it is nonetheless remarkable to note that the interracial canon has a strong presence in the histories of both the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes. Of America's Nobel writers, the following have produced at least one work involving a black/white interracial relationship: Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, Eugene O'Neill and Toni Morrison\(^\text{18}\). In addition, several of Pearl Buck's novels tell Asian/American interracial stories while Hemingway's In Our Time features a character of mixed Native American/White descent.

The interracial connection to the Pulitzer fiction prize is just as strong. The following is a list of Pulitzer authors who have written at least one Black/White interracial story. When an interracial story was specifically designated the prize winner, I've listed the title as well.

\(^{18}\) I am referring only to the writers who were American citizens at the time the award was issued. If I were to include writers who eventually became naturalized citizens, I would
1923  Willa Cather
1925  Edna Ferber
1926  Sinclair Lewis
1929  Julia Peterkin
1933  T. S. Stribling  *The Store*
1942  Ellen Glasgow
1947  Robert Penn Warren
1955  William Faulkner
1956  MacKinlay Kantor
1961  Harper Lee  *To Kill A Mockingbird*
1963  William Faulkner
1965  Shirley Ann Grau  *The Keepers of the House*
1968  William Stryon  *The Confessions of Nat Turner*
1983  Alice Walker
1988  Toni Morrison

As it stands, the list includes a little more than 21% of all the Pulitzer authors. I should point out that I make no claim of an encyclopedic knowledge of the 70+ writers who have won the award; I have listed only those of whom I have firsthand reading experience.

Also, I deliberately kept Pearl Buck (1932) and James Michener (1948) off the list because their interracial novels involved Asia and the Pacific islands. I can only speculate that the several Western writers who have won Pulitzers (e.g.: Robert Lewis ...
Taylor, Larry McMurtry) may have used the common trope of Native American/White romance in some of their books. In any case, the interracial canon is solidly based within the structure America's literary prizes.

For some, that base may not be solid enough. All the talk of how interracial literature coincides with popular and prize-winning literature carries little weight compared to its connection to the traditional canon. Unless there is a way to convince the Harold Blooms of the world that interracial literature has some sort of independent aesthetic value -- that is, a value independent of any ideological/political concerns -- then it will forever be classified as part of what Bloom calls the School of Resentment.

Fortunately, Bloom himself has inadvertently constructed part of the interracial canon. In the final pages of *The Western Canon*, he has provided an extensive list of what he considers canonical authors. Just as Shakespeare is both traditionally and interracialy canonical, many of the writers on Bloom's list fit the requirements of both categories. They are traditionally canonical based not only on Bloom's judgment, but also on the judgment of anthologizers and many writers of university syllabi; they are interracialy canonical based on the subject matter of their works and/or the facts of their own biography.

The following is a list of America's traditionally canonical authors. The names are taken directly from Bloom's list. I assume that most readers have an understanding of the aesthetic standards of Bloom-like critics, so I am not going to explain their rationale. I have, however, provided brief explanations as to why I have included these authors in the interracial canon. Keep in mind that this not a bibliographic exercise and that I make
no claims regarding comprehensiveness. I hope merely to provide a list of interracial writers that is large enough to justify the existence of a term like "the American interracial canon".

James Fenimore Cooper — Interracial elements are part of Nancy's story in The Last of the Mohicans.

Walt Whitman — Whitman wrote a few neglected novels. Franklin Evans, a bizarre piece of temperance propaganda, includes an interracial marriage as part of the plot.

Herman Melville — He is included on this list for the interracial elements of such books as Typee and Omoo. One could also argue that Ishmael and Queequeg were in a sort of interracial relationship.

Frederick Douglass — Like W. E. B. Du Bois (one of Bloom's most glaring omissions) and other leading African-Americans, Douglass was racially mixed. Hence any biographical criticism of his works automatically justifies an interracial approach. Douglass was also interracially married.

Louisa May Alcott — She wrote a number of short stories which feature racially mixed characters.

Charles W. Chesnutt — Himself racially mixed, his novels and stories often deal with interracial issues.

Kate Chopin — Like Alcott, her short stories often featured racially mixed characters. Her major work, The Awakening, has a supporting cast of mixed race servants.
Mark Twain — *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a novel that even the demanding Bloom places in the canon.

William Dean Howells — Discussed in this thesis.

Gertrude Stein — Her Bloom-approved canonical work *ThreeLives* contains an interracial story.

Sinclair Lewis — Discussed in this thesis.

Jean Toomer — Another racially mixed writer.

Eugene O'Neill — *All God's Chillun Got Wings* is a play about an interracial marriage.

William Faulkner — It goes without saying that such works as *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are central to the American canon.

Earnest Hemingway — *In Our Time* features a mixed race character.

Richard Wright — The author was interracially married. Also, the plot of *Native Son* turns on the issue of interracial sex.

Langston Hughes — A mixed race author whose poems and plays sometimes discuss interracial issues.

Ellen Glasgow — The novel *Barren Ground* contains an interracial marriage.

Robert Penn Warren — *Band of Angels* tells a plantation-related story of slavery and miscegenation.

James Baldwin — *Another Country* tells of several racially mixed relationships.

Ralph Ellison — There are interracial episodes in *Invisible Man*.

William Stryon — The author's novelized story about Nat Turner includes an interracial
love story.

Toni Morrison — *Tar Baby's* plot depends on an interracial relationship between a black woman and a rich European male.

Joyce Carol Oates -- This prolific novelist has produced at least one novella concerning an interracial relationship.

Ishmael Reed — *Flight to Canada* is this writer's contribution to the interracial canon.

I would also add that some canonized literary movements have extremely important interracial elements. The Harlem Renaissance absolutely requires an interracial approach in that many writers — Nella Larson, Walter White, W. E. B. Du Bois, George Schuyler, and a host of others — write of interracial concerns. Outside the scope of the American novel, English Renaissance drama is another canonized genre which requires an interracial treatment; Othello was hardly the only Moor on the stage.

The main point of this appendix is to show that the three novels discussed in this thesis are hardly the only interracial literary artifacts in existence. Rather, I would like to show that interracial writing is prominent enough to deserve a specialized style of interracial reading.
APPENDIX THREE

A Brief Proposal

As I stated in the very first paragraph of this work, I have been fortunate to have some interracial essays published. The thesis which you have just finished reading is my longest completed work on the topic to date. That is not to say that I have not attempted more ambitious works. Indeed I have, and I would like to devote a few paragraphs at the close of the present work to modestly propose a direction for some of those more ambitious projects.

It seems to me that an area of learning — in this case the area of interracial literature — cannot be considered completely defined until a proper bibliography of its main components has been compiled. I once was foolish enough to believe I could accomplish this task in the course of a single summer. After making and organizing 250 pages of typed notes and several hundred pages more of hand-written notes, I had to acknowledge that I had barely scratched the surface of this surprisingly vast area. To make matters even more frustrating, it should be noted that I had narrowed my research to one area: the Black/White American novel.

I would call for the completion of this project. Rather, I would propose that several bibliographies be compiled. At the very least, one is needed for each major genre of American literature.
I would also ask for a history of interracial literature. This thesis has hinted at some of the possibilities of such a study. Interracial literature is as old as the Bible, it remained strong in Shakespeare's age, it continues with recent Nobel writers. Along with a bibliography, a history would help define a new area of literary learning.

This new area of learning would, of course, demand new anthologies. To the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be a published collection of specifically interracial works. There are certainly enough quality works from enough different genres and periods to justify the production of an anthology.

Along these same lines, reprints of important interracial novels are long overdue. An Imperative Duty positively begs to be reissued while Kingsblood Royal requires the full apparatus of a critical edition in order to be fully appreciated.

Finally, I would propose that a few courageous teachers take it upon themselves to design interracial courses. My own clumsy internet searches have revealed that a few professors at a few universities are already quite close to such a course. In classes that often go by titles like "Constructions of Race", one can spot a number of interracial works on reading lists.
LIST OF SOURCES


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