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# THE TRAGIC MULATTA PLAYS THE TRAGIC MUSE

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> I have made a step; do not call it a desperate one; do not blame me, for your blame I cannot bear; but I have gone on the stage. There was no other means of independence open to me; and I had a dream, I have it still, that there, if anywhere, I might do my work.
>
> —Charles Kingsley

MARIE LAVINGTON, THE RUNAWAY OCTOROON slave in Charles Kingsley's little-read novel *Two Years Ago* (1857), makes this declaration of independence in a letter to Tom Thurnall, the novel's hero. Though Tom helped her escape to a Canadian Quaker community, Marie has tired of the "staid and sober" (122; vol. 1, ch. 5) lifestyle of a Quakeress. She reenters the public marketplace by refashioning herself into the Italian diva, La Cordifiamma. Marie's ascent to the stage as La Cordifiamma marks the construction of a new female body in the mid-nineteenth century: the Tragic Mulatta who becomes a Tragic Muse.

This may seem an unlikely transformation, but Kingsley was not alone. The American author, Lydia Maria Child, recounts the same refashioning in *A Romance of the Republic* (1867), narrating Rosa Royal's transformation from a slave into the opera *prima donna*, La Senorita Rosita Campaneo. To be sure, the two novelists develop disparate emphases in their treatments, which in large part reflect their different cultural milieus. Child's concern, even after Emancipation, is simply to secure the fundamental humanity of the mixed-race slave, which entails emphasizing not only her vulnerability to subjection, but also the readiness with which she can be absorbed into domestic womanhood. Kingsley, on the other hand, is more engaged by the figure of the mixed-race woman as an embodiment of undisciplined desire, at once dangerous and deeply alluring to men. In Kingsley's England, the Tragic Mulatta is no longer exposed to the threat of slavery, but she feels a different vulnerability inasmuch as she identifies her ancestry with a compromising susceptibility to passion, which must be concealed. For Kingsley's heroine, this concealment is manifested in hidden psychic depths, above all as reservoirs of erotic desire, whereas Child's heroine has no hidden depths because her conflict is more thoroughly social – between herself and the law – and thus more readily externalized.

In both texts, however, the fusion of the Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse embodies a host of anxieties associated with middle-class femininity. "Tragic Muse" gained currency in

the late eighteenth century to describe the chaste and matronly actress, Mrs. Sarah Siddons. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, admirers and critics of the French tragedienne, Rachel Félix, appropriated the title, redefining it to connote the dangerous exotic beauty and sexual power of the Jewish actress. Here, perhaps, in concert with the concerns to "fallenness" that proliferate the 1850s, as the Tragic Muse linked feminine autonomy, erotic spectacle, and material exchange, she incarnated forces seemingly inimical to domestic womanhood. Catherine Gallagher has suggested some of these in her influential article on the Jewish actress, "George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question." But the connection of the Tragic Muse to the Tragic Mulatta further complicates this web of associations, inasmuch as the mixed-race slave is born into a more radical subjection in which she is legally, and not merely figuratively, a form of property – a state, moreover, in which her exchange value is quite explicitly linked to the erotic allure of her body.

The link between the Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse thus amplifies a host of pressures shaping nineteenth-century womanhood. On the one hand, the stage offers the prospect of an escape from subjection, both through the effacement of an earlier identity and in the sense of self-determination the successful actress may enjoy. At the same time, both Kingsley and Child insist on the costs of this effort, which not only denies the performer the more conventional satisfactions of marriage and motherhood, but also (so they suggest) ultimately entails an unwitting surrender of the self to a new subjection, that of the paying audience, which aligns the actress with the prostitute. Amanda Anderson has explored this theme as a preoccupation with what she calls "attenuated agency": commentators attribute to the fallen woman only "the minimal and paradoxical freedom of knowing that she cannot alter her character, for it is no longer her own" (57). As fallen figures, Kingsley and Child's Tragic Mulattas display similar traits of self-consciousness and social determinism. But unlike the fallen figures in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846–47) and *David Copperfield* (1849–50) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), the Tragic Mulatta is born into her predicament – by virtue of the black blood in her veins, she is already fallen. While Child, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Wells Brown, use the Tragic Mulatta figure to show that mixed-race or black womanhood is not inherently fallen, Kingsley and his male spectators are drawn to Marie for the erotic spectacle her black blood promises. Marriage beckons as a relief from the pressures of public spectacle, and yet the domestication of the Tragic Mulatta reinforces a question raised by the allure of the Tragic Muse: is marriage truly a refuge from exchange, or a refashioning of it, in which the actress surrenders her unruly desires in return for material security?

### *The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse: Erotic Spectacles of Race*

KINGSLEY AND CHILD'S REPRESENTATIONS of the Tragic Mulatta playing the Tragic Muse open up a traditionally neglected dialogue between female figures confined to separate literary histories. Indeed, the fusion of the Tragic Mulatta and Tragic Muse motifs in what Paul Giles describes as the "transatlantic imaginary" (1) emphasizes the ways in which literatures create and disseminate racial concepts across cultures.[1] Pairing Kingsley's British narrative with Child's American one underscores the powerful connections between the construction of racial identity and the trafficking of female sexuality in the nineteenth-century marketplace. As objects of the public gaze on the auction block and the stage, the racialized bodies of the Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse tell a story of sexual availability. While white women

embodied ideal womanhood by remaining safely ensconced in the domestic sphere, a realm which was defined in opposition to performance, the Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse were public women on display, their racial difference rendering them spectacles of sexuality and desire.[2] Writing of Alcharisi, the Tragic Muse figure in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Gallagher explains that the Jewish woman's desire to become an actress or "public woman" allows her "to escape the identity imposed by a father" (46). Indeed, by becoming actresses, Kingsley's Marie Lavington and Child's Rosa Royal escape the identities imposed on them by slave owners. But the irony of the Tragic Mulatta's liminal existence, as Jean Fagan Yellin observes in *Women and Sisters*, is that while her masters and suitors read her mixed-race blood as a sign of sexual lassitude, she is a figure that "wants to conform to patriarchal definitions of true womanhood but is prevented from doing so" by her tainted bloodline, which prohibits her from achieving marriage, "the traditional woman's only goal" (Yellin 53, 72).[3]

Unlike the Tragic Muse, the mixed-race slave occupied a liminal space in which she was both a model of domestic virtue and a "public" woman on the auction block. The Tragic Mulatta, as portrayed in Child's "The Quadroons" (1842) and "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" (1843), Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), embodies a violent distinction between these public and private identities. Whereas the Tragic Muse may choose to return to that earlier self inscribed by Jewish patriarchy, the Tragic Mulatta typically lives in mortal fear of its exposure because the discovery of her racial identity would debar her from the protection of the domestic sphere. At any time, whether she was a free woman of color or a slave, the Tragic Mulatta could be ripped from the home and exposed as an item for sale on the auction block, where she was the ultimate example of commodified female sexuality.[4] A sexually imperiled figure, the mixed-race slave conventionally committed suicide either because she had been raped or to avoid violence from the men who read her mixed-race blood as a sign of her sexual availability. Stripped of sexual agency, the Tragic Mulatta was trapped within a narrative that offered only two choices – sexual violation or death. In Child's "The Quadroons," for example, Xarifa is sold into slavery and raped by the master who initially tries to win her favor with gifts and compassionate words. Describing Xarifa's inevitable suicide, Child writes, "Poor Xarifa was a raving maniac. That pure temple was desecrated; that loving heart was broken; and that beautiful head fractured against the wall in the frenzy of despair" (141).

This conflict clearly engaged the writers who helped to give currency to the Tragic Mulatta stereotype. Although Child is often credited with inventing the Tragic Mulatta, another important influence was the writing of British travel writers, such as Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, who toured the south in the early nineteenth century.[5] Trollope and Martineau were fascinated by accounts of *plaçage*, a system in antebellum New Orleans that sanctioned sexual unions between free women of color and affluent white men. In the *plaçage* system, the mothers of free women of color were implicated in the commodification of their daughters' bodies by "placing" their fair-skinned daughters in concubinages with eligible suitors or "protectors."[6] Though Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) and Martineau's *Society in America* (1837) were works of non-fiction, they reflect the forming of a literary type as Trollope and Martineau romanticized the experiences of the New Orleans free women of color. Trollope, for example, explains that the "exquisitely beautiful, graceful, gentle, and amiable" quadroons "perpetually become the objects of choice and affection" (10; ch. 2). However, she does not doom the quadroons to a tragic end. She instead

assures her readers that the unions are "often lasting and happy, as far as any unions can be so to which a certain degree of disgrace is attached" (10; ch. 2). While Trollope could not remove the strain of blood that banished the quadroon ladies from polite white society, she could remove the stain of concubinage by emphasizing the fidelity of the *placées* and portraying them as victims of a racist legal system that rendered them concubines instead of wives.

Martineau, however, envisions a different fate for the mixed-race women who resort to *plaçage* because they are forbidden to marry. Though literary history has largely neglected Martineau's contribution to the formation of the Tragic Mulatta, her account of *plaçage* provided a crucial impetus for interest in the Tragic Mulatta that American authors, such as Child and Brown, later developed. In *Society in America*, Martineau informs her readers that, although some of the liaisons last until death, more typically the concubinages are only sustained for several years. Her description sketches what would become the central tropes in American literary representations of the Tragic Mulatta:

> When the time comes for the gentleman to take a white wife, the dreadful news reaches his Quadroon partner, either by letter entitling her to call the house and furniture her own, or by the newspaper which announces his marriage. The Quadroon ladies are rarely or never known to form a second connexion. Many commit suicide: more die broken-hearted. (117; vol. 2, ch. 5)

Martineau's description of *plaçage* is one of the only travel accounts that ends with the demise of the quadroons. Perhaps to reinforce her attack on slavery, Martineau romanticizes their unions. These "almost white" ladies are given a tragic ending because to show them surviving and forming new connections would have reinforced stereotypes of the quadroons' immorality, whereas death at the hands of a system that prohibited *placées* from marrying elicited sympathy.[7] Those free women who did not commit suicide or die broken-hearted, Martineau imagines, eventually were ripped from the comfort and privacy of the domestic sphere and subjected to public exposure and sale on the auction block where "They were sold . . . at high prices, for the vilest of purposes" (116; vol. 2, ch. 5).

The Tragic Mulatta narrative, as it was conceived by Martineau, Child, and Brown, gained international attention with the publication of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. By the late 1850s there was an explosion of abolitionist sensation fiction in which British authors attempted to capitalize on the popularity of Stowe's novel with their own versions of the Tragic Mulatta narrative. However, in England, the motif shifted more towards sensation fiction as the crucial dynamic became courtship rather than seduction in such texts as Captain Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon; or, A Lover's Adventures in Louisiana* (1856), Dion Boucicault's play *The Octoroon* (1859), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's serial, *The Octoroon; or, The Lily of Louisiana* (1861), which was published the year before *Lady Audley's Secret*. Boucicault and Braddon borrowed liberally from Reid's novel in which a naïve British hero travels to New Orleans, falls in love with a mixed-race slave, and resolves to rescue her from slavery and marry her despite America's anti-miscegenation laws. In these British texts, the heroine has an uneasy relationship to a past that, although it no longer puts her in legal jeopardy, nonetheless represents a compromising secret to be hidden.

It is Kingsley, however, who seems to recognize in the exiled Tragic Mulatta a powerful resemblance to the Tragic Muse. Of course, the very freedom that makes the Tragic Muse attractive as an emblem of autonomy makes her unsettling as well, because her sexuality

seems undisciplined by conventional restraints. Whereas Mrs. Sarah Siddons, who was immortalized in Joshua Reynold's 1784 portrait, *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, and who became "'the most public woman of the day' without sacrificing her claim to private respectability" (Asleson 5), stood for a figure English, white, chaste, and matronly; the French tragedienne, Rachel Félix, was known only by her first name. Her lack of affiliation implied immorality and instability, and hence a dangerous mobility. In Rachel, ideas of nationalism, ethnicity, and sexuality were united and spectacularized in one young body. She achieved iconic status as both a French actress and as a spectacle of Judaism. As Rachel toured Europe, England, and the United States, her image as France's Tragic Muse circulated in the nineteenth-century cultural imagination as a raced figure of power and sexual autonomy. Her exotic allure and erotic danger separated her from the conventional actress. She came to embody what Rachel M. Brownstein describes as a certain "type" of "legendary, literary, tragic Jewish Woman. . . . After Rachel, women like her would be seen as a type in France; someone thin, dark, Jewish, nervous, passionate, serious, and maybe a little desperate might be called *une vraie Rachel*" (51). Rachel was immortalized in such texts as Honoré de Balzac's *Cousin Bette* (1846), Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* (1890). As a literary figure, the Tragic Muse embodied both artistic power and the dangerous magnetism of the exotic *femme fatale*.

Though the Tragic Muse was a raced figure of exchange, she operated from a position of autonomy and self-commodification. Rachel's self-commodification is most evident in her decision to tour the United States in 1855, an adventure that her countrymen saw as opportunistic and ill advised. Undeterred by her critics, Rachel exclaimed in a letter to her friend, Louise de Saigneville, "I am making myself commercial, I take and I pile up the dollars" (qtd. in Brownstein 209). Not only was the Tragic Muse "the saleswoman and wares in one" (157), to borrow Walter Benjamin's description of the prostitute, but she also reveled in the power she exerted over her spectators and lovers. Describing one of Rachel's performances, Adam Badeau, an American writer and soldier, wrote, "She struck you with awe or horror, but she felt none herself; she moved you, but it was in spite of yourself. . . . Her influence was akin to that of a sorceress. . . .You were as completely in her power, as if you had fallen in unawares . . . you were only the puppet to be worked upon" (Badeau 267–68). The Tragic Muse, such descriptions suggest, exulted in her power to move spectators to terror, laughter, or tears. But the actress's powers of fascination often were not confined to mere seduction; they could be turned to engagement with larger social and political currents. This power of "self spectacle," Susan A. Glenn explains, enables the Tragic Muse to employ "theatrical spectacle as a vehicle for achieving a greater voice in culture and politics" (3). The actress's desire to use the theater as a forum for public affairs was often in tension with the theater managers who "made a spectacle of women, positioning them as passive objects for audience consumption" (Glenn 3). But though the theater potentially subjected its actresses to exploitation and the sexual fantasies of spectators, for many female performers the stage offered a voice, a profession, and financial freedom, as Florence Nightingale asserts in *Cassandra* (1860). In particular, the stage offered the slave on the auction block, who endured the probing eyes and hands of potential buyers with downcast eyes, an opportunity to return the gaze of her spectators. In Kingsley's novel, the stage also gives the runaway slave a voice. While a slave, Marie was whipped for "speaking as a woman should speak," but as La Cordifiamma, she intends to use the stage as a platform for abolitionism.

*Marie Lavington, La Cordifiamma*

ALTHOUGH MARIE'S ASCENT TO THE stage in Kingsley's novel reflects topical interest in American abolitionism, which was especially intense in the wake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the character also reflects a fascination with the raced woman in general. This fascination runs throughout Kingsley's later career, from his enthusiasm for Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" (which pivots on a miscegenation fantasy) to Ayacanora, the Indian princess, in *Westward Ho!* (1855), as well as his extended, almost obsessive preoccupation with women of color in his 1871 travel narrative, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies*.[8] Whereas some authors writing about miscegenation and slavery, such as Child, Stowe, and Brown, provide detailed genealogies for their Tragic Mulattas, Kingsley is more interested in how heroines of mixed race articulate psychological conflict, in particular the clash between erotic desire and its restraint. As James Eli Adams argues, mixed-race women in Kingsley's works are a "sign of the contest between desire and reason, impulse and self-restraint" (136). In *Two Years Ago*, Marie is an undisciplined body whose desire needs to be restrained.

Kingsley's representation of Marie shows how her impetuous nature is disciplined by *plaçage* and slavery. Although Marie is a slave when Tom Thurnall rescues her, the few details Kingsley gives about her childhood reveal connections to *plaçage*. Marie is haunted by the image of her great grandmother, "an ancient negress, white-haired, withered as the wrinkled ape," yet the denigration does not efface a hint of dignity conveyed by the phrase "old dame" (Kingsley 190; vol. 1, ch. 9). Marie's mother, by contrast, is degraded by *plaçage*: she is a "gay quadroon woman, flaunting in finery which was the price of shame" (190; vol. 1, ch. 9). While her mother capitalized on the material goods gained from concubinage, Marie's liaison with a southern surgeon is imbued with issues of (sexual) domination and power. Whereas early Tragic Mulatta texts explain the mixed-race woman's devotion to her white suitor as a byproduct of her white blood, which draws her away from men of her own race, Kingsley explains Marie's desire for the southern surgeon as a willing embrace of her subjection. To those who might think a woman of color belongs with a man of her race, Marie declares that until male slaves rise up against their masters, "those who are the masters of their bodies, will be the masters of our hearts" (124; vol. 1, ch. 5). Alluding to her liaison with the white surgeon, Marie asks, "Was there not one . . . to hear whom call me slave would have been rapture; to whom I would have answered on my knees, Master, I have no will but yours!" (124; vol. 1, ch. 5).

Marie's unabashed expressions of desire are out of keeping with the traditionally demure character of the Tragic Mulatta figure. While Child, Stowe, and Brown claim the Tragic Mulatta as a figure of true womanhood, Kingsley represents her as a desiring body lacking self-restraint. Marie's "lack of self-discipline . . . exert[s] a profound erotic attraction for the Kingsleyan male spectator," Adams argues, because it is interpreted as a sign of "insufficiently regulated desire" (137). Marie is desired by nearly every male character she encounters; even Tom, a skeptical doctor, is attracted to her, and can sympathize with stories told by her white lover who "used to go half mad about her sometimes . . . for fear she should have been sold – sent to the New Orleans market" (Kingsley 21; vol. 1, ch. 1) where she would have been sold as a "fancy girl."[9] Fulfilling the surgeon's dying wish, Tom travels to New Orleans and discovers that Marie has already been sold into slavery and has suffered the lashes of the scourge for "speaking as a woman should speak" (125; vol. 1, ch. 5).

From the outset, Kingsley's depiction of Marie is heavily sexualized, and her mixed inheritance comes to figure a "strange double nature" (1:203; ch. 9). We hear little of her actual experience of slavery itself; we learn only that when Marie "sobbed out . . . the story of her life," "What it was need not be told. A little common sense, and a little knowledge of human nature, will enable the reader to fill up for himself the story of a beautiful slave" (203; vol. 1, ch. 9). Kingsley invokes an archetypal male fantasy of "a beautiful slave," which can be grasped with a modicum of "common sense" and a rudimentary (male) "knowledge of human nature." He invites the male reader to imagine precisely the sexual exploitation that the narrator refuses to specify. At the same time, however, Marie is not merely a passive victim. In a familiar association, her African ancestry is presumed to bring with it unruly sexual desires, whose force Marie pointedly feels when she escapes to a Quaker community in Canada. As a male fantasy of a "beautiful slave" Marie, despite her sexual exploitation and violent punishment in slavery, still longs for the expression of her erotic desire when she resides in the Quaker community. For Marie, being a Quakeress is as imprisoning as being a slave. She fears that the Quakers' austere lifestyle will deplete her "youth and vigour" as her "swift-vanishing Southern womanhood wrinkles itself up into despised old age" (Kingsley 126; vol. 1, ch. 5). "Another such winter, and I shall die," she declares in her letter to Tom, "Let me take the evil with the good, and live my rich wild life through bliss and agony . . . instead of crystallizing slowly here into ice, amid countenances rigid with respectability" (123; vol. 1, ch. 5). Unlike the mixed-race slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* who use racial performance to find the refuge of generous Quaker communities, Marie uses her powers of performance to escape this haven.

In moving from a Quaker community to the stage, Marie traverses virtually the entire spectrum of Victorian eroticism. Though her re-entrance into the public sphere as an actress is partly motivated by vanity and fear that her beauty and sexual desirability will wither among the Quakers, by refashioning herself into the Italian diva, La Cordifiamma, Marie gains the independence and ownership of her body withheld from her by *plaçage* and slavery. As La Cordifiamma Marie returns to the public marketplace in which actresses, as Kerry Powell observes, "cannot 'belong' absolutely to one man – their thoughts and feelings, as well as bodies, seem to be commodities in a free market of men at large" (31). However, when she disguises herself as La Cordifiamma, Marie demonstrates more self-discipline than she ever did as Marie Lavington, the former *placée* and slave. Unlike the stereotype of the actress as prostitute, Marie is "unapproachable . . . a very Zenobia, who keeps all animals of the other sex at an awful distance" (Kingsley 143; vol. 1, ch. 7). This self-discipline is necessary for her disguise as La Cordifiamma because Marie's sexuality is the one racial feature that could expose her true identity. She must restrain the erotic desire that, in Kingsley's fantasy of the mixed-race woman, is a result of her African blood. She does so by harnessing that desire to the cause of abolition: when the dramatist, Stangrave, promises to compose republican dramas for her, Marie expresses hope that these plays will "give full vent to my passion, and hurl forth the eternal laws of liberty" (127; vol. 1, ch. 5).

Yet Kingsley insists on the precariousness of her new identity and autonomy. The mere mention of Stangrave makes Tom fear that her independence might be compromised: "But who is this friend? Singing-master, scribbler, or political refugee? or perhaps all three together? A dark lot, those fellows. I must keep my eye on him" (128; vol. 1, ch. 5). To what extent is Marie, or the Tragic Muse generally, still a commodity? Is she in control of

the marketing of her body on the stage or is a manager or writer prostituting her talent in exchange for sexual favors?

Marie rejects the suspicion that she is a helpless ingénue: as she tells Stangrave,

> After you found me, or rather I found you – you the critic, the arbiter of the green-room, the highly-organized do-nothing . . . the would-be Göthe who must, for the sake of his own self-development, try experiments on every weak woman whom he met. And I, the new phenomenon, whom you must appreciate to show your own taste, patronize to show your own liberality, develope to show your own insight into character. (Kingsley 187; vol. 1, ch. 9)

With the regal condescension of the Tragic Muse, Marie boldly declares that she discovered Stangrave, and she proceeds to tell him how she has manipulated him into carrying out her political aspirations: "You had attempted to play with the tigress – and behold she had talons; to angle for the silly fish – and behold the fish was the better angler, and caught you" (187; vol. 1, ch. 9). Here is the sexual power and threat of violence that separates the Tragic Muse from the mere actress. Like Rachel and Brontë's Vashti, Marie, with her "dreadful beauty," crosses into the realm of the *femme fatale*: "I may scorch you, kindle you, madden you, to do my work" (187; vol. 1, ch. 9). Although she secretly loves Stangrave, she refuses to acknowledge this love until he joins the abolitionist cause.

By sublimating desire into activism, Marie becomes a moral exemplar for her male spectators. Lord Scoutbush, an admirer with a reputation for a "shy and secret generosity" toward his lovers (Kingsley 140; vol. 1, ch. 7), certainly admires La Cordifiamma out of more than lust:

> It's not her beauty merely; but there is something so noble in her face . . . and when she is acting, if she has to say anything grand, or generous . . . she brings it out with such a voice, and such a look, from the very bottom of her heart, – it makes me shudder . . . I am sure she is [a hero or a martyr], or she could not look and speak the way she does. (Kingsley 157; vol. 1, ch. 7)

In Scoutbush's description, La Cordifiamma's power to make men shudder is moral as well as erotic. Although Scoutbush entered her home with fantasies of possessing this erotic spectacle, of "taking a viscountess from off the stage" (182; vol. 1, ch. 9), he leaves with a renewed commitment to his military career.

Such theatrical self-possession, however, is at odds with a typically feminine vulnerability, and Marie's susceptibility to romantic love is signaled, tellingly, by a breakdown in her poise. When Marie begins to lose her poise, her theatricality becomes more overtly defensive: she constantly looks in the mirror to see if evidence of her true racial heritage might betray her. She rehearses lines "standing by the fireplace in a splendid pose, her arm resting on the chimney-piece, the book from which she had been reciting in one hand, the other playing in her black curls, as her eyes glanced back ever and anon at her own profile in the mirror" (182; vol. 1, ch. 9). Such self-consciousness merges the conventional vanity of the actress with a more pointed anxiety of self-betrayal. Even though she has refashioned herself into the sexually disciplined La Cordifiamma, the desire produced by her African blood cannot be restrained in Stangrave's presence. As Marie looks in the mirror and thinks of the African blood in her veins and whether Stangrave will read the signs of her ancestry, her performative nature takes over and conjures up an African physiognomy:

> Was it mere play of her excited fancy, – or did her eyelid slope more and more, her nostril shorten and curl, her lips enlarge, her mouth itself protrude? It was more than the play of fancy; for Stangrave saw

> it as well as she. Her actress's imagination, fixed on the African type with an intensity proportioned to her dread of seeing it in herself, had moulded her features, for the moment, into the very shape which it dreaded. And Stangrave saw it, and shuddered as he saw. (Kingsley 189; vol. 1, ch. 9)[10]

After a moment Marie's "African" face fades away, but her ancestry lingers in her eyes. The dark, melancholy eyes of the Tragic Mulatta are the last trace of her compromised heritage. Marie's face then transforms into that of the great grandmother she describes as a "wrinkled ape" (190; vol. 1, ch. 9). When she shakes off the spell, she believes that she sees recognition in Stangrave's eyes and bursts into a hysterical fit. Even though she has refashioned herself into a Tragic Muse, the Tragic Mulatta reclaims her.

While Scoutbush shudders at the power of the Tragic Muse, Stangrave shudders at the Tragic Mulatta that lurks behind the Muse's mask. However, once the spell passes, Stangrave's "loveblinded eye could see nothing in that face but the refined and yet rich beauty of the Italian" (190; vol. 1, ch. 9). When he proposes marriage, the offer is not only an attempt to neutralize the power of the Tragic Muse, La Cordifiamma, but also a way to control the unstable racial and sexual identities of Marie Lavington, the Tragic Mulatta. Stangrave responds to Marie's performance and the hysterics that follow by saying, "You excite yourself till you know not what you say, or what you are" (190; vol. 1, ch. 9). Her identity is so much a byproduct of performance that he believes he can mold her into the image he desires. Looking at his muse, Stangrave sees the image of his future wife. Holding her captive in his arms and overlooking the secret that was just revealed to him, Stangrave imposes his own desire on hers: "You are my wife, and you alone! And he held her so firmly, and gazed down upon her with such strong manhood, that her woman's heart quailed" (191; vol. 1, ch. 9). Stangrave's "strong manhood" is affirmed through the patriarchal power to call her his wife. Yet, Marie rejects Stangrave's proposal; he is in love with a fantasy, La Cordifiamma, rather than Marie Lavington, the former slave.[11]

But in Kingsley's novel, even the runaway slave becomes a fantasy. When Scoutbush vows to "fetch and carry for [her] like a negro slave" (281; vol. 1, ch. 12) during their second meeting, she tells him that he directs his lovelorn pleas to a runaway slave. She expects him to reject her, but Lord Scoutbush tells her, "You will have all London at your feet after a season or two, and all the more if they know your story" (283; vol. 1, ch. 12). When Scoutbush and, later, Stangrave discover that their beloved La Cordifiamma is a runaway slave, they sentimentalize her and render her a sympathetic figure incapable of sexual agency. They have written an abolitionist narrative in which the virtue of the former slave is reinstated and she is free to live and love at will in England. This beautiful slave retains more sexual agency than the stereotypical Tragic Mulatta: Marie does not regret her liaison with the surgeon. However, Scoutbush and Stangrave understand her purely as a victim of exploitation. Although Marie sees that "her origin formed no bar whatever to her marrying a nobleman" (283; vol. 1, ch. 12), she feels herself tainted by more than her racial heritage. She sees herself as a concubine, a fallen woman, telling her persistent suitor, "I cannot tell you all. – You must not do yourself and yours such an injustice" (283; vol. 1, ch. 12). Although Scoutbush knows the secret of her race, he has not fathomed the secret of her sexual life.

In her predicament, Marie might seem to epitomize Anderson's account of "attenuated agency." The early Tragic Mulatta figures in the texts of Child and Brown reflect this narrative imprisonment wherein they are fallen women perceived by other characters as texts that are "already written rather than as . . . agent[s] capable of dialogical interaction"

(Anderson 10). However, Cassy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Marie Lavington both exemplify the Tragic Mulatta disrupting her story through performance. The theatricality of Cassy performing as the ghost of Simon Legree's mother and Marie Lavington's transformation into La Cordifiamma show the Tragic Mulatta changing the conventional story – her "script," as it were – to escape the social structures that enslave and abuse her. Unlike Cassy, who escapes to Canada and regains her role as mother, Marie has escaped into another paradigm of fallenness – the stage. And that world takes its toll. Sabina notices the enervating effect of Marie's nightly performances: "That white cheek had been fading more and more to a wax-like paleness; those black eyes glittered with fierce unhealthy light; and dark rings round them told, not merely of late hours and excitement, but of wild passion and midnight tears" (Kingsley 286; vol. 1, ch. 12). She comes to verge on a stereotype of over-stimulated exhaustion: "I am beginning to long for brandy and water . . . to nerve me up for the excitement of acting, and then for morphine to make me sleep after it" (Kingsley 286; vol. 1, ch. 12).[12] Blaming her "wild Tropic blood" for her addictive habits, Marie confesses to Sabina, "I feel at times that I could sink so low – that I could be so wicked, so utterly wicked, if I once began!" (287; vol. 1, ch. 12). Her African ancestry is clearly coded as a realm of impulsive desire: in Stangrave's absence, Marie experiences the loss of self-control, presumably a surrender to sexual impulses, and the "hasty passion" and "love of present enjoyment" that Kingsley attributes to her "strange double-nature" (203; vol. 1, ch. 9).

Ultimately she is redeemed, however, through marriage. Although Marie, the Tragic Mulatta passing as the Tragic Muse, is aligned with the disruptive bodies of the slave, prostitute, and actress, she still becomes Stangrave's wife. Stangrave "had heard enough in the last ten minutes to bewilder any brain" (Kingsley 366; vol. 2, ch. 27) when Marie reveals her past, but he proposes marriage because to him her status as a "beautiful slave" entails a form of innocence. She could not prevent her own exploitation. The former concubine and slave enters the cult of domesticity in which, as Hazel Carby and Claudia Tate have argued, true womanhood was defined against the unregulated bodies of the slave.[13] At this crucial junction, even though Marie has entered the cult of true womanhood, Kingsley tellingly still evokes the undisciplined strains of her sexuality. Upon accepting Stangrave's proposal Marie's "theatric passionateness had passed; – 'Nothing was left of her,/Now, but pure womanly" (368; vol. 2, ch. 27). The quoted phrase echoes Thomas Hood's famous poem, "The Bridge of Sighs," which exhorts, "Think . . . Not of the stains of her,/All that remains of her/Now is pure womanly" (lines 16–20). In a radical and deeply unsettling ambiguity, Kingsley would reclaim Marie's womanhood by likening her to a dead prostitute. Evidently the stain of her sexuality is difficult to efface. But unlike Hood's homeless "unfortunate," Marie's disruptive body is absorbed into the private realm. She is no longer a slave or an actress, but a wife. Kingsley thus domesticates the Tragic Mulatta narrative, changing it from a narrative of seduction to one of courtship and marriage – the only means by which Marie's troubling desire can be safely mastered.[14]

Has Marie really escaped slavery through marriage? In the United States, a crucial issue in abolitionism was the commodification of white women on the marriage market. Activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who declared that women were "given in marriage like an article of merchandize" and that "the rights of humanity are more grossly betrayed at the altar than at the auction block of the slaveholder," wondered whether freedwomen would receive self-ownership or become the property of their husbands (qtd. in Stanley 177). Kingsley acknowledges such interpretations in passing references to eligible young women being "sold" into marriage for their property.[15] Coming from a history of *plaçage* and slavery

in which the female body is only a sexual commodity, Marie becomes a different sort of commodity when she refashions herself into La Cordifiamma. She sells herself on the stage, but there's a level of self-ownership in her self-merchandizing.

When she enters the cult of true womanhood, however, Marie surrenders her self-ownership. Both her exploitation and the sexual agency that she demonstrated during her liaison with the surgeon are erased when Stangrave removes her "fair, pure, noble flesh" (Kingsley 369; vol. 2, ch. 27) to the domestic sphere. Despite Tom's misgivings that Stangrave will tire of Marie's temper and flightiness – signs of her unruly black blood – once her beauty goes (367; vol. 2, ch. 27), Marie becomes the ideal of Victorian womanhood, bearing Stangrave two children. When the novel ends with everyone greeting Tom after he returns from the Crimean war, Marie is absent. She and the children have not made the trip from London, which may be a sign that she has lost not only the theatric passions of the Tragic Muse, but also the mobility. Even though Marie has become a mother and has exchanged the stage for domesticity, she carries the scars of slavery into her marriage. The scars from her past cannot be erased, but entrance into the private sphere has defused Marie's dreams of social revolution along with the desire she arouses in men. Stangrave now carries out the quest alone: as Marie settles into the private sphere of home and children, the violence and political struggle of the public sphere are no longer her concern.

### *Rosa Royal, La Senorita Rosita Campaneo*

In her 1833 *Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, Child transgressed the rules of propriety obliquely, but daringly addressed the subject of sexual violation in slavery: "There is another view of this system, which I cannot unveil so completely as it ought to be . . . I shall be bold for saying so much; but the facts are so important, that it is a matter of conscience not to be fastidious" (qtd. in Karcher 185). Gesturing toward the large "mixed population" as evidence of the violation suffered by slave women, Child relies on her readers' imaginations to visualize the fate of women "unprotected either by law or public opinion," who "must be entirely subservient to the will of their owner, on pain of being whipped as near unto death as will comport his interest, or quite to death, if it suit his pleasure" (qtd. in Karcher 186). As Carolyn L. Karcher notes, Child's *Appeal* damaged her literary career as "readers boycotted her writings, and parents canceled their subscriptions to the *Juvenile Miscellany*. *The Mother's Book* promptly went out of print, the *Miscellany* folded, and even sales of *The Frugal Housewife* plummeted" (192). However, Child persisted, and in the early 1840s, she began publishing stories that used "the conventions of romance . . . to dispel readers' romantic illusions about slavery" (Karcher 336).

While the stories she published in *The Liberty Bell*, such as "The Quadroons," and "Slavery's Pleasant Homes," narrated the tragic deaths of mixed-race slaves, her 1867 novel, *A Romance of the Republic*, offered a different ending, revising the Tragic Mulatta's narrative by allowing her to marry. The mixed-race heroine, Rosa Royal, is an admirable exemplar of true womanhood, but in the wake of Emancipation, the interracial marriages that Child celebrates in her novel were deeply suspect. While Kingsley is more interested in the erotic dynamics of the interracial marriage plot, Child is invested in interracial marriage as a form of universalism in which racial, class, and cultural differences are erased and everyone is united under one nation, a theme which she explored with Native Americans in *Hobomok* (1824) and "Willie Wharton" (1863). As Deborah Clifford explains, Child believed that

miscegenation would reduce racism and "diminish the amount of crime and violence in the world" (96). Child's depiction of the Tragic Mulatta is also a reaction against the rigid roles and expectations prescribed for (true) women. *A Romance of the Republic*, Karcher argues, explores the question of "whether a woman has the right to seek another chance at happiness after a sexual misalliance, be it an illicit affair or an unhappy marriage" (523).

For Child, the Tragic Mulatta playing a Tragic Muse not only embodies the fantasy of a woman surviving a sexual fall, but also represents a dream of self-fashioning that anyone – regardless of sex, race, or culture – could distinguish and support themselves if they had talent. In *Woman's Journal*, Child enters the debate on the equality of women by declaring, "All I ask is perfect liberty to choose our own spheres of action, and a fair, open chance to do whatsoever we can do well" (qtd. in Karcher 590). She extends these sentiments to African-Americans when Child predicts their impact on American theater and music. In "A Chat with the Editor of the Standard," an article published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1865, Child writes that before long "operas will embody the romantic adventures of beautiful fugitive slaves; and the *prima donna* will not need to represent an Octoroon, for men will come to admire the dark, glowing beauty of tropical flora, as much as the violets and lilies of the North" (qtd. in Karcher 513). Transforming the Tragic Mulatta into a *prima donna* in *A Romance of the Republic* reflects Child's belief that mixed-race women would one day sing in opera houses to audiences who admired their virtuosity rather than the price their bodies brought on the auction block.

Before the octoroon heroine of Child's novel ascends the stage, she must first escape from *plaçage* and slavery. The labyrinth plot complications in themselves emphasize how surprisingly intricate and far-flung the effects of slavery could be. Rosa and her sister, Flora, are the daughters of Mr. Royal and Eulalia, a "Spanish" lady, who most of Mr. Royal's acquaintances assume was a *placée*. After their father suddenly dies, leaving behind several large debts, the sisters discover that their mother was actually a slave and that they are now property that can be sold to pay off their father's debts. Although Rosa refuses to escape with her suitor, Gerald Fitzgerald, until after he has married her, she soon learns that their marriage was not legal – when Fitzgerald shockingly brings a new wife, Lily Bell, to his plantation! Like the typical Tragic Mulatta, Rosa is nearly destroyed by this discovery, and by the further revelation that she is Gerald's slave. After hearing this news, Rosa undergoes a familiar transformation, as suffering brings out her white ancestry: when Gerald next sees her "the warm coloring had entirely faded from her cheeks, leaving only that faintest reflection of gold which she inherited from her mother; and the thinness and pallor of her face made her large eyes seem larger and darker" (Child 173; ch. 15). As in Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, suffering not only makes the mulatta whiter, but the "faintest reflection of gold" in her skin underscores another inheritance from her mother: she is a commodity that can be sold on the slave market.[16]

Learning that she is not Gerald's wife but his slave not only places Rosa outside the boundaries of true womanhood; it also denaturalizes her relationship to her child. She has given birth to property. With this recognition, Rosa slips into a momentary revolt against the reproductive role that slavery has prescribed for her. When she learns that she and her son have been sold, Rosa's demeanor becomes "wild and strange": "the wild, hard look came into her eyes. Such a tempest was raging in her soul that she felt as though she could kill [Gerald] if he stood before her. This savage paroxysm of revenge was followed by thoughts of suicide. She was about to rise, but hearing the approach of Tulee, she closed her eyes

and remained still" (Child 198; ch. 16). Unlike Kingsley's treatment of Marie, Rosa's wild response is not due to her African blood, but simply maternal rage. In similar situations, Rosa's tragic predecessors are driven to suicide (Francilla in Braddon's *The Octoroon*) or infanticide (Cassy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). But the more resilient Rosa switches her newborn with Lily Bell's infant son when Chloe, a slave woman from Gerald's plantation who often visits Rosa's secluded cottage, brings Lily Bell's newborn during one of her visits. Although the reader does not learn until much later in her story that the children have been switched, the exchange occurs when Rosa succumbs to temporary insanity. After exchanging the half-brothers, Rosa moves away from the predicament of the Tragic Mulatta toward that of the Tragic Muse, who performs her despair onstage.

While Marie refashions herself into a Tragic Muse, Rosa's identity as La Senorita is constructed with the help of her former governess, Madame Guirlande, and her music teacher, Signor Papanti. Suffering from shock and exhaustion at the knowledge that Gerald was going to sell her and their son, Rosa is "whirled away, without time to think of anything" (Child 203; ch. 16), transported from Madame's house in New Orleans, to Philadelphia, New York, and finally to Marseilles. (Tulee and the baby, Lily Bell's son, have been left at the home of Madame's cousin). Unlike Marie, who actively pursues the public stage, Rosa is a relatively passive figure: sexually fallen and in need of a way to support herself, she nonetheless remains closer to true womanhood because she does not actively seek a public career, but relies on her talents as a singer simply to survive.

Entering the public marketplace as an actress is a necessity that, however reluctant she may be, grants Rosa independence. By the time she premieres in Italy as La Senorita Rosita Campaneo, Rosa has already achieved success by singing at private parties of accomplished musicians in Paris and Queen Amelia has given her an enameled wreath. Unlike Marie, who views acting as a means to the revolutionary life she dreams of living, Rosa has difficulty acting or singing a part unless she truly feels it: "Again and again Rosa sang the familiar airs, trying to put soul into them, by imagining how she would feel if she were in Norma's position. Some of the emotions she knew by her own experience, and those she sang with her deepest feeling" (Child 229; ch. 19). Such identification helps to shield Rosa from suspicions of deception and theatricality. As the lead in Bellini's 1831 opera, *Norma*, Rosa performs the part of a Druid high priestess who has been spurned by her Roman lover, Pollione. Though Rosa often performed arias from the opera on the island for Flora and at private parties, after her transformation into La Senorita, the idea of singing "before an audience of entire strangers, filled her with dismay" (Child 227; ch. 19). While rehearsing in private before her premiere, Rosa wonders, "Will my heart pass into it there, before that crowd of strange faces, as it does here?" (Child 228; ch. 19). Unlike Marie, who can be "some one else for two hours every night" (Kingsley 147; vol. 1, ch. 7), Rosa cannot inhabit the role fully unless she can identify with the emotions of the character she is playing.

Rosa's performance as Norma underscores her unease in a public role. When she performs *Norma* for the first time on the stage, she does not fully embody the role until she sings "Casta Diva," a song that she often sang with Flora when they lived on the island with Gerald. The audience holds her in this moment of authenticity, crying "Bis! Bis!" until she has performed this memory from her past three times. Rosa's moment of authenticity is briefly disrupted during her duet with Adalgisa, her rival both on and off stage, but when she notices Gerald and Lily Bell watching her from a box near the stage, her reaction to these specters from her past makes the audience believe that "her look, her attitude, her silence,

her tremor, all [seem] inimitable acting" (Child 230–31; ch. 19). Ironically, she owes the authenticity and "theatrical genius" of the moment to Gerald holding her in his gaze (Child 231; ch. 19). Seeing Gerald and his wife watching her eagerly from their box evokes Rosa's Tragic Mulatta past, however, "a glance at the foot-lights and at the orchestra recalled the recollection of where she was" (Child 231; ch. 19): she is no longer Rosa Royal the slave, but La Senorita performing the tragedy of a betrayed lover. But Child is careful to emphasize that La Senorita's performance is successful because she is reliving on the public stage her private experience of betrayal. Unlike Marie, Rosa is more thoroughly an ideal woman because she is not performing, but expressing her feelings. At the same time, when she's on stage, she feels a certain kind of safety as well as danger: "the recollection of where she was" protects her from compromising her self-expression.

Like other Tragic Muse figures, Rosa's virtuosity is presumed to draw on forms of experience and emotion beyond those of bourgeois women, such as Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth and Brontë's Lucy Snowe. As La Senorita, Rosa is associated with an aura of forbidden experience. But unlike the *femme fatales*, such as Rachel and Eliot's Alcharisi, or the prostituted actress or chorus girl, Rosa's experience was attained through passive victimization. As the Tragic Mulatta she has experienced what her spectators have not, but if not for slavery and anti-interracial marriage laws, she would be an ideal model of Victorian womanhood. Rosa shares the values of her "respectable" spectators even though she is a fallen woman. However, her popularity on stage suggests the desire of the audience to enjoy vicariously the pleasures of her transgression.

Whereas Marie uses performance to escape her Tragic Mulatta narrative, Rosa is more akin to Gaskell's Ruth and Dickens's fallen women, who are controlled by the stories of their falls. Though La Senorita has escaped to the public stage and refashioned a new identity for herself, her role in *Norma* requires her to perform her tragic past each night. La Senorita constantly retells her story each time she performs an aria from *Norma*, but she cannot change her narrative. After making the story of her fall public through her performance in *Norma*, Rosa seems to be transformed:

> The glossy dark hair rippled over her forehead in soft waves, and the massive braids behind were intertwisted with a narrow band of crimson velvet, that glowed like rubies where the sunlight fell upon it. Her morning wrapper of fine crimson merino, embroidered with gold-colored silk, was singularly becoming to her complexion, softened as the contact was by a white lace collar fastened at the throat with a golden pin. But though she was seated before the mirror, and though her own Spanish taste had chosen the strong contrast in bright colors, she took no notice of the effect produced. (Child 233–34; ch. 20)

The description of Rosa as the Tragic Muse contrasts with her faded appearance when she is ill and pregnant. No longer "lying on the bed, in a loose white robe" (Child 173; ch. 15), Rosa is dressed in the regal colors of crimson and gold. Though Child attributes Rosa's choice of colors and fabrics to her Spanish taste, her dress also reflects the crimson and gold-embroidered clothing worn by Melpomene, the Tragic Muse in Greek mythology: "her gown and petticoat are crimson, the gown turned up with lace and ermine, the petticoat ornamented with gold fringe and embroidery" (Ribeiro 114). Unlike Marie, who constantly looks in the mirror, Rosa ignores her reflection because she has no hidden depths to reveal. Rosa possesses the transparency of ideal womanhood and is not besieged by the anxiety of

self-betrayal reflected in Marie's experience in front of the mirror. At the same time, her obliviousness hints at the jaded sensibility of a kept woman. She is dressed as La Senorita, but this Tragic Muse still feels herself enslaved; but instead of being kept or enslaved by a man, she is kept by the stage.

Rosa takes no joy in her regal appearance because she sees herself as playing another part. Though she is uncomfortable as a public spectacle, her career on the stage has afforded her financial autonomy. But despite her mobility and financial freedom, La Senorita is unable to escape her Tragic Mulatta origins; these are reclaimed when Gerald visits her the day after her premiere in *Norma*. When Signor Papanti, Rosa's music teacher and manager, asks the intruder to leave the dressing room, Gerald disparages Rosa's character by declaring that Signor Papanti is her sexual "protector": "So *you* are installed as her protector . . . You are not the first gallant I have known to screen himself behind his years" (Child 236; ch. 20). Gerald's insults re-map the history of *plaçage* onto Rosa's body. Since she did not die in childbirth or commit suicide, the only way she could survive Gerald's treachery would be to find a new "protector" and continue her role as concubine. Because they are both non-white, Rosa and Signor are incapable of forcing Gerald to leave the house. The only person who can do this is Alfred King, a friend of Rosa's father and Gerald's social equal. For a moment, Rosa melts away into the passive existence of the Tragic Mulatta while the three men argue over their sexual and legal claims to her.

Unable to escape her Tragic Mulatta past and transform herself completely into a Tragic Muse, Rosa admits to Alfred, "I hardly know myself as La Senorita Campaneo. It all seems to me so strange and unreal, that, if it were not for a few visible links with the past, I should feel as if I had died and passed into another world" (Child 248; ch. 21). During this pivotal conversation in which Rosa both decides the future of her career and accepts Alfred's marriage proposal, she indeed "passes into another world," deciding to enter the domestic sphere as Alfred's wife. With marriage, the Tragic Mulatta gains entrance to the cult of true womanhood, and the fallen woman gains a second chance at happiness. Marriage to Alfred removes Rosa from the marketplace. When Alfred suggests that Rosa's "romantic story" of slavery would make her a "great lioness" in England, Rosa responds, "I should dislike that sort of attention . . . Do not suppose, however, that I am ashamed of my dear mother, or of her lineage; but I wish to have any interest I excite founded on my own merits, not on any extraneous circumstance" (Child 252; ch. 21). By keeping her history "strictly confidential" (Child 252; ch. 21), Rosa prevents her story from becoming another product for public consumption, retaining control over the way in which her body will circulate in the private sphere as Mrs. King.

Still, Rosa's past as an object of public exchange follows her into the private sphere. The white baby that Rosa left behind with Tulee in Louisiana and the "black" baby whom Lily Bell has raised as her own are the hidden signs of difference that plague Rosa in the same way that Marie is haunted by her scars and her great grandmother's African physiognomy. Rosa's final act as the Tragic Mulatta creates treacherous consequences within the private sphere through a tangled web of plot complications. On the night of her premiere in *Norma*, Rosa receives a letter informing her that Tulee and the white baby (only Rosa knows this is Lily Bell's son) died of yellow fever, but the baby has in fact survived (and will grow up to call himself George Falkner) only to be sold into and later escape from slavery. While Lily Bell's white son escapes slavery by passing as a white gentleman aboard the ship, "The King Cotton," Rosa's mixed-race son, Gerald Fitzgerald, has been raised as a white gentleman in

a family whose fortune came from the cotton industry.[17] The young Gerald Fitzgerald is not only evidence of Rosa's sexual fall, but since he has been raised as Lily Bell's son, he is a reminder of Rosa's alienated motherhood in slavery.

The emergence of this past threatens Rosa's marriage, and the novel begins to veer from sentimental romance into sensation fiction. When Rosa is staggered at a ball by the sight of her son, Gerald, Alfred presumes she has seen a former lover. While Alfred fears infidelity, Child's readers fear incest, since young Fitzgerald is "entirely devoted to the queen of the evening" (Child 299; ch. 25). As an intimacy arises between Fitzgerald and Eulalia, Rosa's daughter and his half-sister, Rosa attempts to distract Gerald, but thereby arouses Alfred's jealous suspicion that "his modest and dignified wife was in love with this stripling" (Child 349; ch. 30). Rosa finally unburdens her heart when her husband suggests that she is the victim of "an unworthy passion" (Child 350; ch. 30). To reclaim her character from her husband's erroneous assumption, Rosa finally confesses that she switched her child with Lily Bell's and that their daughter is being courted by her half-brother.

This confession markedly alters the dynamics of power in Rosa and Alfred's marriage. Whereas before their marriage Alfred wished to "leave her in perfect freedom" to decide whether to retire from the stage (Child 252; ch. 21), when Rosa blanches at the thought of informing her son of his true heritage, Alfred gently takes control of matters and assumes the role of the confident patriarch: "You have wisely chosen me for your confessor, and if I recommend penance I trust you will think it best to follow my advice" (Child 355; ch. 30). After resolving to tell young Fitzgerald the truth about his past, Alfred informs Rosa that she "ought to make a full confession to Mrs. Fitzgerald," to which Rosa responds, "It will be a severe penance . . . but I will do whatever you think is right" (Child 356; ch. 30). After tying up the various loose ends – Gerald is killed in the Civil War, Alfred settles George Falkner in business in Marseilles – Rosa's past deeds as the Tragic Mulatta have been confessed and righted, and she thereby attains the "pure womanliness" of Marie Stangrave. She tells her husband, "I should never have found my way out of that wretched entanglement if it had not been for you. You have really acted toward me the part of Divine Providence" (Child 439; ch. 39).

While Marie is presented as a passive victim of slavery, Rosa is a sinner whom her husband must redeem. As Alfred tells her at the end of the novel, "I think you may now have a tranquil mind; for I believe things have been so arranged that no one is very seriously injured by that act of frenzy which has caused you so much suffering" (Child 438; ch. 39). With young Gerald's death and George Falkner's immigration to Europe, evidence of Rosa's sins have indeed been erased. No longer a Tragic Mulatta or a Tragic Muse, Rosa fades into the background as a true woman. The novel concludes with a patriotic tableau featuring Eulalia bedecked in red, white, & blue ribbons and crowned with a circle of stars, presented in honor of Alfred's birthday (Child 440; ch. 39). The Tragic Muse is subsumed in a celebration of husband and country.

## *"Think . . . Not of the Stains of Her": The Tragic Mulatta as True Woman*

BY REFASHIONING HERSELF INTO A TRAGIC MUSE, the mixed-race slave determines how she circulates in the public sphere. However, as Kingsley and Child's heroines show, the tensions besetting the actress – between self-expression and performance, between real autonomy and

an appeal to the audience, between actual and feigned desire – are too exhausting to sustain. Despite her power and independence, the Tragic Muse could not write her own script. Like many Tragic Muse figures in nineteenth-century literature, La Cordifiamma and La Senorita Rosita Campaneo must eventually make a choice: remain on the stage and perish or retire to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. For example, in *Villette*, which was published five years before Rachel's death from consumption in 1858, Brontë presents a Tragic Muse who has death hanging upon her. Lucy Snowe observes, "What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame" (Brontë 257; ch. 23). Like the theatre fire that disrupts Vashti's performance, the Tragic Muse's life was destined to be "quenched in a moment" (Brontë 254; ch. 23) if she chose to remain on the stage and continue the self-commodification of her body.[18]

Kingsley's Marie and Child's Rosa escape the death of the Tragic Muse by retreating from the stage to the private sphere where they refashion themselves into wives and mothers. However, Tragic Mulatta narratives that concluded in marriage were rare. While the Tragic Mulattas in early American texts die spectacular deaths – Child's Xarifa fracturing her head against a wall, Brown's Clotel diving into the Potomac – British authors, motivated by abolitionist sentiment, preserved the lives of their mixed-race heroines. But though these heroines may have survived violation and misfortune, their narratives did not necessarily end in marriage as Kingsley's does. For example, since Reid does not transport his characters to Europe where they can marry legally, his ending implies that the British hero and quadroon are united in concubinage: "the interest of a 'lover's adventures' usually ends with the consummation of his hopes – not even always extending to the altar" (226; vol. 3, ch. 23). He leaves it to his readers to imagine the afterlife of Aurora and Edward's union, that is, if their "fancy deign to act" (226; vol. 3, ch. 23), which reflects his awareness of the anxiety that an interracial marriage could produce. While Boucicault's play makes no reference to marriage, Braddon's adaptation of Reid's novel transports the octoroon heroine to England where she is reabsorbed into the domestic realm: "Cora is a happy wife in our dear native land – happy in the society of the father she loves, secure in the devotion of her proud English husband" (210).[19] However, like Kingsley, Braddon does not explain how Cora's race fits within her new identity as an English wife. Do her British neighbors know she is a former slave? Or is this a secret of omission protected by her husband and father?

Indeed, Marie Stangrave and Rosa King's entries into the domestic sphere allow them to escape the violent death that typically ends the Tragic Mulatta's narrative and the exhausting public display and self-commodification of the Tragic Muse. But in becoming true women, Marie and Rosa experience a different demise as they lose their independence, individuality, and most notably, their racial identities. At the end of *Two Years Ago*, Marie is merely "as beautiful as ever" (Kingsley 383; vol. 2, ch. 28). Whereas Kingsley never discloses whether Marie and her children are passing, Child explains that Rosa and Flora, whose children believe their mothers are of Spanish descent, have decided not to reveal the truth of their racial lineage to their children "till time and experience had matured their characters and views of life" (Child 287; ch. 24). Though Kingsley and Child's fantasies rescue the mixed-race woman from sexual exploitation and public exposure, in doing so her racial identity is erased. Despite Marie and Rosa's entries into the domestic sphere, the cult of true womanhood remains a realm where only "white" women may tread.

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## NOTES

1. In addition to Paul Giles's *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) and *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730–1860* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001), the following transatlantic studies of nineteenth-century culture have followed Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993): Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), Jennifer DeVere Brody's *Impossible Purities: Blackness, in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), Cheryl J. Fish's *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2004), and most recently Daphne A. Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) and Amanda Claybaugh's *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007).
2. For studies of racial difference and visibility, see Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), Patricia McKee, *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison* (Durham: Duke P, 1999), and Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton UP, 1999).
3. For more criticism on the Tragic Mulatta, also see Hortense J. Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81, Jennifer DeVere Brody's chapter, "Miscegenating Mulattaroons" in *Impossible Purities*, as well as Werner Sollors's extensive study, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), Eve Allegra Raimon's *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004), and Teresa C. Zackodnik's *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004).
4. As Smith argues in *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*, "middle-class privacy was violently denied to slaves and slave families . . . the horror of slavery was symbolized not only by the breakup of the slave family, as Harriet Beecher Stowe proclaimed, but also by the terrifying exposure to a threatening gaze that preceded and begot violence upon the slave body." On the auction block, the female slave "was relegated to the world of commodities and thereby denied the protection of middle-class domesticity" (46).
5. In addition to Trollope and Martineau, British and European travelers, such as Alexis de Tocqueville and his traveling companion, Gustave de Beaumont, as well as lesser-known visitors, including a German duke, Karl Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, also influenced the construction of the Tragic Mulatta. See, for example, Beaumont's *Marie* (1835) and Duke Bernhard's *Travels through North America* (1828).
6. Describing this economic transaction between the mother and her daughter's protector, the American journalist, Frederick L. Olmsted, explains that a *plaçage* was sanctioned by the mother only after ensuring that the suitor could "support her daughter in a style suitable to the habits she had been bred to, and that, if he should ever leave her, he will give her a certain sum, for her future support, and a certain additional sum for each of the children she will then have" (244). For more on *plaçage*, see Henry A. Kmen's *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1966) and Monique Guillory's "Under One Roof: The Sins and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," *Race Consciousness*. Ed. Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey A. Tucker (New York: New York UP, 1997).
7. While Martineau does not acknowledge the sexual agency of *placées*, other visitors to New Orleans, such as the physician Paul Alliot and Gustave de Beaumont, viewed the free women of color as opportunistic adventuresses. Alliot writes, the mixed-race concubines ruin their lovers financially and when they "perceive that the men with whom they live have nothing more, they desert and abandon

them, and take up with another [white] man. Those among them who have children, are very careful to rear them in the same sentiments" (85, 87).

8. With the onset of the Civil War, Kingsley's attitude toward Abolitionism changed when he saw that the Union threatened to "exterminate" the Southern aristocracy. He became increasingly disdainful of American slaves and black West Indians. See Martin 258–59, Chitty 285, and Adams 112–47.
9. Like the "almost white" *placées* whom tourists crowded into Quadroon balls to observe, the "fancy girls" offered a sexual fantasy to slaveholders. While her fair skin, refinement, intelligence, and virtue earned her a place as a "lady's maid," "housekeeper," or "cook," the "fancy" girl's main purpose was to gratify her master's sexual desires. As Walter Johnson explains, the word "fancy" suggests that slave traders were trafficking a fantasy made flesh. Noting that slaveholders paid excessive prices "ranging from $2000 to $5233" for a "fancy" girl, Johnson asserts, "The high prices were a measure not only of desire but dominance. No other man could afford to pay so much . . . no other man's desires would be so spectacularly fulfilled" (113).
10. According to Lewes, Rachel had a similar ability to mold her physiognomy. She molds hers in the opposite direction, making "a common Jewish physiognomy lovely by mere force of expression" (170).
11. Kingsley employs what Karen Tracey describes as a double-proposal plot, a narrative device that explores "questions and problems about courtship and marriage in the rejected proposal(s) and then partially answer those questions or solves those problems with the accepted proposal." See *Plots and Proposals: American Women's Fiction, 1850–90* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000) 7.
12. Nervous exhaustion is a common trope in fiction featuring actresses. Though Bianca, the actress heroine of Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848), is intoxicated by the power of public performance, she eventually must retire from the stage or die from exhaustion. The American actress and author Anna Cora Mowatt also describes the fatal power of the stage in "Stella," in which the music teacher of the eponymous heroine warns, "You do not know the difficulty of *representing* in public that which is easy to feel, or stimulate, in private." Stella's constant shift between identities and characters results in insanity and death. See Mowatt's *Mimic Life, or, Before and Behind the Curtain* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856) 21; ch. 1.
13. As Claudia Tate argues, "a woman had to be white to have access to the ideologies of true womanhood." See *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 24. Hazel Carby asserts in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) that though black women existed "outside the definition of true womanhood, black female sexuality was nevertheless used to define what those qualities were" (30).
14. Kingsley's novel is one of the first Tragic Mulatta stories to allow a mixed-race woman to marry her white lover legally. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's serial, *The Octoroon; or, the Lily of Louisiana* (1861), follows this trend, but it seems that Kingsley was the progenitor of this theme.
15. Lord Scoutbush's sister, Valencia, for example, though vivacious and flirtatious – traits attributed to her Irish heritage, or as Kingsley describes it, her "tinge of southern blood" (290; vol. 1, ch. 13) – nonetheless detests being pressured to marry: "Men . . . admire – not me, for they do not know me, and never will – but what in me – I hate them! – will give them pleasure" (181; vol. 2, ch. 20). Her aunt, Lady Knockdown, who is eager "to get the wild Irish girl off her hands" (291; vol. 1, ch. 13), compares arranging a marriage for Valencia to "those men who carry about little dogs in the Quadrant. I always pity the poor men so, and think how happy they must be when they have sold one" (291; vol. 1, ch. 13). Valencia's experience resonates with some earlier gossip recounting how a girl whom Scoutbush remembers singing in "Cavendish Square, as innocent as a nestling thrush," was sold to ruin by her parents (Kingsley 64–65; vol. 2, ch. 16). Scoutbush and his friends worry that the girl, who subsequently jilted her attorney husband for a cavalry officer, could be robbed of the independent

income she brought to her second marriage: "Poor child . . . sold at first – perhaps sold again now. The plunger has bills out, and she has ready money. I know her settlements" (Kingsley 65; vol. 2, ch. 16).

16. When Zoe resolves to commit suicide to escape rape and enslavement at the hands of the villain of Dion Boucicault's play, her lover, George, notes her paleness. As Zoe dies from drinking poison, Dora, her white rival for George's love, observes, "Her eyes have changed colour," and one of the slaves explains, "Dat's what her soul's gwine to do. It's going up dar, whar dere's no line atween folks." Apparently the bluish tinges in her eyes that revealed the secret of her birth have faded away. See *The Octoroon in Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault*, ed. Andrew Parkin (Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1987) 5.4.
17. For more about Child's use of the half-brothers to critique the construction of racial identity, see Shirley Samuels's chapter, "The Identity of Slavery," in *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation*.
18. The fate of the Tragic Muse in *Villette* was a common element in the "theatre fiction" that was published during the mid-nineteenth century. Powell observes that narratives of fire, disfigurement, and death "contributed to, as well as reflected, the anxiety with which Victorians regarded the actress, and were part of the disciplinary process by which the supposed excesses of theatre women could be moderated" (34–35). In *Women and Victorian Theatre*, Powell provides an array of narratives that discipline their actress heroines, such as *A Leading Lady* (1891) in which Sybil Collier is scarred in a theatre fire and *Teresa Marlowe, Actress and Dancer* (1884) in which the heroine rejects a proposal of marriage from the man she loves because she believes that she is too tainted by the theatre and public life to be a wife. She chooses instead to become a deaconess.
19. Desiring to create an authentic picture of life on a southern plantation, Boucicault struggled to design a realistic ending for his play. In fact, he had to write two different endings to determine Zoe's fate after the slave auction – one for American audiences and one for London audiences. In what has become known as the American ending, Zoe frees herself from slavery by committing suicide, drinking poison that she has snatched from Dido, a fellow slave. Ironically, she asks George to pour the poison in a glass of water for her, telling him that it is a "restorative." Zoe's dying words restore George to Dora, reinstating order on the Peyton plantation: "I stood between your heart and hers. When I am dead she will not be jealous of your love for me" (Boucicault 5.4). A few weeks after this ending premiered on the London stage, pressure from the public and the press persuaded Boucicault to change the final act of his play. In the English version of *The Octoroon*, the villain is murdered and George walks onto the stage, carrying Zoe in his arms. Although the play ends with Zoe in her lover's arms, she seems to be in a dead faint and unaware of the action taking place around her. As Jennifer DeVere Brody explains, "The implied blissful future of the lovers is not guaranteed. Their reconsolidation is also undercut by the fact that in all versions of the drama, Agnes Robertson, a white woman and Boucicault's wife, played the part of Zoe, ensuring that an 'actual' interracial kiss did not occur" (51). Though the couple intends to "'solemnize a lawful union in another [unspecified] land'" (Brody 51), the lack of interaction between Zoe and her suitor at the end of the play implies some reluctance on Boucicault's part to legitimize an interracial relationship.

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