

Racial Passing as an Act of Self-erasure in The Name of Freedom

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Sammendrag

Резюме

Данная работа исследует до конца не изученное понятие, которое можно перевести как «подражание» или же попытка выдавать себя за представителя этической группы, в которую человек не входит. Данный феномен будет исследован на фоне двух Афро-Американских романов, написанных во время жёсткой расовой дискриминации в Соединённых Штатах Америки. Оба романа построены на скандальном факте, который гласит о том, что президент Джеймс Джефферсон является отцом ребёнка, которого ему родила его чернокожая слуга Салли Хемингс. Учитывая тот факт, что межрасовые отношения Америке 19 века строго карались, данный факт не только разрушает вдребезги образ президента, но так же поднимает множество таких вопросов, как рабство, кровосмешение и определение категории «раса» . И поскольку дети, рождающиеся в отношениях, где отец белый, а мать мулатка, часто могут не иметь признаков наличия Африканской крови, возникает вопрос – а можно ли читать абсолютно белого человека, у которого в роду есть Африканские потомки, чернокожим? По сути, основываясь на законе «одной капли крови», такие дети считались темнокожими и отдавались в рабство. Именно таким образом появился на свет прототип главной героини в обоих романах. Уникальность же понятия «похождения» заключается в том, что на сегодняшний день существует слишком мало источников, подтверждающих точное число Афро-Американцев, которые пересекли грань, выдавая себя за «белых». Скрыть своё тождество было не просто желанием иметь комфортные условия жизни, доступные лишь «белым», а скорее необходимость, которая толкала на этот отчаянный подвиг.

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Introduction

Silently, I watched the lilac phaeton become smaller. Within sat my daughter, who had begun her slavery even before she had begun her existence, and who could not dispose of her life without committing some kind of fraud. (23)

The above words are taken from Chase-Riboud's *The President's Daughter*, one of the novels, which will be studied in this thesis. The words reflect Thomas Jefferson's thoughts during his penultimate meeting with his illegitimate daughter, who passes for white, and expose a cluster of issues which are the focus of this entire project. The Jefferson's character reflects over the fact that passing is a quicksand as it requires the ability to mask slave identity and lead a double life. The paradox of this situation relies on the fact that law considers his "white" daughter "black". In a sense, this quotation sheds light upon the destiny of African ancestry, who lived in the nineteenth-century America, a period of time when the country was deeply affected by racial prejudice, being unable to resist race politics which suppressed them and pushed towards passing. Even before Harriet Hemings was born, her destiny was predetermined by the fact that her mother was a slave by birth. Thus, the daughter inherits her mother's social status and becomes herself a slave. However, the main tragedy of passing is found in the necessity to renounce the blood ties with the family and to start a new yet false life.

Passing is also implies loss, a historical invisibility and self-erase in the name of freedom. At the same time, passers are driven by the need to it be accepted differently from the previously established identity, which referred to slavery. To pass meant to cross the colour line and to commit a fraud; therefore, the process of passing is complex and may result in a psychological trauma, causing split identity. It is a desire to avoid being categorized as chattel even if it implies one's origin and identity. Passing can also be compared to a process of hiding

personal individuality in order to obtain certain advantages: either employment opportunities, a higher position in a society or a greater mobility. The performance of passing has many similarities with impersonation and acting skills. It is a constant mastering of “white” manners and habits, as well as “white” lifestyle, which is at stake here. Thus, Thomas Jefferson’s daughter is faced with a dilemma, the consequence of which will dramatically change her life. The vision of a young light-skinned woman who disappears in the phaeton, indeed symbolizes her vanishing from the American history. Once she passes, she will never be able to acknowledge her past because this would automatically imply that she had committed a crime by crossing the line between the oppressed and predominating communities.

Here we encounter an issue of a high importance. A whole generation of passers just like Harriet Hemings has been erased from American history. None of the passers wanted to risk their newly established “white” life, therefore visiting a relative or a friend was out of the question. The definition of passing was developed in the nineteenth-century America and defined the experience of an individual of African descent who claimed membership in another ethnic group. Those who had crossed the line lost the connection with their cultural and familial background and disappeared in the dominant “white” community, leaving no evidence of their previous existence. As Sinead Moynihan states, “the logic of passing is the logic of one drop rule: subjects can only be seen to be passing if they are legally and socially defined as black despite their “invisible blackness” (22). For Ginsberg passing, “as the term metaphorically implies, that an individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary- indeed *trespassed* – to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression of accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other”(3). The privileges of white community were found in its members’ the ability to act upon their own will, which was never possible to those who belonged to the world of slavery. The phenomenon of passing has traditionally been linked to African American experience. However, Bellusico

admits that during the time of massive immigration in America, it was also discovered within other ethnic groups. An example can be found in situation in which "non -Anglo-Saxon European immigrants found themselves in racially in between positions from which they could escape only by adopting the social, religious, economic, and intellectual mores of the better established white dominant culture"(2). Other examples of passing can be found during the World War II, when Jews were forced to pass for other ethnic groups in order to escape persecution. Russian literature has also some examples. Aleksander Sergeevich Pushkin, a famous Russian poet, aristocrat and a well-respected man, had African ancestors, although he did not have to pass for white because it was not a necessity in Russian society of his days. Ironically, passing is still present in our society, although not necessarily linked to race. It is registered under the rubrics of gender, class, age etc. Nevertheless, in most cases, just like racial passing, other forms imply hiding one's true identity in order to gain certain advantage within the community to which an individual passes. For example, an individual may hide her age or a social class to avoid the discrimination or to obtain an improved life situation.

During the nineteenth century slave era, the opportunity of passing usually came as a result of having light-enough skin. Children who were born in miscegenous relationship had more chances to pass then the rest because one of their parents was "white". Thus, a great number of mulattoes passed for "white" almost painlessly. Some of them could have been easily mistaken for either Latinos or Native Americans. However, the exact number of those who did pass is still unknown. This indicates that a mulatto who rejects his or her "black" identity becomes in fact biracial: neither "black" nor "white" yet both. As Moynihan puts it, "by crossing the colour-line, the passer *simultaneously* subverts and reinforces the racial binary". Therefore, he or she subverts this very racial binary "by exposing its contractedness, its permeability, its instability". But in the very act of passing, she also reinforces it by gaining authority and credibility to the mythical 'colour line' as a real and true boundary to be

transgressed” (Moynihan, 9). In many ways, passing is a form of protest against the enslavement. Children born in slavery were oftentimes a result of miscegenation. This means that one of their parents was light skinned while the other one was of a darkest color. The psychological damage these children received due to the fact that they were perceived as “black” when in fact their skin was light pushed them towards crossing the line, also including cross dressing. Imitation was a key element in mastering “whiteness”. It is not only the skin color that distinguishes passers from non-passers, but it a whole set of other elements such as manners, coping of “white” dress codes and apart from the ability to read and write, the talent to communicate. A passer had to ensure that he or she is a worthy member of the community into which he passed. The harsh and humiliating conditions of slavery were the main reason why African American colonized subjects risked their lives in passing. Women passed to avoid sexual abuse by their masters, while men passed to fight against slavery. Usually, a successful passer became a prominent figure or even a famous abolitionist, whose goal would be “to extend” the “blessings to their race” after “having tested the sweets of freedom” (24), like it is shown in Brown’s *Clotel*.

Traditionally passing has been treated as a challenge and a source of identity crisis as it resulted in such consequences as exile and a total isolation. To pass one had to abandon the place of birth, change his or her name, get an education, and start a new life as a “white” person. The main goal was to avoid being revealed by others and to perform whiteness, which in nineteenth century America indicated power, while blackness, on the other hand, referred to the practice of slavery, torture, sufferings and death. In other words, a passer usually became assimilated into society, estranged from his own background, thus himself. In any case, the act of passing is a rare knowledge because each individual experiences it differently: for someone it is an opportunity to escape slavery and to create a new “white” identity, while for others it is a torment, which can stop in case a passer commits suicide, being unable to deal with the

burden of secret identity. To pass equals becoming invisible. A successful passer is not the one who passes but rather the one who stays forever unrecognized. The most common source of information about passing found in oral tradition by telling the secret of passing from one generation to another as it is shown in *The President's Daughter*.

This thesis will study how the phenomenon of passing is constructed in Barbara Chase-Riboud's *The President's Daughter* (1994) and William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853). This theme has also been previously evoked by a number of writers such as Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1893-4), James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912-1927), Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1925) and *Quicksand* (1928) and others. The importance of the analysis of this theme is explained by the fact that passing is relatively poorly explored topic. Narratives on passing illustrate that this phenomenon is an individual and unique experience. Passing narratives in African American literature usually illustrate the contradictions of race politics and focus mainly on representation of "race" in connection with on-going debates about "ethnicity" (Bellusico, 14). Usually, a narrative on passing would depict a light-skinned character, who against all odds manages to escape slavery, hiding his slave identity and living a double life in a society where purity or whiteness were quite important. In fact, the category of "race" was employed as a means of manipulation and the exercise of power over the colonized nations.

Brown and Chase-Riboud's characters pass in order to gain freedom. Even though passing grants them with certain social benefits, their significant goal is to break the chains of enslavement and be free. In both novels, the act of passing is shown as the only opportunity to escape bondage in order to live a free and secure life. At the same time passing has its advantages. The joy, achieved while passing for white, was minimized by the price one had to pay for it. Harriet Hemings, the protagonist of Chase-Riboud's finally gets used to her false

life as Harriet Wellington, she realizes that she does not know who she really is. Harriet, just like Clotel is unable to reconnect with her past and her true self. In order to explore the issue of racial passing, my aim is to represent “race” as a social construct and which is why my thesis will focus on a whole range of different issues, which are key elements to passing. These elements are: miscegenation, duality, identity crisis and finally, representation of “race”.

Each chapter will be divided into subchapters, analysing several issues at the same time. The contribution of this thesis to the scholarship on passing is in its attempt to explore the consequences of racial passing such as loss of identity and duality. I will start by analysing different types of duality, linking them to the issue of identity. First of all, I will study Brown’s *Narrative of The Life and Escape of William Wells Brown*. Second, I will study Clotel’s duality caused mainly by the fact that she is a product of miscegenation. And, finally, I will examine duality in other characters. Chase-Riboud’s novel requires different methods of analysis. Harriet Hemings seems trapped in between her multiple roles she has to play in order to maintain her image of “white” woman. All these types of duality, which affect her identity crisis, will be studied in order to prove that the protagonist erases her identity. As Ginsberg argues, passing is a “transgression not only of legal boundaries (that is from slave to freeman) but of cultural boundaries as well” (1). In the two novels that this thesis discusses a passer enters a new class system and achieves a new status. Harriet transitions from the status of slave to a well-respected representative of a white, upper class, while William, the fictional character in William Wells Brown, becomes a successful businessman and an abolitionist whose talents are admired and praised by everyone.

In my second part of the thesis, I will address the issue of miscegenation and representation of “race”. This part focuses on interracial relationships and their outcome: first, through Clotel and Horatio’s relationship, second through Thomas Jefferson father-daughter relationship and his attempt to prove that his child is “white” by way of equation Jefferson’s

calculations reflects his excuse for the crime he had done by fathering a child with his natural wife. I will also refer to The Declaration of Independence and the Bible as two important sources, which evoke contradictions between the politics and religion. Despite the original claims stating brotherly love and equality among all nations, these documents have been used as a means of manipulation in order to approve slavery.

For the reason of clarity of the argument, this thesis will discuss the novels in a chronological order since the former novel inspires the latter. I will start with Brown and gradually move to Chase-Riboud, discussing how the same issues are constructed in the novel.

Chapter 1.1.

The problem of identity and a state of duality in William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*

William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's daughter*¹ (1853) is considered to be the first novel published by an African American. Brown's *Clotel* can be viewed as an anti-slavery novel as it mainly unmasks consequences of slavery. The path, which Brown takes in order to represent himself as an abolitionist involves a direct critique of slavery and those who approved it. It has been argued by some critics, Ishida among them, that Chase-Riboud's *TPD* "owes much to William Wells Brown's antislavery *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*" (88). Ishida's point is that Brown's novel also illuminates the same controversial rumor brought up by Callender² almost a century before Chase-Riboud wrote her version of this story. Thus, Chase-Riboud and Brown, published in different centuries, bring up almost identical issues concerning the problem of identity and a state of duality. Before I start analyzing the novel, although, the meaning of "identity" and "duality" should be given. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* "identity" stands for "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness." (620). In the same dictionary, "duality" is explained as "the condition or fact being dual; or consisting of two parts, natures, etc. twofold condition:"(1094).

¹ Kartie Frye mentions that in addition to the original *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, which is the topic of my analysis, Brown published three other versions of this novel: *Miralda; or, the beautiful Quadroon* (1860-1861), *Clotelle, A Tale of The Southern States* (1864) and *Clotelle; or The Colored Heroine* (1867). Among all four versions of his novel, Thomas Jefferson is presented mainly in the first one. His *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown*, a travel memoir, was written in 1847; however, in the edition I am referring to (1853) it is perceived as a part of the book (527).

² James Callender is known for his *Richmond Recorder* (1802), in which he criticized Thomas Jefferson for having children with his concubine Sally Hemings.

In three ways, Brown exposes a state of duality and the issue of identity. First, in the autobiographical note *Narrative Of The Life and Escape Of William Wells Brown*, where he performs a role of an author and a fictional character. Second, in spinning his plot around Clotel, the protagonist with mixed legacy who besides being a slave, is also the illegitimate daughter of Thomas Jefferson and a bright mulatto Currer. Not only does Clotel pass for white, but she also conceals her identity by cross-dressing as a man, while searching for her daughter. Finally, the third example of duality and the issue of identity are George, Maria, Sam, Salome and Althesa who are in a sense a reflection of the author himself.

In order to unpack the issue of identity and the state of duality, taking into consideration the problem of passing, I will analyze the relationship between the fictional and autobiographical elements in *Clotel*. As Arna Bontemps admits, “Brown made a maximum use of his personal story as literary material” (221). Therefore, in using his own background as a foundation for *Narrative Of The Life And Escape Of William Wells Brown*, he creates a character that he names just like himself, William Wells Brown³. This narrative technique puzzles the reader and produces a stable state of duality, which is present throughout the whole novel. Through his slave character Brown mirrors his childhood story and sheds light upon his slave experience. As Fabi claims, “structurally, even more stylistically, the volume that contains *Clotel* frames it as the most obvious transition from autobiography to fiction” (641). Basically Fabi is arguing that *Narrative Of The Life And Escape Of William Wells Brown* is a transition from Brown’s own biography to fiction, which portrays all but white female protagonist, however, I would say that Brown only complicates matters because he doesn’t present any distinctive shift from the story about the fictional character William, which most likely resembles the author himself, to the chapter illustrating Clotel being sold on the auction block. Right after the end of the *Narrative Of The Life And Escape Of William Wells Brown*, he

³ In my thesis I will refer to the author of the novel as Brown, while when describing the slave character, whose name is William Wells Brown, I will use his first name in order to make some clarity and differentiate between these two figures.

starts a new scene without developing the story illustrated earlier. Despite the author's preoccupation with the problem of slavery, identity and duality, the parts dedicated to the fictional William and the rest of the novel look like two completely different texts illogically put together in one book. The structure of the novel seems fragmental as it lacks a logical chain of events. For example, the chapter named *Narrative Of The Life And Escape Of William Wells Brown*, doesn't seem to fit into the frame of the main plot dedicated to Clotel, Althesa, Currer and Mary. Arna Bontemps also admits that some of the facts the author presents in *Clotel* "can only lead to confusion if the truth is sought, because he gave at least three versions of his parentage and early childhood"(221).⁴ Fabi suggests that the clumsiness of the narrative tone can be explained by the "tensions between the two plots—between melodrama as a theme and as a narrative mode, between the author's desire to portray the life of the slave community and the necessity to structure the fictional text around the evolution of an individual fate" (640). Thus, not only the reader can get easily puzzled due to the fact that Brown represents himself both as a fictional character and a writer but it is also the episodes which are not linked to each other that cause a distinctive disorder and unpredictability of the storyline.

Clotel can be divided into four main parts: a story about successful passing slave William, a story about Clotel, Althesa and their mother Currer, a story about Georgina, Mr. Peck and Carlton, and finally a story about Mary and George Green whose identity is also dual. In writing about gender, slave resistance and Brown's *Clotel*, Giulia Fabi, suggests that this transition from autobiography to fiction can be explained by the fact that "Brown chooses to function as the editor of resume by quoting from his own travelogue, abolitionist speeches, and previous *Narrative*"⁵(641). He also mentions his own literary works such as *Three Years in Europe; or, Places I have seen and People I have met* (36), includes Fredrick Douglass's

⁴ Arna Bontemps lists three versions of the novel and all three portraying his origin differently. First, he claims that he was born of a slave parents. His second account illustrates him being stolen by a slave trader at a very young age. Then, finally he reappears as a son of a white father and a mulatto mother.

⁵ The first edition is titled *Narrative of William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself* (1847).

journal as a “testimonial to Mr. Brown’s abilities” (38), illustrates his personal letters and references of his name in weekly periodicals such as *Daily News*, *The Weekly News*, *The Literary Gazette*, *The Electric*, *Morning Advertiser* (36, 37) and even discusses a note from his slaveholder as a proof of his story being trustworthy enough. Ann duCille argues that even though *Clotel* is “peppered with real-life incidents and historical events”, “the novel itself has never been true, authentic, or certifiably “black” (453). Her point is relevant for despite Brown’s urge to present himself as a witness of the “truth”, his characters and some episodes he constructs to illustrate his reliability, still remain unverified while his ideas are borrowed from other narrators⁶. Thus, the incoherence of the chain of events, numerous autobiographical remarks and the author’s state of duality result in *Clotel*’s chaotic structure. This can be explained by the fact that Brown doesn’t develop his slave character William as already after the first chapter he disappears and reappears only a few times throughout the novel. Moreover, Brown doesn’t give any thorough description of William’s life after he becomes a successful abolitionist rather than briefly stating that he offered fifty pounds to his former slaveholder hoping that “he would relinquish all claim to him”(38). In a sense, William remains undeveloped hence his main function in *Clotel* is to voice the protagonist’s story from his perspective and to celebrate the author’s abilities and virtues.

Clotel uses William as a trustworthy narrative voice through which the reader gets a plausible story regarding both Brown and other characters. A state of duality is also present in William’s narration. As an author and a fictional narrator of his novel, through the articles dedicated to his persona, Brown deliberately complements his literary success by stating: “To you who know him so well, it is enough to say that his lectures were worthy of himself” (38) and subsequently adds:” We rejoice to find our friend still preserving in the pursuit of knowledge, and still do we rejoice to find such marked evidence of his rapid progress as his

⁶ Ann duCille quotes Gayle who asserts that Brown simply rebutted popular descriptions of blacks as brainless, childlike Uncle Toms or lawless “brute Negroes” with counter images of beautiful quadroons –romantic images that appealed to whites and to the black middle class. (453)

several letters afford“ (39). All these elements indicate that Brown wants to establish himself as a known writer and a prominent abolitionist. Thus, through portraying his life history from William’s perspective, his own influence over the text reaches its highest point when he manages to represent mainly a positive image about himself. Robert Stepto⁷ admits, “In this way, Brown’s narrative is not so much a tale of personal history as it is a conceit upon the authorial mode of the white guarantor” (224). Consequently, in domineering over his plot, Brown manifests not only his freedom and intellectual skills but also erases his slave “self”, which harmed his self-esteem. Fabi claims that Brown “authenticates his ability to elaborate on his own personal experiences (instead of simply recounting them) and seizes the authority to make use of various sources to create his “story” ”(641). The example of Brown’s development of his own experience can be seen in the conclusion of the novel where William states:

My narrative has come to a close. I may be asked, and no doubt shall, are the various incidents and scenes related founded in truth? I answer, Yes. I have personally participated in many of those scenes”; and consequently remarks: “some of the narratives I have derived from other sources; many from the lips of those who, like myself, have run away from the land of bondage” (206).

Basically, Brown is arguing that all the episodes in the novel are reliable and authentic, however, I would say that the novel doesn’t give any other evidences rather than the ones we hear from the author himself. Thus, in building the story about his life, Brown achieves his goals but at the same time his narration becomes flat and rather limited because he controls it in order to present him as a heroic character. In other words, *Clotel* does not include any other real participants who could shed more light upon the author’s credibility.

The moment Brown splits his personality and starts using only his subjective experience as the only source of the truth, the novel achieves elements of duality. In creating his twin character, Brown introduces an issue of mistaken identity. Basically, Brown’s slave character William shares almost the same slave history as the author; therefore sometimes it gets difficult

⁷ Commentary to *Clotel*; or, *The President’s Daughter*, 221

to differentiate between the author and the character as novel doesn't give any distinguishing line between them. Ironically enough, just as his fictional character William, Brown was also born "on a plantation near Lexington, Kentucky" (*Biographical note*, v). In the novel William is also identified as a "born slave", whose "mother was a slave" and "his father was as a slaveholder" (5). In a sense, William goes through the same transition as Brown by moving from slavery to successful passing. The process of creating William's free self-perception is achieved in two ways: by adoption a white man's name and mastering literacy. In order to conceal his slave identity, he changes his name. The novel explains this by stating, "slaves seldom have more than one name", therefore "the fugitive began to think of an additional name"(19). In the novel Quaker Wells Brown protects William and fathers the fugitive by sparing part of his name: "Since thee has got out of slavery, thee has become a man, and men always have two names" (21). In *Clotel* creation of the new name is compared to christening as Brown calls his fictional character a "newly-christened freeman" (21). Thus, from being William, the name that identifies the fugitive as a slave, he becomes William Wells Brown. Passing journey is incomplete without another element, and that is the ability to write and read. Gates comments on this by stating that African American slaves tried to write themselves out of slavery, therefore they "wrote as if their lives depended upon it" (13). Thus, in order to record "an authentic black voice", "they wrote books, poetry, autobiographical narratives" (11). Williams's necessity to be able to write is in a sense his respond to the slave silence created by centuries of slave abuse. In the novel, William carries a chalk as a symbol of his hunger for knowledge:

Well, I wanted to get so as to write my own name. While escaping, I received the hospitality of a very good man, who had spared part of his name to me, and finally my name got pretty long, and I wanted to be able to write it. (23)

In creating an autobiography, Brown follows the literary tradition developed by other African American writers of the eighteenth century. The formula would usually include an African

protagonist, “who would become the ex-slave, brute animal become the human being” (Gates, 11). The fact that William turn out to be not only an educated man, but also a successful businessman and a writer, can be regarded as a manifestation of freedom and a proclamation of African dignity in order to show that Africans and white Americans have equal abilities. In the novel Brown comments on William’s success through the news chronicles, which in amazement regard William a virtuous talent:

That a man who was a slave for the twenty years of his life, and who has never had a day’s schooling, should produce such a book as this, cannot but astonish those who speak disparagingly of the African race. (36)

Here Brown depicts William as a self-made man, who against all odds manages to resist the oppression of slavery and, thus, reestablishes the perception of African race. In fact, in illustrating William’s success Brown celebrates his own recognition as a genius, which demonstrates his own state of duality both as the narrator and the author of the novel.

Furthermore, by making his fictional William a narrator of the novel, Brown uses him as a voice for his enslaved female characters, which as Angelyn Mitchell states, “seek freedom through heroic deeds”(8). For instance, Clotel is pictured as a courageous woman, who “had risked her own liberty for another” (175). It is the maternal instinct or rather “woman’s nature” (175) that pushes her towards risking her life in order to save her own blood. In using William as the narrator of Clotel’s story, Brown makes an attempt to make it up for women’s inability to be independent narrators; therefore he take the leading role and exposes his side of the story about Clotel. Mitchell suggests that “the search for female’s voice” is basically a “response to the fact that women have either been left out or included in demeaning, disfiguring, and misleading ways in what has been the most part an exclusively male account of the world”(24). Clotel’s presence in the novel is very occasional hence the reader gets rather blurred description of the protagonist’s life. Brown’s sketch of Clotel presents a vague and somewhat passive image of an oppressed female, whose identity is also doubled. Being the illegitimate child of

Thomas Jefferson and his housekeeper Currer, Clotel is identified as a slave. At the same time, she tries to maintain the role of Horatio's "wife" and a mother of their daughter while being practically his property. Clotel's main tragedy can be found in her inability to fulfill all her roles, which eventually results in her suicide.

Due to the fact that Clotel's daughter successfully escapes slavery, Mary can be observed as Brown's replication for like him she also undergoes the same experience of passing in order to achieve her freedom and erase the old self-perception. Brown employs Mary as a successful passer. And since he describes her as light enough to be mistakenly identified as a white woman therefore her identity is also doubled. The main hitch is that despite the light complexion her mixed legacy is the main obstacle on her way to freedom. She conceals her slave "self" by stepping over her social class and marrying a free Frenchman; thus from being an illegal child of Horatio and Clotel, she becomes Mrs. Devenant, a representative of a higher circle and a free woman. Even though Brown gives only a brief and somewhat raw description of Mary, her presence is important, as her main purpose is end the cycle of slavery in the dynasty. Thus, Mary is the only one out of her female kin who is granted with reasonably happy ending.

A state of duality and the issue of identity are also found in George, Mary's beloved. In keeping up with formula of romantic novel, Brown allows Mary to reconnect with her past through previously dramatically renounced relationship with George, her father's slave. In *Clotel* George is portrayed as "white as most white persons", while his eyes were "blue, nose prominent, lips thin"(187). George's inherits his mother's slave position and therefore is considered as slave. Paradoxically enough, like Clotel, Mary and Althesa, George can be also viewed as Brown's reflection. Their resemblance can be found in the following actions: like Brown, he escapes slavery, resolves "to quit the American continent forever", changes his name from George to Mr. Green "for he adopted his master's name", becomes literate hence

their experience is similar (194). Brown draws a parallel between William and George who also views education as means of freedom and a protest against slavery oppression. Just like the author he “worked during the day, and took private lessons at night”(194) before he was “on a road to wealth”(195). George is portrayed as successful passer not only because he succeeds to escape slavery but also because he manages to manifest his liberty and reestablish his social status. Brown deliberately highlights that both George and Mary are identified as free people unless they cross the American border for “they cannot return to their native land without becoming slaves” (205). Thus, in writing about Clotel’s daughter and George, the author criticizes slavery and emphasizes the difference between enslaved America and free Europe. In *Clotel* England and France are symbols of freedom and equality therefore Brown uses them as means of opposition against the slave system.

One of the methods of concealing a slave identity in *Clotel* is cross-dressing. As Michael Berthold suggests “Brown may present Clotel as the driver of the masquerade” (21). In making this comment he urges us to realize that by masking as a man, Clotel also changes her identity. First the protagonist goes by the name “ Mr. Johnson”, Williams’s master (140), and the second time she reappears as an “Italian or Spanish gentlemen” (159). Fabi admits “the need for male attire points to the limited mobility of white women” (645). Therefore, masking as a man gives the protagonist an ultimate opportunity to obtain a certain freedom in the nineteenth century patriarchal society where women were regarded as subordinates’ rather than free individuals. On the one hand, the author problematizes Clotel’s state of duality, on the other hand, urges the reader to see yet another problem hidden beneath the surface and that is women’s rights. In a sense, Gertrude, Clotel’s rival, is also limited in her rights because despite her social position being slightly better this does not stop her from being a victim of the patriarchal system for Horatio views her as an opportunity to improve his social status.

In writing about *Clotel's* escape, Brown also links the protagonist's story with his fictional twin William who suddenly reappears in the chapter as "another servant, a man, who had from time to time hired himself from his master" (138). This time Brown employs him as a heroic character, giving a characteristic of a "full-bodied Negro, whose very countenance beamed with intelligence" (138). The fact that William "could feel for Clotel, for he like her, had been separated from near and dear relatives" (138) explains that the protagonist could also be his reflection as they share the same slave experience. Berthold suggests, "Brown concentrates on William's role in the escape to mollify and contextualize Clotel's disguise and to celebrate William's own virtues- his intelligence, earnestness, honesty and "deep feeling" (23). Taking into consideration the author's split personality and preoccupation with demonstrating his positive image through the fictional character William, this statement seems true. His emphasis on William's desire to sacrifice his own money in the name of Clotel's freedom is very distinct:

He had in his chest one hundred and fifty dollars. His was a heart that felt for others, and he had again wiped the tears from his eyes as he heard the story of Clotel as related by herself. (139)

Basically, Brown states that Clotel owes William for his kind protection and an opportunity to pass for white. Not only does he propose his money, but he also aids her during their escape by passing as her slave while she is dressed as his master. Hilton Als indicates that Clotel is "fathered by a writer who sees in her nearly white skin and nobility of purpose not only his sister, but himself".⁸ William understands Clotel's tragic destiny and wants to protect her from sexual abuse by escorting her out of slavery. The protagonist, however, is not the only one who uses cross-dressing as a means of hiding identity and passing. George also passes while being dressed in Mary's clothes. Frye suggests that Mary repeats her mother's destiny as she "enacts a similar performance to rescue her lover" (537). True to female's nature, Mary sacrifices her life in the name of love by giving her cloths and taking George's place in prison. The fact that

⁸ See *Introduction to Clotel*, xix

George accepts this heroic gesture indicates somewhat egoistic side of his character as he leaves his beloved in the prison where she can be practically punished for assisting the criminal. However, if her mother dies, Mary manages to walk through the obstacles on her way to freedom. Frye also suggest that “Mary’s foray into cross-dressing leaves her on the same side of the color line, so that she morphs into a black, not white man” (538). Unlike *Clotel* who chooses a white man, which eventually results in her biggest tragedy, Mary stays with George who could relate to her mixed lineage being the product of miscegenation himself. Mary’s and George remarkable resemblance is yet another peculiarity, which allows Brown to touch upon “sexual and social possibilities of female cross-dressing” (Berthold, 20). Thus, by dressing as a man *Clotel* manages to pass and release her male qualities, while George’s cross-dressing as a woman achieves somewhat homosexual undertone. In addition to passing for white, he also pretends to be a woman, the fact that underlines a distinct connection between his loss of identity and a state of duality. Like *Clotel*, George sees in cross-dressing an opportunity to escape slavery. During his passing journey, George goes through hiding of his male appearance and a rejection of his old identity, which despite his light skin classifies him as a slave. In fact, it is the slave system that pushes him towards rebuilding of his own identity. Berthold suggests that Brown’s novel “cultivates forgetfulness of self” (20). Consequently, oppressed by the norms and politics of the nineteenth century system, both characters use masking in order to hide their authentic “self”, which is achieved through partial amnesia and rejection of their past in the name of the future where they will obtain freedom.

In illustrating Althesa’s story, Brown once again touches upon the issue of identity and a state of duality. Like her sister *Clotel*, Althesa also has a mixed legacy. Mitchell suggests that Althesa “heroically gambles with fate” (10). In a sense it’s true, because her successful passing experience doesn’t protect her children from the double jeopardy. Althesa obtains a new identity once she marries Henry Morton and becomes Mrs. Morton; however, when she and her

husband die, swept by the Yellow Fever, their daughters Ellen and Jane are identified as slaves as “they follow the condition of the mother”(170). In keeping up with the destinies of the young girls, Brown suggests that a slave fate is inevitable in the nineteenth century America. Hence, “the girls who had never heard that their mother had been a slave, and therefore knew nothing of the danger hanging over their heads” (171) are faced with the fact that they are identified as their father’s property prepared for sale. Jane and Ellen are evaluated “one for 2,300 dollars, and the other for 3,000 dollars” only because they are Thomas Jefferson’s grand-granddaughters, which in fact “increased their value in the market” (171). Taking into consideration the instability of whiteness as well as dual identity of Althesa’s daughters it becomes obvious that Brown underlines the fact that the family history repeats itself. In a sense, Jane and Ellen replicate *Clotel*’s fight for manifesting true identity. Both girls are sold into slavery and die under tragic circumstances being unable to cope with their “horrendous situation” (Mitchell, 10) as well as resist their worldly identity as slaves. Like *Clotel*, Ellen finds her release in suicide, while Jane dies “of a broken heart”, and is “buried at night at the back of the garden by the negros” (174). Thus, as Mitchel suggests, “Brown poignantly depicts the elusive nature of the slave’s freedom as well as the degradations suffered by slaves in bondage” (10). In other words, Althesa’s daughters deal with the consequences of their mother’s passing experience, which in fact results in their psychological trauma and inability to accept the truth of their position as chattel slavery.

A thorough study of *Clotel* clarifies that Brown does not necessarily view mixed legacy as the only source of state of duality and loss of identity. The episode illustrating Salome, a “perfectly white” (114) woman, who was forced to slavery, opens debates to the question of “white” slavery. Brown intentionally admits that this story is “no fiction”, implying that it was taken from “the New Orleans newspapers of the years 1845-6” (117). Katie Frye admits, “Brown uses a real case of mistaken identity” which refers to a known case about Salome

Muller”⁹ (535). In doing so, he wants the reader to relay on his authentic sources. And since Salome is not a slave the absurdity of her situation is found in her inability to reveal her true identity: “I was once severely flogged for telling a stranger that I was not born a slave”(115). Brown uses Salome mainly as an abolitionist instrument to expose the evils of slavery and to highlight the inconsistencies of its practice. The fact that a free European woman is identified as a slave pushes the reader towards rebuilding of the notion of freedom:

A person claiming to be free must prove his right to liberty. This, it will be seen, throws the burden of proof upon the slave, who, in all probability, finds it out of his power to procure such evidence. And if any free person shall attempt to aid a freeman in regarding his freedom, he is compelled to enter into security in the sum of one thousand dollars, and if the person claiming to be free shall fail to establish the fact, the thousand dollars are forfeited to the state. This cruel and oppressive law has kept many freemen from espousing the cause of persons unjustly held as slave. (116)

Salome’s inability to solve her issue is an example of Brown’s critique directed towards American government, which in his opinion benefits from slavery in all its forms and conditions. Once Salome is identified as a slave, the oppressive law binds her leaving no other choice rather than compelling with the established rules of the slave community. In *Clotel* Salome is used as a means of reproduction of the labor force: “I was forced to take up with a Negro, and by him had three children” (115). The author employs the German woman as a tragic figure whose experience is similar to that of *Clotel*. Consistent with this agenda, Brown suggests that the only difference between these two characters is their heritage: “Salome Miller was by birth a free woman” (116) while *Clotel* is by birth a slave. The novel implies that despite the fact that Salome is a white European woman, her father’s low social status, for in the novel he is described as “poor”(115), is used as an excuse for recognizing her as a slave. Brown solves her dilemma through the heroic assistance of “the good and generous Althesa” and Mrs. Marshall who does her “utmost to rescue” the woman “from the horrid life of a slave”

⁹ Frye mentions M.Gulia Fabi as a reliable source who verifies the fact that Brown fictionalizes the real-life case of Salome Muller, who finally won her case in 1845 after being held in New Orleans for more than a year (535).

(116). At the same time, even though Salome is rescued, her children are “are still slaves, and in all human probability will die as such”(117). In writing about Salome’s progeny produced within slavery, Brown urges the reader to see that her state of duality will be also transitioned to her next generation.

Another dilemma presented by Brown is the imitation of identity. Sam, Mr. Peck’s slave, doesn’t categorize himself as a representative of a low class; in fact, he wants “to follow in the footsteps of his master”(104). Sam’s identity is doubled because regardless the fact that he is perceived as a slave, he tries to impersonate a noble man. Brown highlights Sam’s preoccupations with his appearance in order to look and act like his master:

When he wished to appear to great advantage, he would grease his face, to make it “shiny”. On the evening of the party therefore, when all servants were at table, Sam cut a big figure. There he sat with his well combed and buttered, face nicely greased, and his ruffles extending five or six inches from his breast. The parson in his own drawing- room did not make a more imposing appearance than did his servant on this occasion. (104)

In a sense, Sam, just like Salome, is also product shaped by the slave system and therefore he acts according to its norms: “There is, in the Southern States, a great amount of prejudice against color amongst the negroes themselves. The nearer the negro or mulatto approaches to the white, the more he seems to feel his superiority over those of a darker hue” (103). He despises his identity and regards it as a “great misfortune” (104) because it exposes his real “self” that he tries to masks. However, unlike other characters in *Clotel*, Sam’s plans go beyond the ordinary need to pass for white in order to obtain freedom. His biggest wish is to be an aristocrat; therefore, he disguises his identity by dressing and acting as one. In a sense, he erases his real identity and replaces it with the fictitious one. This helps him to feel relatively happy about his imaginary social rank.

Hierarchical system within the slavery is yet another topic, which Brown, signifies in writing about Sam’s state of duality. The author underlines Sam’s top position among other

savants in Mr. Peck's house by identifying him as "the Black Doctor" (106). The fact that he impersonates not only a noble man but also a doctor indicates Sam's split personality. Not only does he conceal his identity by dressing but he also demonstrates his medical "practice" on other slaves. He imitates his master by prescribing "bleeding and a dose of calomel" when he realizes that he did major mistake during the operation (106). Although Sam inherits rather poor medical knowledge from his former master who was a doctor himself, he still manages to use this experience as an opportunity to receive possible benefits. Consequently, Sam's artificial image of a successful man "made him a dedicated favorite with the ladies" (107). His state of duality reaches its peak when he and other servants discuss Dorcas Simpson's fiancée, who turns out to be "nearly white" (105). Sam regards her fiancée's fairness of skin as an excuse for their relationship, for in his eyes "dis malgamation of blacks and mulattoes" is beyond his acceptance (105). Thus, Brown emphasizes Sam's imitation of his master and the masquerade he drives in order to pass for a noble man as an example of his hypocrisy. His fancy clothes on the contrast with his African dialect, dark skin and the unwillingness to embrace his culture and ethnicity as a part of his real "self" indicate that Sam is an atypical passer with rather materialistic views. Compared to William, Clotel, Althesa or George who passes to achieve freedom, his passing is motivated mainly by the luxurious lifestyle and a higher social rank.

Chapter 1.2. Representation of "race" and miscegenation as an issue in

William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*

In light of the fact that one the main functions of *Clotel* is to expose racial prejudices against African population, Brown presents three key issues through which he explores the problem of race and miscegenation. First, in connecting his female protagonist with historical figure of Thomas Jefferson, whose presence exposes Brown's agenda to challenge moral

qualities of the President who contradicts himself by fathering children with a mulatto woman named Currer. Second, he sheds light upon the issue of race by rotating his plot around Georgina, Mr. Peck and Carlton. In writing about them Brown redeems his authority to criticize representatives of Church, who go against Christian dogmas by benefiting from slavery. And third, he employs Clotel as Horatio's property by examining the slave marriage and its consequences. Before I start my chapter, the notion of 'race' and 'miscegenation' should be explained. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, miscegenation is "mixture of races; *esp.* the sexual union of whites with Negroes; the issue of a union between people of different races"(850). Henry Gates classifies race as "a described and inscribed differences of language, belief system, artistic traditions, and gene pool, as well as all sorts of supposedly natural attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, celebration, usury, fidelity, and so forth". He also classifies race as "a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be a fiction" (5). Gate's meaning of the notion of "race" echoes to one of the aims of this thesis, to illustrate race as a social construct.

From the very beginning of the first chapter dedicated to Clotel and her family, Brown describes South as the core of race prejudice and miscegenation. As Adeleke Adeeko claims," the narrative implies that the higher circle's unwillingness to abolish slavery is not caused by their ignorance" but rather "by their base urge to protect material interests"(116). Consequently, Clotel, her mother and sister can be considered the product of Jefferson's slavery practice in order to maintain his income. Adeeko also suggests, "for narrative purposes, the iconic name, Jefferson, is enough to confer significance of the affair" (122). Even though the President is not included as a character in the novel, his presence is always there, suggesting that regardless his image as a founding father of American nation, he comes across as a criminal. Brown deliberately illustrates the relationship between the President and his concubine by stating that "in her young years Currer had been the housekeeper of a young

slave-holder” and “the gentleman for whom she had kept house was Thomas Jefferson, by whom she had two daughters”(45). Currer just like other slaves possess attributes of property; her position is indicated by the fact that once Jefferson had to leave for Washington, she was “left behind” with her two daughters Althesa and Clotel. Since Clotel is a child produced through miscegenation, her tragic destiny is already foreseen. Brown deliberately describes Clotel’s light complexion in order to expose the contradictions of race politics of the nineteenth century America:

There she stood, with a complexion as white as most of those who were waiting with a wish to become her purchasers; her features as finely defined as any of her sex of pure Anglo-Saxon; her long black wavy hair done up in the neatest manner; her form tall and graceful, and her whole appearance indicating one superior to her position. (47)

Here *Clotel* analyzes the connection between social rank and “racial” difference. Brown indicates that is Clotel’s “superior position” and mixed origin referring to Thomas Jefferson, which makes her an exotic item on the auction block. Even though Clotel’s appearance does not indicate mixed ancestry, she still inherits her mother’s slave status. In other words, Brown wants to illustrate that Clotel’s social rang should not have anything to do with her looks to be considered one white enough. However, in reality, Clotel is recognized as “black” only because she has African ancestors from her mother’s side of the family. As Anthony Appiah argues, “Apart from the visible morphological characteristics of skin, hair, and bone, by which we are inclined to sign people to the broadest racial categories- black, white, yellow-there are a few genetic characteristics to be found in the population of England that are not found in similar proportions in Zaire or in China” (21). Ultimately, this indicates that Clotel is bind by racial politics, which results in the social classification of people, created by the slave system. The irony and hypocrisy of the situation is found in her possessing almost identical biological features as those one of her “purchasers”. In a sense, Clotel is a “white” slave bought by a white master, which is an irony itself.

In *Clotel* Curren performs a function of a guide, who prepares her daughters for the role of a mistress, hoping that this would help to free them. Therefore, since the very childhood Curren is “resolved to bring her daughters up as ladies” and therefore “imposed little or no work upon them”(46). Margo Okazawa-Rey clarifies the history behind the color-consciousness, which relates to *Clotel*’s situation:

Color-consciousness is rooted in the social, political, and economic conditions that existed during the centuries of slavery in the U.S. In the American South, blacks were subjected to enforced segregation, while white men were allowed to victimize enslaved and defenseless black women. The biracial offsprings were called “mulattoes”: light skinned, straight-haired children born of interracial parentage. Social advantages were often granted to those children by their fathers who offered a better quality of life than that available to other blacks. Concrete benefits were gained, such as release from fieldwork, better housing, education (formal or informal), and clothing and even on some occasions emancipation, despite the mother’s continued enslavement. (92)

In light of this historical overview, *Clotel* can be viewed as a typical mulatto child, for since her early age she lived in “comparative luxury” hidden from brutal realities of slave life (46). Even though, her father does not manumit her, *Clotel*’s childhood and the conditions in which she was kept determine her superior position compared to that of other slaves who were put to work in the fields. As Frye suggests, Jefferson’s illegitimate children are “caught between two worlds having been born as slaves but brought up as ladies” (529). It is their relatively good upbringing and fine manners, which makes it difficult to transit into the slave world. Thus, being Jefferson’s mistress herself, she understands that her children would eventually inherit her slave position hence she deliberately chooses comparatively better option for them. Frye argues, “*Clotel*’s light skin does much in the way of providing her with privileges of whiteness:” (531). Thus, in order to “attract the attention”, *Clotel* and Althesa attend a “negro ball”, where *Clotel* meets Horatio Green “the son of a wealthy gentlemen of Richmond” to whom she will be subsequently sold (46). In a sense, Curren tries to find a better match for her daughters in order to make up for her own inability to build a family and to pass for white:”

Currer looked forwards with pride to the time when she should see her daughter emancipated and free”(46). Basically, it is Currer who sells her own daughters for the sake of their financial prosperity and a higher social position in the white society. Fabi suggests that Brown “casts” the story about Jefferson’s offspring “in the sentimental patterns of female virtues, distress, death, and/or marriage” (642). The essence of Fabi’s argument is that both Clotel and Althesa have only a few ways to survive in the slave society: either to become someone’s mistress and sell themselves for the sake of a stable economic security and a possibility to pass for white or to die being unable to cope with the consequences of their mixed ancestry.

Clotel’s destiny is indeed fatal. Mitchell also suggests that Brown employs Clotel as a “tragic figure” (9). Her argument seems relevant and the best example of her tragedy can be found in the chapter *The Negro Sale*, where she is sold to Horatio, a young man of twenty two years old, who promises to make her the “mistress of her own dwelling” (46). In order to demonstrate the immoral side of the slave system and sad condition of its victims, slaves like Clotel, Brown includes a price-list of Clotel’s virtues made up by the slave trader in order to increase her rate on the auction block. This episode is almost absurd and tragic at the same time:

This was a Sothern auction, at which the bones, the muscles, the sinews, blood and nerves of a young lady of sixteen were sold for five hundred dollars; her Christianity for three hundred; her chastity and virtue for four hundred dollars more. And this, too, in a city thronged with churches, whose tall spires look like so many signals pointing to heaven, and whose ministers preach that slavery is a God-ordained institution. (48)

Not only does Brown direct his criticism against slavery, but he also complicates matters further by linking slavery and Church, who approves its practice for the sake of financial stability and cheap labor. Clotel is viewed as an “article” with a high “value”, which makes it indicate her as a property, not a human (48). Thus, all the positive qualities she owns are evaluated in “fifteen hundred dollars”, her ultimate price, which makes her the most expensive “white” slave (48). Once again Brown challenges Thomas Jefferson as a founding father of the

national identity by saying, “Thus closed a negro sale, at which two daughters of Thomas Jefferson, the writer of the Declaration of American Independence, and one of the presidents of the great republic, were disposed of the highest bidder!”(49). Basically, the author urges the reader to see the instability and the contradictions of the race politics and Christianity, which for some reason approves of slave trade, however, at the same time manifests brotherly love and equality among all people.

Brown invents another character through which he assesses Jefferson. George, Mary’s lover, who is white, however, “African blood coursed in his veins” (187) is portrayed as fighter against oppression of liberty, which eventually results in the trial for “practicing in the revolt” (188). Brown employs George as voice of justice and once he does this, he allows him to accuse the higher circle in the inconsistency of their political activity. In illustrating George’s monologue about why he joined the riot, Brown exposes his weapon against the slave system:

I have heard my master read in the Declaration of Independence ‘that all men are created free and equal’, and this caused me to inquire of myself why I was a slave. (188)

Your fathers were never slaves, ours are; your fathers were never bought and sold like cattle, never shut out from the light of knowledge and religion, never subjected to the lash of brutal task-masters. For the crime of having a dark skin, my people suffer the pangs of hunger, the infliction of stripes, and the ignominy of brutal servitude. We are kept in heathenish darkness by laws expressed enacted to make our instruction a criminal offence. What right has one man to the bones, sinews, blood, and nerves of another? Did not one God make us all? You say your fathers fought for freedom, -so did we. (189)

The text’s use of the Declaration of Independence on the contrast with practice of slavery makes the meaning of “freedom” in the eyes of “white” slave like George, Clotel, Mary, Althesa and her daughters, somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, Jefferson performs a role of a national image of the country, while America is portrayed as “Land of the Free” (189). On the other hand, his Declaration does not coincide with the beliefs specified in it. Thus, being as white as the rest white people in America, George questions himself on basis of what dogmas

he and other slaves are classified as superior and occupy different social rungs, if he lives in a country, which manifests equality and liberty.

Like mother, like daughter: Brown demonstrates that Clotel repeats her mother's destiny when she becomes Horatio's lover. Her position is a risky one, for despite the fact that their feelings are mutual, she is still identified as his property. In writing about the relationship between Clotel and her master, Brown exposes the issue of slave marriage and miscegenation. *Clotel* gives a clear message that miscegenation is viewed as an ordinary element of every day life in the South for "society does not frown upon the man who sits with his mulatto child upon his knee, whilst its mother stands a slave behind his chair"(41). Thus, Clotel, just like other slaves is "in the power of a master", which indicates a possibility that she might be used for master's sexual needs (42). Truly, bright-skinned slaves like Clotel had only a few options: either to find a white man who can financially support them, or runaway and pass for white, which of course doesn't pledge their safety:

Indeed most of the slave women have no higher aspiration than that of becoming the finely dressed mistress of some white man. And at negro balls and parties, this class of women usually cut the greatest figure. (45)

In this case Clotel uses Horatio first and foremost as her financial guarantor and only afterwards as her husband. Even though *Clotel* gives a brief illustration of their liaison, it becomes obvious that their relationship is a union in which both of them get a certain benefit. Horatio receives "the most beautiful girl, colored or white" (46), while Clotel is granted with a peaceful life in a "beautiful cottage surrounded by trees" (62) and Horatio's word to purchase her mother. The text suggests, "marriage is, indeed, the first and most important institution of human existence- the foundation of all civilization and culture- the root of church and state" (43). At the same time it illustrates slaveholders who give their definition of marriage. As Tess Chakkalakal suggests, "the meaning of marriage shifts according to the text" (23). It gets obvious that "the marriage relation, the oldest and the most sacred institution given by his

Creator is unknown and unrecognized in the slave laws of the United States” (42). Thus, Clotel’s nuptial is unrecognized by law: “It was indeed a marriage sanctioned by heaven, although unrecognized on earth” (63). Mary being a product of miscegenation with her complexion “still lighter than her mother”(63) is in a double jeopardy for she as it has been argued above eventually inherits the slave status, which is the consequence of “the tyranny of society”(63). Chakkalakal proposes that “marriage between Clotel and Horatio is mere a fiction: It is based upon lie of Horatio’s fidelity”(25). Horatio’s understanding of their “marriage” indicates that he does not take it seriously. Thus, Clotel’s life dramatically changes when Horatio becomes “engaged in political and other affairs”(64).

The text employs Horatio as a women’s consumer. He changes women according to the situation, whenever it is suitable for him. Unlike the union with Clotel, Horatio’s marriage with Gertrude is indeed a matter of profit, not love. Brown compares two women by illustrating Gertrude as “inferior in beauty” with her “light hair” and “inexpressive” (64) blue eyes and indicates that “she had never loved, and been beloved” (89) like Clotel. Chakkalakal suggests that their marriage “is more about property and politics than personal satisfaction (25). Horatio does not love Gertrude, however, it is her social rang on the society ladder and therefore his “political success” which are at stake here (64). Horatio uses Gertrude who represents an opportunity to improve his political career. As Frye suggests, “ Gertrude is also a property, so to speak, but within nineteenth century hierarchy of social and humanitarian rights, as Anglo American woman would nevertheless have outranked an African American woman”(532). Ironically enough, Mary lives under one roof with her biological father, however, at the same time she is regarded as a slave chattel. Gertrude, who is employed as an evil stepmother, uses Mary as a means of revenge by putting her “to the meanest work that could be found” (118). A daughter of a “very popular and wealthy man” Gertrude has more benefits compared to Clotel who can offer only her beauty and love (64). Possessing qualities of a pure race and being a

representative of a higher circle, she is a perfect match for reproduction of white adolescents and a guarantee of an opulent future. Thus, Clotel's whiteness does not guarantee a stable and a safe life. Right after Horatio marries her rival, she is sold "for waiting maids" with her long hair cut and separated from her child (119). The emphasis on Clotel's short hair manifests the humiliation she goes through: "To-day the woman is mistress of her own cottage; to-morrow she is sold to one who aims to make her life as intolerable as possible"(120). Consequently, in writing about the protagonist's tragic fate, Brown compares African slaves with English servants, indicating their relatively superior position:" the English laborer may be oppressed" but "he cannot be sold" (120). Once again, the author criticizes the slave practice and celebrates European virtues. Clotel's tragic fate only supports his theory.

Aside from the materialistic values, which push Horatio towards Gertrude, it is also his egoism, or rather "new impulse to ambition, combined with the strong temptation of variety in love" (64). Thus, the author focuses on the contrast between Clotel and Horatio's union, which he regards more natural and mutual, and the marriage between Horatio and Gertrude, which "conforms to the definition of marriage as an economic and political institution with rigid rules"(Chakkalakal, 25). Horatio's egoism is also viewed in his urge to balance between two women without having to renounce his relationship with Clotel. He admits that he still regards her as his "real wife" and considers that "they might see each other frequently" (87). Horatio's egoistic qualities are rather similar to those of George. Both male characters choose to act based upon their needs: George uses Mary in order to obtain his freedom, while Horatio marries Gertrude for the sake of his career and purchases Clotel as his property in order to satisfy his personal needs.

Sideways the issue of miscegenation and slave marriage theme, Brown also invents a character through which he targets at hypocrisy of the church in linking it with slavery and the issue of race. It is Georgina who voices the author's thoughts on that matter. In order to unpack

the issue of race Brown also includes Mr. Peck, parson, an owner of the Poplar Farm and Georgina's father and Mr. Carlton, Georgina's husband, who also shares the ideas of equality among people. The texts suggests that church approves slavery as it views is as a property and an opportunity to maintain the financial stability. Cheryl I. Harris explains the origin of property rights by stating that they are "rooted in racial discrimination" (1716). Basically, it was rather "the interaction between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination" (1716). The institution of slavery "was bond up with the idea of property" and thus "produced a peculiar, mixed category of property and humanity"(1718).

Mr. Peck regards his slaves as a property; in fact his views conflict with the Declaration of Independence, which manifests "liberty" (71). Brown demonstrates parson's hypocrisy through his confused understanding of Bible: "It is will of God who hath by his providence made you servants, because, no doubt, he knew that condition would be best for you in this world, and help you the better towards heaven if you would do your duty in it" (75). Georgina on the contrary, is employed as a new generation, or rather a new system of "gradual emancipation", which gives "time to accomplish their wish, and to prepare the Negro for freedom"(133). Being educated in the North, she has different views on slavery, celebrating equality and abolitionist ideas, which echoes to those of Brown:

Good has created of one blood all the nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth. To claim, hold, and treat a human being as property is felony against God and man. The Christian religion is opposed to slaveholding in its spirit and its principles; it classes men—stealers among murderers; and it is the duty of all to who wish to meet God in peace, to discharge that duty in spreading these principles. Let us not deceive into the idea that slavery is right, because it is profitable to us. (93)

Here the idea of equality contrasts with Mr. Peck's ideology. The parson regards slavery as part of God's plan, considering that his servants' ancestors were "poor and ignorant", therefore they owe to "Christian America", where they can "sit under" their "own vine and fig tree"(77). As

Adeeko claims, “Georgina finds only one blood in all humans” (123). In other words, she goes against the race politics by destroying the myth of social superiority based upon origin. In her opinion race does not indicate qualities of property.

Mr. Peck on the contrary uses Christianity in order to redeem his control over the plantation and his servants. He deliberately deludes his slaves by making them believe that they have “a great advantage over most white people” as they are “eased from all these cares” that white people have to balance on a daily basis (76). The hypocritical side of Christianity reaches its peak when the parson misrepresents and twists the Biblical dogmas alluding that his servants should comply with his rules as it is a part of their nature and God’s will. During one of his ceremonies, he claims that if a “servant runs away”, he “should be brought back” and whipped, implying that all these rules are included in the Bible (79). The parson’s ability to control his slave is achieved due to the fact that none of his slaves is literate enough to be able to read or write, therefore it gets almost impossible to expose his trickery. Mr. Peck is also affected by superficial values, which result in his need to maintain an image of a good and generous master. In order to boast his plantation, he creates an illusion that his “Negros are well clothed, well fed, and not overworked” (108). Brown employs him as “the most cruel master”, as he encouraged his driver “to work the field hands from early dawn till late at night”, while the “good appearance” of his slaves was “to cause himself to be regarded as a Christian master” (112). Not only does Mr. Peck support slavery, but he also approves that slaves are used as biological material for medical experiments. His two-facedness on the contrast with his affection towards poetry, in which his slaves are the main characters, portrays him a typical slaveholder who uses religion as a cover up for his pro slavery actions. In a sense, his death is a symbol of the epoch shift. His place is taken by the new generation, represented by his daughter, who is able to grasp the bitter side of the slave practice. Her main role is to free slaves, for she understands that “the idea that he was born to be free will survive it all” (125).

Chapter 2.1

The problem of identity and a state of duality in Barbara Chase-Riboud's *The President's Daughter*.

The President's Daughter (1994) is a sequel to *Sally Hemings* and it opens up with the protagonist's runaway from Monticello without being manumitted by her father on her 21st birthday, when she realizes that passing for white is the only way to achieve freedom. From the beginning of the novel Chase-Riboud illustrates episodes, which portray Harriet Hemings's experience of constant loneliness, alert and even a state of invisibility due to the inability to reveal her identity because passing is a crime, which makes her a felon.

Chase-Riboud highlights the issue of identity and a state of duality through the protagonist's struggle to balance between two main identities: her identity as Harriet Hemings, the illegitimate daughter of Thomas Jefferson and his concubine Sally Hemings, and the one she creates in order to pass for white, first as Harriet Petit and eventually as Harriet Wellington, a free woman and a representative of a high society. In order to illustrate the complexity of racial passing and how it is problematized through the issue of duality and identity, I will mainly concentrate on three key themes. First, I will start by discussing family name change as an essential element of hiding the protagonist's identity, second, I will move to the importance of the fingerprints theme as a proof of Harriet Hemings's real identity and, finally, I will finish by discussing different types of duality of the protagonist and how all these elements shape the protagonist's identity crisis.

The story about Harriet Hemings has been previously evoked in William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or The President's Daughter*. Chase-Riboud uses a first person narrator focalized through not only Harriet Hemings but in addition to other characters, which makes the plot

fragmental. In using this technique, Chase-Riboud illustrates Harriet Hemings's passing journey from different angles so that the reader could decide for himself the complexity of this process. Another reason why she does that is to give those who have not been able to talk a voice. Thus, some chapters, which ended with an affidavit, such characters as Adrian Petit de Remis, Thomas Jefferson, Thance and Thor Wellingtons, Thenia Boss, Eston Hemings Jefferson, Madison Hemings, James Wayles Hemings, Charlotte Waverly Nevell and Roxanne Wellington construct the protagonist's story. This episodic and fragmental sequence of episodes creates a connection between the protagonist's real "self" and the invented "self", helping the reader to understand the issue of identity Harriet Hemings experiences from the day she leaves Monticello and until she dies considering herself "forever invisible" (446).

In *TPD* Harriet Hemings's worldly identity depends upon her hiding of her real background, which results in a certain state of duality when the protagonist is unable to determine whom she really is. Harriet Hemings can be regarded both as a resistant power to the oppression against African American slavery as well as a slave of her own secret burden, which is her identity. Harriet Hemings is described as a "bastard" whose father is a "celebrated and powerful man", which puts the protagonist "in double jeopardy" (3). Changing of the family name and adopting a new one is viewed as a key factor to the successful passing for white. Already in the beginning, in the dialogue between Harriet and her mother, the author problematizes passing by stating that it refers to the termination of any connection with the protagonist's family: "You will have no family, Harriet, no kin. It's the end, its oblivion." (9) Chase-Riboud problematizes the traumatic process of passing by observing Harriet Hemings's life under different family names during different stages of her life. By shifting from Harriet Hemings to Harriet Petit, and then to Harriet Wellington the protagonist outsteps the class system too because she moves from being just a slave to a free and educated young lady. And since the boundaries of the protagonist's identity are blurred it

gets problematic to classify her, because she constantly masks her real “self”. The words Sally Hemings says before her daughter “strolls away” determine the direction of the plot for the next chapters of the novel and provide the reader with the information, which explains the source of Harriet’s identity crisis:

Promise me,” she said,” that if you reveal your true identity to your future family, never tell your own children. Choose a female of your second generation, a granddaughter. Grandchildren are easier to talk to than your own children, and any secret is safer with your own sex.”

“Why is that, Maman?”

“Women carry their secrets in their wombs,” she said, “hidden and nourished by their vital fluids and blood, while men,” she continued, “carry their secrets like they carry their genitals, attached by a thin morsel of mortal flesh unable to resist either a caress or a good kick.” (4)

In including the dialogue between mother and daughter, Chase-Riboud highlights the importance of keeping a secret about identity as a part of a tradition among successful passers. As Laura Dawkins suggests “Chase-Riboud invokes the unspoken power of racial memory in Harriet’s solemn declaration that ”all slave women since the beginning of time had this secret they had to convey to their daughters” (Dawkins, 794). This statement seems true because in *TPD*, through retelling a family secret, the protagonist is able to verbally keep the family history, which is passed from one generation to another. The protagonist passes this secret to her granddaughter Roxanne Wellington, who after Harriet Hemings’s confession about her real identity regards her as “utterly crazy” (453). In describing Roxanne’s disbelief, Chase-Riboud problematizes the issue of passing by pointing out that Harriet Hemings’s journey eventually leads her to familial dispossession, loss of identity and even exile. Basically, the narrator implies that passing for white is a trauma in itself because changing the last name and concealing ones identity is a complex process, which may result a state of duality. The intricacy of the issue clusters around the protagonist’s daily duty to perform several roles at the same time. Harriet Hemings is identified as a slave and an illegitimate daughter of

Thomas Jefferson, an abolitionist Harriet Wellington, an educated woman, a representative of a high society as well as a mother of eight and a perfect wife. All these roles cause a chaotic sequence and lead to the protagonist's split personality. In order to prove it, I suggest looking closer at different stages of Harriet Heming's life: as Harriet Hemings, Harriet Petit and Harriet Wellington. These are the three main phases, which shape the protagonist's story and explain her identity issue as well as a state of duality.

In *TPD* the family name theme is evoked through Adrian Petit de Remis, Jefferson's majordomo, who escorts the protagonist out of slavery just as he "had escorted the mother out of slavery thirty-five years before" (41). Chase-Riboud uses this comparison in order to draw a parallel between Harriet Hemings and Sally Hemings, whom she describes as "quiet and immobile as a mountain" (3). If mother chooses love instead of freedom, then daughter regards love as a certain type of slavery. The protagonist subsequently remarks "Was I going to trade myself for a new enslavement that of love?" (104). Before Harriet Hemings becomes Harriet Petit; her self-conception refers to that of "property", which is elaborated through the father-daughter relationship (13). In fact, at this stage she is aware of neither who she really is nor what passing means. The protagonist admits that she was passing "for other people", implying that it was done mainly as a possibility "to explore" and "to see what would happen" (4, 5). In other words, she passes because freedom and passing were two main goals in her slave family. In a sense, her grandmother passes her the knowledge about passing and why it is a necessity. What is at stake at this point is the fact that the protagonist's need to pass for white and to hide her real identity at any cost becomes an issue once she faces society's norms, however, until then she doesn't realize any jeopardy. This means that her identity crisis is directly shaped by discrimination of African American population. Moreover, Chase-Riboud evokes the idea of familial memory, which directs the protagonists towards passing in order to stop sexual

exploitation by men in their family: “I only knew what I’d seen and what my grandmother had said: ”Get that freedom”(4).

Like in other passing narratives such as *Passing by* Nella Larsen, where Clair renounces her family and constructs new identity, because of her “racist white husband”, in *TPD* the protagonist’s transition onto the next level is also possible only by means of total isolation and creating a new self-conception (Madigan, 524). Laura Dawkins explores this idea and admits that “Harriet views her 21st birthday as a true birthday, the creation of real self” (798). The protagonist’s runaway from Monticello is in a sense a claim for stability and protection from slavery system: “Leave everything you have ever loved, start your new life as an orphan: nameless, homeless and friendless. White, White, White” (18). Basically, by breaking off the relations with blood relatives and changing her last name, Harriet Hemings undergoes an experience, which gives her only nominal freedom. In a way, she is a continuation of Sally Hemings, who was not able to obtain the freedom and therefore the author solves this problem by giving this opportunity to her daughter by granting her with partial freedom, which implies that she has always to be on alert. Not only does Chase-Riboud compare the protagonist with her mother, but also with James Wayles Hemings, Sally Heming’s brother. In the article which is dedicated to comparing of Chase-Riboud’s *TPD* and Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Sinead Moynihan states, “on one hand Chase-Riboud imagines Harriet as undergoing experiences similar to those of her mother, Sally Hemings, and her uncle, James Hemings, as if this has been determined providently. On the other hand, she emphasizes Harriet desire to seek out and know her past” (815). This statement seems true because Harriet embodies “all James’s hopes” for Sally’s freedom, her mother’s “lost dream of Paris” and even Adrian Petit sees a striking resemblance between Harriet and her uncle (43, 45). When it comes to the question of freedom, the narrator points out that James and Harriet share many similarities. Just like James Hemings, she wants to bring her mother out of slavery, but faced with the same

problem. Sally Hemings is not ready to leave Monticello, and the source of her fear is found in her inability to be independent.

One of the key means by which Chase-Riboud indicates her engagement with identity issue is by evoking the idea of slave past. In the novel the protagonist's passing depends upon rejection of her slave past in favor of construction of a new, free biography. Otherwise the transition from slavery is impossible because her old identity refers to the rumored union between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson. Not only does Harriet Hemings change her last name, but she also changes her position in society. The protagonist changes her position from slave and "bastard" Harriet Hemings and becomes Harriet Petit, the name, which identifies her as a free woman. Chase-Riboud illustrates the process of concealing the old family name in Harriet's dialogue with Adrian Petit:

"You should change your name, Harriet...Harriet Petit, perhaps."

Petit flushed at saying out loud what he obviously held dear in his heart. I looked at him in my surprise. Why? I thought. But then, why not? He had guided me safely out of slavery. It was little enough to ask. The name Hemings only bond me to generations I had this day renounced.

"Yes," I said, "Harriet Petit, orphan."

I took Adrian Petit's surname mostly to make him happy. He was an old bachelor, he said, who would leave nothing behind when he returned to France. The Hemings name was notorious, he said, so why risk someone's remembering. "I would be honored to offer you my name as well as my protection." (3, 50)

Basically, in the novel Adrian Petit performs a function of a guide, who not only takes the protagonist out of slavery, but also in many ways replaces her real father whose attention she seeks throughout her entire life. Chase-Riboud uses the dialogue with Petit in order to show that a young lady with mixed background is unable to outstep a social class without male's assistance. Chase-Riboud highlights the irony and absurdity of the nineteenth century social norms by opening an issue to even more complicated debates. In presenting of the protagonist's inability to reveal her true identity hides a critique of the nineteenth century rank system.

Harriet Hemings's problem is constructed around her need to constantly create false stories about her imaginary past in order to be approved by this very society where she is identified as a free woman. For Harriet Hemings passing for white means impersonation and creating an imaginary life, which eventually leads to split personality. Chase-Riboud herself writes, "A 'split personality' was created to keep the secrets of slavery. To mention slavery was to insure discomfort, guilt, and confusion in the minds of both victims and the perpetrators"¹⁰. In making this comment, Chase-Riboud urges us to understand the nature of the protagonist's fear to expose her family past, implying that by revealing the truth, she has to admit that she is a "Harriet Wellington, who could not exist without committing a fraud, a Virginian aristocrat by birth who is also a bastard" (415). Chase-Riboud brings up the issue of status once again when Harriet Hemings exposes her real identity to Lorenzo, who automatically regards her as an "illegal alien", a bastard, and a representative of a lower rank, and therefore their relationship is impossible in the eyes of the English aristocracy:

"There is an injury where reparation is impossible," murmured Lorenzo." Neither wealth nor education can repair the wrong of dishonored birth. It's a matter of geography...illegal aliens crossing an inviolable frontier." (164)

In the dialogue between Lorenzo and the protagonist, highlights society's inability to see beyond social rank and to judge people based on their origin. The narrator's critique of the English class system clusters around the fact that Lorenzo is ready to give up his idea of marrying the protagonist only because of her social position which identifies her as bastard.

Chase-Riboud underlines that the protagonist's abandoning of the family name is one of her biggest tragedies because once she conceals her past and adopts a new name; she becomes a prisoner of her imaginary life. This issue is illustrated through Harriet Hemings's monologue:

Throughout the winter, I continued my tales about my imaginary life with my father at Monticello, inventing solitary walks and intimate conversations, birthday presents and Christmas celebrations. I invented wild horseback rides across Monticellian fields and

¹⁰ Callaloo, Volume 32, number 3, Summer 2009, p. 826.

excursions to Richmond for shopping. Everything seemed to flow so easily from the observations and dreams of the first twenty-one years of my life. I so forgot the lie that it was summer when the recognition of what I was doing began to consume my courage. (101)

In this monologue, the narrator evokes the idea of passing as self-invention and therefore the protagonist's imaginary life is just a reflection of how others perceive her. In other words, Harriet Petit is a fiction; she is simply an illusion.

Harriet Heming's worldly identity and status changes once again when she becomes "Mrs. Wellington, Philadelphia matron, mother of six, wife, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, abolitionist, and musician" (237). Moreover, through this transition the protagonist gains a security and a higher social rank, which helps her to gain the influence, which is available only to the white population. Laura Dawkins supports this idea and suggests that "Harriet uses her white husband's name and authority to frustrate two bounty hunters' attempts to return a female fugitive to slavery" (800). In addition to it, the new name gives her an opportunity to continue the antislavery work and illegal activities of the Underground Railroad; however, the illusion of being invulnerable disappears when she realizes that passing gave her not freedom but tragedy. When the protagonist receives a news about her mother's death, she admits: "Passing had given me a worse burden than any slave's because theirs could be lifted, but mine never would." (241). Basically, Chase-Riboud claims that the protagonist still regards herself as the President's daughter and Harriet of Monticello, which is evident regardless the fact that she has renounced everything that points towards her slavery past and created a new life where she is identified as a free and powerful woman. The protagonist's identity crisis can also be seen in the episode in which she carries her leather nursing kit with carved initials H.H.J as a reminder about her real family name: "I was Mrs. Wellington to everyone I encountered, and that was the name I would carry into this battle. But secretly I bore another name as famous and illustrious as any." (354). Her need to reconnect with her real identity results in split personality and a

psychological trauma. Another example of the protagonist's identity issue can be found in Thenia Boss's affidavit, which describes their visit to Monticello. Here the protagonist finally restores her past: 'I'm me', Harriet screamed to the south, 'I'm me, Harriet Hemings of Monticello,' she shrieked to the east. And to the west she bellowed, "Eset-ce que tu venis? I'm never coming back here for you again." (411). What is at stake here is that in spite of the fact that Harriet Hemings "polished the prosperous surface of (her) false life until it glistened like a pane of glass", unwillingly seeks the opportunity to release her secret and to get rid of her secret burden via her journey to Monticello, the only place which knows her real name (283).

Chase-Riboud also raises questions of the protagonist's self-delusion by describing her fear to let down the guard even with her family members: "The belief that moral courage requires more than physical courage is not poetic fancy. I would have found it easier to face a lynch mob than tell my husband and children who I really was." (273). The author opens a debate by mentioning "the gulf between the true Harriet and the fiction" which was created for all others, meaning that at some point the borders between her false identity and a real one mix up to the level when that the protagonist feels like she doesn't really exist and admits: "Sometimes I walked past a mirror and saw no one reflected. That frightened me more than anything" (272).

In *TPD* Chase-Riboud connects Harriet Hemings with Brown's protagonist in *Clotel* and raises a question of social death as a result of passing. When Harriet Heming's friend gives another antislavery novel, she ironically realizes that she is reading her own biography:

I sat reading my "biography" with an eerie feeling of jubilation, turning the pages with my blank fingers. How dead was I? I shivered. I felt cold, as if I really jumped into the ice-clad Potomac and drowned. Hadn't I drowned? Wasn't I dead? Hadn't I chosen oblivion rather than slavery? The fictitious life of Harriet Hemings, written by a fugitive slave, had been read by millions of Englishmen and Sarah might now serialize it is antislavery propaganda *Clotel, or the President's Daughter*. What else could I wish for? It was even better than my station on the railroad, and made me laugh. (327)

This episode allows the reader to see that the price for the protagonist's freedom is the demolition of her identity and the reason why Chase-Riboud draws a parallel between Brown's *Clotel* and Harriet Hemings is because she wants to highlight the protagonist's unawareness of her own jeopardy. Despite the fact that deep down the protagonist identifies herself as Harriet Hemings, the slave, while in reality she refuses this identity because of her fear that she could be traced back and brought into slavery. As Joanne M. Braxton admits "Brown can tell a version of the story that Harriet can not tell for the sake of her and her family safety. Harriet's free identity depends upon her concealment of her personal story. Chase-Riboud brings Brown's novel, into the narrative to provoke Harriet's reflection on the circumstances of her life" (124). In her encounter with Brown's novel Chase-Riboud forces us to see the difference between fiction and reality. The complexity and irony of this issue can be viewed in the protagonist's reaction on the novel she reads. When her daughter Mary asks her what she is reading, she pretends that she reads *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and explains her laughter by stating "I always laugh when I read Uncle Tom's Cabin"(327). The absurdity of her own life story results in her laughter and even disbelief. *TPD* urges us to see that Harriet Hemings's biggest tragedy is that at some point the protagonist comes to the conclusion that her whole life is a fiction she has created for the sake of freedom she never achieved. Towards the end of *TPD* Harriet Hemings asks a rhetorical question, "Was I plausible? You tell me" (446).

Another important element, which refers to identity is the fingerprints theme. Invoking the idea of fingerprints being an "inimitable" and "fixed particularity given at birth to every human being" Chase-Riboud's signals that fingerprints is the very identity and therefore they will always refer to the protagonist's origin her protagonist tries to conceal (77). This indicates that unlike family name Harriet Hemings's identity cannot be changed through passing. In a sense, passing gives only an illusion of a new life, whereas, in reality the protagonist is standing on a quicksand because of passing never grants a constant freedom.

Thance explains to Harriet the nature of fingerprints “My twin could impersonate me, and he could in many ways, but his fingerprints would betray him.” (78) And then adds “These (..) are your fixed human personality, given to you at your birth, an individuality that can be depended upon with absolute certainty. You can only be you! Lasting, untouchable, always recognizable, and easily proven” (78). For Harriet her fingerprint is a threat, which betrays her real identity. In a sense, the protagonist believes that her fingerprints can prove her slave past. “This was who I was - *what* I was”, -she finally concludes (155). In the novel, she tries to physically protect her identity from being discovered by either wiping her prints with a handkerchief or hiding her hands in gloves. Chase-Riboud problematizes the issue of fingerprints through the dialogue between Harriet Hemings and her father. In despair the protagonist declares, “Even the death won’t separate us. Because I am you. I’ve got your...fingerprints” (208). For Harriet one of the most traumatic experiences is her relationship with the President, who can neither free her from the burden of her real identity by accepting her as his daughter, nor does he want to formally manumit her. As Clarke Kaplan admits “for Harriet, they (fingerprints) signal both the always –imminent betrayal of her double illegitimacy and the ineradicable history of kidnapping, captivity and physical and sexual subjugation out of which she is produced” (785). So in many ways, the protagonist’s fingerprints are a reminder of her past, the reason why she perceives herself to be as a criminal. And even though, here fingerprints are not all-powerful because they cannot identify her race, the protagonist still views them as a threat.

Chase-Riboud solves the problem of the fingerprints by creating an episode where the protagonist burns her prints from the tips of her fingers during the accident in the laboratory. The disappearance of her fingerprints should be studied more carefully in order to understand the reason why the author creates this scene. In *TPD* the removal of the prints can be understood as a destruction of Harriet Heming’s identity to the point when she becomes in a

sense invisible both for herself and others. Therefore, loss of her fingerprints can be compared to loss of her identity. The protagonist reacts to her smooth fingertips as if they could release her from the need to hide her identity:

My blank fingerprints were the only lasting souvenirs of the accident. My identity was erased. I felt both sad and jubilant. My heart beat faster. It was a sign, I thought, as I stared at my mutilated hands. My oblivion was complete. The injury of my birth eradicated. But was this retribution or deliverance? Tears of confusion welled in my eyes. Did this make me father's daughter or the contrary? (279)

Through her representation of the case with fingerprints disappearance, Chase-Riboud extends her exploitation of the issue of identity in one more way. Although the protagonist erases her self-conception as a slave, she still suffers a psychological injury because as it turns out, when she wants to be accepted as a real “self” she still remains unrecognizable even to her closest family. In chapter 43 Chase-Riboud depicts a conversation between Roxanne Wellington and the protagonist, where she shows her hands without fingerprints and meets Roxanne's disbelief. In despair Harriet Hemings remarks, “Nothing on this entire earth would make her recognize me” and subsequently adds, “I was what people perceived me to be, and there was nothing I could do about it. Who would believe me?” (447). The scar on her fingertips echoes to her sufferings in real life as well as it refers to her main secret, which might be unnoticeable for everyone else except for the protagonist. Joanne M. Braxton develops the idea of purpose of the fingerprints scar and views it as something, which “resonates with the history of suffering that the Hemings women have endured”, as it involves “her great-grandmother's branded breasts, her grandmother's broken spirit, and her mother's burnt fingertips.” (124). In this sense the scar can be studied as a primal familial wound that has been ingrained in the family for many generations hence is a part of the family history. Even though In *TPD* Harriet Hemings is an atypical fugitive slave because unlike others she does not experience any major physical abuse except for the episode when Sykes hunted her, therefore the scene during which she burns her prints with an acid can be applied as a certain form of punishment for her crime. As the reader

sees, her mental torture can easily compete with a physical: physical pain is temporary whereas mental misery is a constant condition, which results in the protagonist's identity crisis.

As I have argued above, passing for white is a complex process because it consists of numerous elements. One of these elements is the protagonist's state of duality, which suggests that she is torn between multiple roles that she performs in order to hide her identity: a role of an orphan, a role of a wife, mother and Charlotte's friend, a role of the President's daughter, which identifies her as a criminal and bastard and finally, a role of an abolitionist whose task is to rescue fugitive slaves. The protagonist's duality is the result of the conclusion she makes in the beginning of the novel. Since everyone has secrets and something to lie about, she learns that "the world is divided into those who had a choice and those who had none" (64). Oftentimes the novel presents the idea of coalition between chance and fate. This makes the protagonist realize that duality is in many ways is a part of everyday life, a chance she could use to reach her goal. Chase-Riboud, however, problematizes this issue by describing the protagonist's duality as one of the main reasons of her identity issue:

I was impersonating. There would be, I knew, o major mistake, no untoward behavior. Harriet Hemings of Monticello was only a fleeting image that I caught in the mirror from time to time in a gesture or a thought, but firmly relegated to the past. Not only had I forgotten myself, I had forgotten my mother, my father; I played the orphan perfectly. (73)

Through the evoking of impersonating of Harriet Petit, as an orphan with no past, Chase-Riboud introduces the idea of identity damage. In the novel the protagonist passes for white but eventually destroys her own identity, which she will never be able to restore. In Moynihan's article the use of the term "to impose" is explained as a fabrication, suggesting that "since 'posture' already implies posing or faking, 'imposture' is the pose of a pose, the fake of a fake: the word implies no possible return to any point of origin" (9). As much as the protagonist impersonates and identifies herself in the eyes of her fiancée and friends as a representative of society, which has nothing to do with slavery, using her white cousin's life as a source for her

imaginary life stories, the narrator emphasizes the loneliness and low spirits she is faced with every day. She admits to herself “Sometimes I felt I was acting out of fictional scene in a novel” (104). Chase-Riboud views the protagonist’s impersonation as a performance in which she plays her role in order to survive in the white world. This can be seen towards the end of the novel, when the protagonist ironically concludes: “Which of my friends accused me of coquetry of an actress? I was certainly an actress, I thought” (439).

Maria Cosway’s presence in the novel is essential because through the theory of everything being an illusion, this character gives the protagonist helps the protagonist to open up her horizons as well as gives her “the courage to invent” herself by sharing the knowledge she didn’t get from Sally Hemings (183). This theory serves as a starting point to Harriet Heming’s new life, suggesting that “there is no such thing as double life-or single identity”(..) People “are only grains of sand in God’s hands.” (183). In using this theory, the narrator invokes the religious context in order to demonstrate that unlike the protagonist, Maria Cosway regards identity as something predestined. Since God creates only one life, it is impossible to have several roles or even lives at the same time. People are powerless against God’s will. Therefore if nothing is real except for God’s plan, then Harriet is also regarded as an “illusion” or rather God’s creation (183).

Duality is also found in the novel’s plot construction. As Moynihan admits, supporting the idea of doubleness in Chase-Riboud’s novel: “Significantly, twinning in *The President’s Daughter* extends beyond the biological and into the textual” (814). Not only does the protagonist lead a double life, but she also marries two identical twin brothers, first Thance and when he dies, Thor. In addition, she gives birth to seven children two of them being also twins: William John Madison and William John James (237). And two of them killed during the war: Beverly and James. Chase-Riboud complicates matters when she states that none of the protagonist’s husbands truly knew her. For Thance the protagonist “possessed a fanatic

abhorrence to any kind oppression or inhumanity to man, an almost irrational rile which manifested itself in an exaggerated enthusiasm for all kinds of causes: abolition, world, peace, temperance, transcendentalism, women's rights, protection of animals, protection of Indians", while for Thor she is mystery, "a dangerous thing" (282, 295). In illustrating of Thor's and Harriet Heming's relationship, Chase-Riboud uses a Biblical plot, which refers to the story about Tobias and Sarah. Thor says: " According to Moses, (...) a Hebrew is commanded by God to marry his brother's widow as her nearest kin so that her children shall not be fatherless and so she shall not pass out of her husband's clan into the hands of strangers" (291). Through this episode the narrator grants the protagonist with identical husband as well as indicates the process of history repeating itself.

The protagonist's state of duality is also present in the monologue she addresses to her father when she finally visits his grave. The words she says need to be studied carefully as they illustrate numerous issues raised by the narrator, however, first and foremost, they indicate the doubleness of Harriet Heming's life:

I have married twins and borne twins and have lost double sons to the death to defeat you. I've borne in silence all my secret doublage: double indemnity, double allegiances, double color. It was you, Father, *your* fiction that made impostors and confidence men of us all-Eston and Beverly, who doubled for white; Adrian Petit, who doubled for fictitious aristocracy; Thomas, who doubled as Woodston, then tripped as a Union spy, then quadrupled as a loyal white Confederate; Thenia, who doubled as my slave; sisters. Who doubled as wives; wives as slaves; slaves as mistresses; daughters as aunts; sisters-in-law as lovers; sons as lackeys. Lincoln, as the Great Emancipator, planned to deport his negro citizens; you as a great democrat, subsisted on the wages of slavery; Sally Hemings, as the great slave captive, sold herself for love, and Uncle James, the watchdog, played a role of the helpless mackerel. Oh Papa, your great and dying world spawned magnificent impersonators!" (414)

In this episode Chase-Riboud summarizes the whole spectrum of such issues as: slavery, passing, identity, race and miscegenation. And even though the question of race will be

discussed in the next chapter, this quote seems relevant regarding the state of duality. In this long chain of different types of duality, the narrator points out that everything around Harriet Hemings has a double meaning. In fact, the protagonist is not the only one who has to pretend in order to achieve a certain goal or a benefit. Everyone in the novel plays a role for the sake of survival: her mother plays an imaginary role of Jefferson's wife, her brothers either pass for white or black, whichever suits their purpose best, Thor plays the role of the protagonist's husband, trying to replace Thane, while Harriet Hemings blames her father for the reason of her own state of duality. Thus, in directing at different types of duality, the narrator exposes the origin of the protagonist's identity crisis by addressing one of the most essential questions to the reader: Would there be an opportunity for the protagonist to expose herself for who she really is and not what others perceived her to be? In a sense, Harriet Hemings's death is the only solution to her identity crisis. Being unable to cope with her traumatic past, she dies under absurd circumstances without having to neither acknowledge her identity nor apologize for hiding this secret from her family and friends (454). The protagonist's death is symbolic as it can be compared to the death of the whole fictitious nation created by her father. In her affidavit Roxanne Wellington would state: "And what a better father could she have chosen than Thomas Jefferson himself, the father of our national identity" (454).

Harriet Hemings's imaginary life and a state of duality does not only provide an example of loss of identity and exile but also explores the essence of faux freedom within white society of the nineteenth century America. Thus, the novel employs passing as the main reason of the protagonist's self-erasure and inability to connect with her past and to pass the oral knowledge of her passing experience. It is in the process of inventing herself that the protagonist emerges all the borders between her real "self" and imagined one; and therefore she becomes a hostage of her own secret identity. Through the analysis of the protagonist's passing journey, Chase-Riboud urges the reader to see that Harriet Hemings's tragedy is defined through her

living several lives at once. However, the main problem is that none of these lives is real because once she passes for white and changes her family name, she loses a sense of self-perception and breaks off the blood ties with her family, being trapped by double roles she has to play every single day.

Chapter 2.2.

Representation of “race” and miscegenation as an issue in in Barbara Chase-Riboud’s *The President’s Daughter*.

The main point of this chapter falls on the representation of race in the novel. In order to illustrate the complexity of passing in light of its preoccupation with race and miscegenation, I will analyze the illustration of contradictions of the concept of race through Chase-Riboud’s performance of racial politics in the 19th century American society. This includes problematizing and discussing of the issue of miscegenation through evocation of Thomas Jefferson’s presence and his mathematical solution to the issue of passing and the Declaration of Independence as well as problematizing of the Civil War and exploration of the question of race through Harriet Hemings’s perception of her color.

The very idea that the protagonist’s birth is the result of the relationship, which refers to the crime of miscegenation, makes race an issue. Daughter of Thomas Jefferson and at the same time his slave, having one sixteenth of African blood in her veins, Harriet Hemings understands the nature of her origin. Not only does this fact challenge American history but also evoke the contradictions of the Declaration of Independence and affects Thomas Jefferson’s reputation. The novel raises the question of truth and illustrates slave and master dialectic, which opens doors to representation of race consciousness and miscegenation. Regardless the fact that the protagonist is fictional and the liaison between Sally Hemings and

Thomas Jefferson is arguable, Chase-Riboud suggests that in light of the race politics of the 19th century America, a child produced through the crime of miscegenation would have experienced the same racial issue as the fictional one. Thus, as Chase-Riboud herself admits, “the pathos of Harriet’s dilemma and the tragedy of Harriet’s enigma is just one more episode in the continuing story of love, race, and identity in America” (466).

In the novel Harriet Hemings’s race consciousness is illustrated through the complexity of her origin. From the very beginning Chase-Riboud brings our attention to the issue of race by exposing the protagonist’s dilemma: “For despite for my green eyes and red hair and white skin, I was black” (3). In writing about Harriet Hemings, Chase-Riboud accounts her as “symbol of the metaphysics of race” (466). The fact that regardless her light complexion Harriet Hemings is perceived as a dark-skinned woman, who limits her freedom and affects her identity, makes the whole issue even more complicated. Underscoring the ambivalence of the protagonist, Yoriko Ishida’s states that “Harriet is troubled by being caught into two bloods but at the same time she is also fugitive slave through passing” (118). Given the fact that Harriet Hemings’s father is American President while her mother is a slave, the protagonist simply fears to repeat her mother’s story and therefore uses her light skin in order to pass into white society and obtain freedom. Obviously, she follows her grandmother’s instructions to “get freedom at any price”, however, she realizes that double jeopardy, because passing is “against the law”(113).

Chase-Riboud invokes the idea of critical attitude towards passing by depicting it both as destructive experience and a form of opposition against racial politics. In writing about passing, Catherine Rotenberg explains: “punishment is an ever-present threat for subjects who attempt to identify differently (443). In light of this utterance, the protagonist’s identification as white raises a probability to be traced back, revealed and lynched for the crime of passing. Since the protagonist is bind by racial politics this defines her as a tragic mulatta, who “by

passing into whiteness refigures the meanings of whiteness, blackness and (un) freedom”(Kaplan, 775). The example of this tragedy is found Thomas’s, Harriet Heming’s brother, utterance: “It’s funny about passing. We disapprove it, yet condone it. It excites our contempt, and yet some admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revolution, but protect it” (195). Through Thomas’s views on passing, Chase-Riboud raises awareness about the protagonist’s inability to substitute her family with a high status she gains by being perceived as a white woman. Unlike the protagonist, Thomas “stayed on the black side of the color line”, as he regards passing as “living in insane asylum”(194,195). The protagonist, however, views her heritage as something, which needs to be studied and explored. Harriet Heming’s dual identity in light of the race issue, which was discussed in my previous chapter, makes her realize that she “would love” her “color, if only” she “knew what color” she was, implying the confusion about her own heritage (9).

The author problematizes miscegenation and the representation of race through exhibition of the race politics in The United States. In two ways she studies these questions. First, she brings into focus the complexity of father- daughter relationship between the protagonist and Thomas Jefferson, and second, she explores the nature of the color line. By passing for white, the protagonist crosses the color-line border to avoid a slave destiny. Chase-Riboud evokes the issue of race in connection with slavery in the protagonist’s “You know what a slave woman can expect”, leaving Harriet Hemings no other choice in her dilemma (9). In order to unpack the issue of passing in light of its preoccupation with race, Chase-Riboud constructs an episode during which a white carpenter Sykes is attacking the protagonist. This episode sheds light onto the inconsistency of race politics and could be also viewed as a feministic tactic in order to problematize sexual abuse. As Louis Gates puts it, “use of mulatto figure, as a literary device, has two primary functions: it enables an exploration of the relation between the races while, at the same time, it expresses the relation

between races” (313). The protagonist’s function is to demythologize the concepts of “pure race” as well as to illustrate the male dominance, which the reader can see in the conversation between Sykes and Harriet Hemings:

Come down from there, you little white nigger! I’ll show you how to obey an order!

I crouched lower in the arch of the tree and watched as Sykes took out his sex, brandishing like a weapon against the tree. I screwed my eyes shut. (12)

Here and in other cases, Chase-Riboud’s usage of the adjective “white” separately or in combination with nouns, for example “WHITE PEOPLE”, “white nigger”, “little white nigger” or “little Snow White”, oftentimes possesses a negative coloring, as it exhibits the prejudice of race politics and the effect of the One Drop Rule, which despite the protagonist’s looks, classifies her as a black American (11,12,17). The vision of Sykes echoes in the middle of the novel, when the narrator illustrates another example of the issue of sexual abuse of the African American female slaves. Through the confession of the female fugitive, the narrator evokes the problem the master and slave relationship:

When I couldn’t move, he forced his...sex into my mouth. After that, I had no more strength to defend myself. He took me any and every which way, but kneeling was his favorite. For three years. Every day I suffered in my spirit. I lowed like an animal when he came after me. He used me until I got with child, and when it came, the baby, white as snow, my mistress took it away from me and sold it into a passing slave trader, who had a nursing slave- just like a bundle of rags. (251).

Basically, here Chase-Riboud urges us to explore the complexity of race and miscegenation. Her analysis of rape refers to the critique of political weapon of terror as a means of submissiveness and control over the female slaves. She also argues that African American female slaves were both mentally and physically humiliated through the white patriarchal supremacy of their masters. Chase-Riboud’s sexual abuse critique is very common for the nineteenth century black feminists who were occupied with exposing of “the colonization of the black female body by white male power” (Gates, 315), therefore her novel can also be defined as a one, which possesses feministic traces in light of its preoccupation with race.

TPD also exposes another racial issue, the One Drop Rule. Based on the One Drop Rule, which “defined race in the United States: one black grandmother made a black, but one white grandmother didn’t make a white”, which means that this theory taints the whole generation and makes “a whole personality and entity” completely “invisible” for the American society of the 19th century¹¹ Regarding this theory, the protagonist is perceived as a slave, who is also a fugitive and the President’s daughter, therefore in the eyes of the white society she is three times illegitimate. In *TPD* Chase-Riboud interprets the complexity of father and daughter relationship by defining it as a relationship between master and slave. Since the early age Harriet Hemings’s understands that she is father’s “property” rather than his beloved daughter (13, 208). Throughout the whole novel the protagonist seeks his recognition as her father in order to cope with her race consciousness. The issue of miscegenation presented in the novel partially refers to the first chapter, which highlights Harriet Hemings’s state of duality as a result of the problematic relationship with her father. Chase-Riboud problematizes the presence of Thomas Jefferson by criticizing his inability to free his own daughter from committing a fraud by passing into the white society without being officially manumitted. From the begging of the novel Chase-Riboud draws our attention to the fact that Jefferson’s illegitimate children have to steal themselves “in the name of whiteness” (31) Each chapter of the novel begins with Jefferson’s epigraph from one of his literary works. All these epigraphs frame the protagonist’s story and relate to the events in these chapters. The President’s presence in *TPD* also challenges the American history by exploring a possibility of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings: on one hand, Chase-Riboud illustrates that by recognizing Harriet Hemings as his own daughter, he will come across as a criminal, which would automatically taint his reputation as the farther of American identity, on the other hand, she highlights the contradictions of his political activity. In *TPD* Thomas Jefferson’s says:

¹¹ See Chase-Riboud, “*Sally Hemings and the One Drop Rule of Public History*”, p. 2

And so, although, everybody knew Harriet was a bastard, knew she was a slave, knew she wasn't by fact or fiction white, knew she would have to annihilate these facts by fraud if she were ever to be free, that little grain of veracity had disappeared into the lilac carriage. A whole race of liars lived down here in Virginia: black, white, and mulatto liars whose only subject of conversion was Truth and Beauty. They were the once, including myself, who had set up our greatest pillar of falsehood: that with every gesture and emotion with every breath we took, with the very pollen we inhaled, we had not entered into black people as deeply as black people have entered into us. (23)

In focusing on the "fiction" of being white and the necessity of annihilation of the protagonist's mixed heritage, the narrator investigates an enslaved female, who cannot dispose her life without crossing the borders of the color-line and committing a crime. And since, the protagonist is the President's daughter, this involves him as the main reason of Harriet Heming's fraud. "A whole race of liars" here invokes debates on race from the biological to political level in order to show that passing for white was the result of the race prejudice and racial politics against African American people hence the annihilation of the racial heritage. And since in the novel the problem of miscegenation is invoked as a forbidden subject, this implies that passers become invisible in order to keep their secret and survive in the white community. This very state of invisibility is exposed through the issue of miscegenation in the protagonist's "I could not exist because miscegenation didn't exist. It was a crime punished by fine and imprisonment. A crime against America" (444). In illustrating of the unspoken power of racial memory, Chase-Riboud uses Thomas Jefferson "as a surrogate for meditation on the problem of human freedom" (Dawkins, 793). Chase-Riboud implies that being unable to oppose white supremacy and fix her heritage, which involves Thomas Jefferson as her father, she sacrifices her family blood ties and becomes in a sense biracial, as she knows that "there would be no turning back after that" (33). Thus, Harriet Hemings passing can be viewed as an act of self-destruction in the name of freedom.

What needs to be studied in *TPD* in order to illustrate miscegenation as an issue is Thomas Jefferson's annihilation of his own crime. The President's perception of his slave daughter's position is defined by his conclusion that "Since she's white enough to pass for white, then let her be white." (33). In analyzing the complexity of the father and daughter relationship between the protagonist and the President, Yoriko Ishida suggests that, "Jefferson realizes that Harriet would be condemned by only one-eighth of African blood, throughout her lifetime even after passing is successful" (116). In a sense, Chase-Riboud implies that the President is aware of the absurdity of one-drop rule, however, he is unable to take the responsibility for his actions, as it would simply be a discreditable fact. In the novel Thomas Jefferson says:

It was the most tremendous lie we had ever told ourselves in the South: that one drop of black blood was enough to condemn an individual to slavery, which in turn protected the incredible, invincible, overwhelming myth amongst us that the crime of miscegenation never occurred, that the purity of the two races, but especially the white race, had been preserved, forever separate, forever untainted." (23)

In his monologue, the narrator opens a door to the debate referring to the purity of race. In exposing here the myth that African people were regarded as impure race, the narrator argues the tragic position of the slaves as well as Harriet Hemings's position. Through this monologue, the novel combats racial injustice in all its forms as the reader grasps the idea of the complexity of the crime of miscegenation, which has traumatized the slaves not only on physical but also on mental level. Certainly, Chase-Riboud implies that in the pursuit of saving so-called purity of the white race, African racial memory has been erased by the government's elimination of the fact that the whole nation was abused. The same idea of racial purity is invoked in the end of the novel, when after Harriet Heming's death; her family denies the protagonist's African heritage. These views can be found in Roxanne's "It was impossible that any of this had happened to do with me", evoking the racial hysteria by rejecting the possibility to be considered black (353). In raising the issue of racial purity Dawkins suggests "Roxanne and her grandfather destroy Harriet's diaries after the death for the sake of their prosperity" (803). This

can be explained by the fact that the protagonist's granddaughter might be also affected by the views of the racial politics in the United States. The fact that she denies her mixed heritage suggests that she is also influenced by Negrophobia and therefore is unable to continue to pass the racial memory of the oppressed slave hood. The power of the racial memory is also invoked in mother and daughter relationship. Chase-Riboud builds a connection between the protagonist's mother and the protagonist in order to illustrate that first and foremost, Harriet Hemings wants to break the family tradition of slave hood by obtaining the freedom, which her mother never got: "Seeing her, I vowed that I would never live a life of imagination but reality"(33). Through the depiction of Harriet Hemings and Thomas Jefferson relationship, the narrator not only problematizes miscegenation but also manifests, which Owen Whooley calls, a possibility "to provide theoretical insight as how outsiders can affect the content of historical knowledge" (1373). The illustration of the relationship between Harriet Hemings, her father and mother carries with it an implicit demand to rethink the understanding of slavery, miscegenation, American history, the difference between natural freedom and nominal freedom and most importantly, the notion of race.

In the novel Chase-Riboud presents mathematical solution to the issue of passing as an example of the President's need to justify him so that he could exclude his presence from the participation in the crime of miscegenation though his illustrating the protagonist as a white woman. According to this theory, the third cross clears the African blood:

It is understood in natural history that a fourth cross of one race of animals with another gives an issue equivalent for all sensible purposes to the original blood. Thus a Merino ram being crossed, first with a country ewe, second with his daughter, third with his grandfather, and fourth with the granddaughter, and fourth with the great-granddaughter, the last issue is deemed pure Merino, having in fact but one- sixth of the country blood. Our canon considers two crosses with the pure white and third with any degree of mixture, however small, as clearing the issue of the Negro blood. (21)

What is at stake here is the fact that the President's project compares clearing of the African blood with animals' crossing. This theory implies that since Harriet Hemings is a daughter of Sally Hemings and granddaughter of Elizabeth Hemings, grand granddaughter of the African Bia Baye, all of them crossing the color-line and having children with white men, this indicates that the protagonist is only in one-eighths African American, therefore, her passing for white should not be an issue. However, as it is problematized in *TPD*, in reality, The One Drop Rule overshadows the protagonist's position. Chase-Riboud illustrates the risk of being caught and lynched for the crime of passing for white in order to remind that this theory does not work in practice. In the novel Harriet Hemings states: "I'm white", as if using the whiteness of her skin as a protection from racial discrimination; while Eston, her brother, clarifies: "Not if they catch you." (7). In this conversation, the narrator exposes the context of raced subjection as well as sheds light onto the protagonist's racial consciousness, which is in state of indeterminacy. The protagonist's deeply conflicted position on her black ancestry is also evoked in another Eston's dialogue with his sister. The words Eston says to Harriet Hemings before she passes for white and leaves Monticello, makes it clear to the reader that passing is never a guarantee, which gives a complete freedom from the burden of slavery. Though his utterance, the narrator criticizes slavery by linking it with the race theme:

If Martha Wayles inherited Mama, then Martha Randolph can inherit you... They can hunt you right in the grave. They can send slave catchers after you in Philadelphia as soon as Father takes his last breath. It's been done. This slavery stuff is for good. (7)

In bringing to the reader's attention Harriet's inability to own her body, the narrator urges us to see how functions the racial politics of the 19th century America. Just like her mother, Sally Hemings, the protagonist risks to be trapped into the cage of slavery because of her mixed heritage. In this dialogue the narrator points to the parallels between slaves and masters, who use violence as a means of control of black subjects in order to maintain their financial position

by using slaves in each and every possible way: either for labor or reproducing of the new slaves.

Another method of brining the reader's attention to the issue of race is in concentrating on the color-line theme. When it comes to Harriet Heming's perception of her color, the narrator presents the idea that she is "a third color", which defines her as neither black, nor white (184). Through Maria Cosway, the narrator suggests the idea that "color only exists in relation to another color" (184), meaning that Harriet Hemings is neither black nor white. In the novel crossing of the color line "doesn't stop even at the grave" and needs to be hidden as it leads to the crime of miscegenation (482). For Harriet Hemings admitting that she has crossed the color line equals confessing that she is a criminal. On one hand, she seeks the reconnection with her own race: "I'll never sell myself for whiteness" (441), on the other had she experiences racial hysteria when she meets Sarah, Madison's black daughter, who stayed on the black side of the color line. Through Sarah's "And this is why we fought the Civil War" (440), the narrator exposes the protagonist's fear to step back over the color line and admit that Sarah is her family.

The novel exposes the complexity of the color-line issue through evoking the idea of womanhood. During the conversation between the protagonist and her white half-sister Martha Jefferson, the President's daughter from his marriage with Martha Wayles. When the protagonist asks her why she hates her, Martha replies:" Because you are an offense to southern white womanhood. Look at you. You do not belong here-not in this country. You think you crossed the line God has drawn between us" (209). The protagonist remarks:" It's not God drawn the color line. It's people like you, Martha!"(209). Though this conversation, Chase-Riboud expresses the idea of race being an invention of the white society, which used it as a form of submissiveness against African American slaves. She also exposes annihilation of the conscience of guilt regarding the crime that white slaveholders have done against

African American slaves. In a sense, this utterance echoes to the idea presented in the chapter narrated by Abraham Lincoln: “Since I have wronged you, I can never like you” (340). Martha consciously realizes the damage her family has done against Sally Hemings and her children, however, by accepting this fact, she, just like her father, will be faced with the necessity to admit her participation in the crime of slavery. For Martha the idea that she can be connected through the blood ties with the protagonist, who is perceived by their family as black, is beyond acceptance.

In the dialogue between the protagonist and her brother Thomas, the narrator once again highlights the complexity of the father and daughter relationship, in light of her preoccupation with the crime of miscegenation. This is done through the opposition between Thomas Jefferson’s principles and “the principles of his country” (195). In many ways, her critique refers to the contradictions of the Declaration of Independence, which states that “all men are created equal” and “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it”¹². In the novel the document, which grants equality and freedom of the American citizens, goes against its set of principles, taking into consideration the fact that “all men who signed the Declaration of Independence were slave holders except John Adams and Benjamin Franklin”¹³. In the novel Thomas Jefferson is represented as a slaveholder. Thus, not only does this challenge American history but also produces numerous questions, which in some ways damage his reputation as a father of national identity.

Thomas Jefferson, however, is not the only historical figure, which is involved in problematizing of the question of race in *TPD*. In the chapter focalized through the narration of the President Abraham Lincoln, the narrator evokes the idea of the rights stated in the Declaration of Independence in order to illustrate the absurdity of the 19th century racial

¹² *The Declaration of Independence*. Web 15 October 2015. http://www.constitution.org/us_doi.pdf

¹³ Chase-Riboud, “*Sally Hemings and the One Drop Rule of Public History*”, p.2

politics. Chase-Riboud initially appears to assert the equality between the representatives of African American blood and the white population of the country. This is evident through the episode where the President meets a group of colored and non-colored African American men seeking political and social equality. In the novel one of them says:” We have the right to have applied to ourselves those rights named in the Declaration of Independence” (340). The presence of the President Lincoln is important here because through his narration Chase-Riboud evokes the vision of the whole American nation, which is affected by racial limitations. In including Abraham Lincoln’s affidavit, Chase-Riboud criticizes the Civil War and its usage of the black soldiers in the name of the victory. The sixteenth President of the United States realizes that his Proclamation of Emancipation “transformed a war in a way” he “had vowed” he “would never permit”, however, at the same time he understands that “if the race war came, it came” and adds that he “had no more compunction about using black men as U.S. soldiers” (342, 343). The essence of Chase-Riboud’s argument is that African slaves were regarded as tool used primarily for Lincoln’s main goal. As she suggests in her article, “the black presence itself was only an afterthought until Lincoln needed black union soldiers to win the war”¹⁴. This idea is also supported by Thor’s commentary:

When our country was in trouble in its early struggles, it looked upon the Negro as citizen. In 1776 he was a citizen. At the time of Jefferson’s constitution, the Negro had a right to vote in eleven states out of the thirteen. In 1812, General Jackson addressed them as fellow citizens. He wanted them to fight! And now, when conscription time has come upon us, the Negro is a citizen again. Join the army! (349)

Not only does Chase-Riboud expand her critique beyond the notion of race by involving the politics debates and American history, but also recovers a traumatized performance of race within the fiction. In linking the Civil War and the issue of race, she regards black people as “domestic aliens”, while referring to the war as the very “watershed of American identity”

¹⁴ Chase-Riboud, “*Sally Hemings and the One Drop Rule of Public History*”, p.2

(405). Chase-Riboud complicates matters further when she describes the protagonist's attitude towards the Civil War. First and foremost through the protagonist's statement referring to the "reparation for the slave" (345). Harriet Hemings's reaction to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is expressed in a radical way:

Let the South," I said slowly, "Spend every single penny of their treasure, which colored people have earned for them. Let them spill a drop of their own blood for every drop of colored people's blood they have spilled or contaminated" (345)

Through the protagonist's attitude to the contradictions of the Proclamation of Emancipation, the narrator brings out attention to the consequences of the practice of the politics of oppression and violence directed towards African slaves, which after the document's announcement, were ironically omitted and ignored. In writing about politics of the 19th century America, Chase-Riboud presents rather disputed point of view concerning the historical facts. Chase-Riboud suggests, that people were promised freedom from slavery as long as they would join the war and fight for the Union. In evoking the Civil War in her novel, Chase-Riboud urges the reader to reevaluate the national treatment of these historical events as she suggests that "until public history points out that the Civil Rights Movement is directly connected to the Civil War and the War was the direct result of the failures of the Revolutionaries to remove slavery as part of their fight for freedom, we will never have a critical understanding about any of these wars or why they were fought"¹⁵. Thus, *TPD*'s main goal is to raise the awareness to the race issue in light of the problem of passing. Chase-Riboud deliberately includes highly debated historical facts and real historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Maria Cosway, Thomas Jefferson etc. in order to resurrect not only the vision of Sally Hemings and her daughter but also the crime of miscegenation and slavery as a part of American history, which in her opinion is left out.

¹⁵ Chase-Riboud, "*Sally Hemings and the One Drop Rule of Public History*", p.5

Conclusion

The themes of slavery, race, miscegenation, duality, racial passing and identity are central in *TPD* and *Clotel*. After a close examination, it is evident that Chase-Riboud is more occupied with investigating the mystery of Harriet Hemings's existence based on the controversial rumor, brought by Callender, while Brown worked within the abolitionist tradition of writing and "wanted to rebuild the only world "; which perceived as "filled with loss and suffering because people thought in terms of "black" and "white" (Hilton, xvii). The information given in the novels which is supported partially by rumors and partially by historical reality, including quotes from *The Notes on The State Of Virginia*, the presence of Abraham Lincoln, Mrs. Willowpole, Maria Cosway and others. All these elements, including a portrayal of Thomas Jefferson, raise multiple questions and challenge American history. At the same time one should keep in mind that Harriet Hemings is a fictional character, and even though it has been proven that the President has had fathered at least one of Sally Heming's children, the fantasy about what could have happened with their child is not the most reliable source. However, what is at stake here is the fact that this fictional construction of Thomas Jefferson's daughter sheds light upon those who belonged to the slave world and crossed the color line in the name of freedom, being oppressed by the racial politics. Despite the fact that there is a time difference between the publications of the given novels, they share similarities. I suggest start by looking at the representation of passing in both novels.

As I have argued earlier, passing requires a construction of the new identity. We have seen both male and female characters in *Clotel* and *TPD* achieve their goals through using passing. Chase-Riboud and Brown depict passing as an act of self-eraser. For example, Harriet Hemings is so afraid to be revealed that at some point she crosses all limits and destructs her

old identity to the extent that she becomes used to her false life. The heart of her crisis is found in her inability to be who she really is. Clotel erases herself by coming a suicide and unlike Harriet Hemings finds her freedom in death. Clotel's daughter also erases herself by adopting a new name, changing her status and living abroad where she stays unrecognized from the Fugitive Law. The only characters that do not erase themselves are the fictional reflection of Brown, William and Madison, Harriet Hemings's brother who marries a "black" woman and regards himself African American. However, there is a slight difference between Madison and William. Unlike the young abolitionist, Madison neither passes for white, nor changes his last name hence he stays on the "black side" of the color line. In a sense, Madison saves his family history from being lost and diminished. In both novels racial passing is illustrated as a necessity rather than a simple wish to imitate whiteness. Racial passing is an escape but at the same time it is also a risk and a symbol of the lost generation. This thesis' aim was to illustrate that "race" is a socially constructed category, while passing is the only way to avoid slavery and sexual abuse. Both *Clotel* and *Harriet Hemings* are products of miscegenation but both of them lack features, which could characterize them as African; however, the society and racial politics of the nineteenth century America classify them as slaves in order to get certain profits from slave exploitation. The importance of heritage illustrated in *Clotel* and *TPD* indicate nineteenth century "white" community's urge to preserve their high status as a main proof of their mightiness and power. For example, Martha Jefferson refuses to acknowledge that Harriet Hemings has a direct relation to the President's family because this would indicate that he has recognized her as his daughter, although in the eyes of his nation he would come across as a criminal.

From the very beginning, Harriet Hemings and Clotel are put in a double jeopardy. Not only are they indicated by the one-drop rule as African Americans but also on top of that, they are illegitimate children of the President. Chase-Riboud's representation of Thomas Jefferson is

much broader compared to Brown. Unlike *TPD*, Brown does not give an analysis of this historical figure. Chase-Riboud goes much further and employs him as one of her narrators, giving him a voice to tell the story from his perspective as well as letting other “historical” figures who have not been given a chance to talk, shed light upon the situation. Whether Jefferson was a real father of Harriet Hemings is quite uncertain, yet in writing about the complexity of father-daughter relationship, Chase-Riboud reaches peak of her critique against the President, questioning his image as one of the fathers of the national identity. Brown does the same but in a different manner. His account also concerns the contradictions of the claims stated in the document, which he evokes through George Green, whose speech about equality, liberty and race prejudice in the Land Of Promise. Another important character in the novel whom the Brown employs as well as the main narrator is the William, whose story resembles that one of Brown. His presence clarifies Brown’s agenda to argue against slavery and racism as well as introduces his personal experience, illustrating his transition from slave to a well-respected abolitionist, writer and a businessman.

In terms of structure, the novels differ yet have something in common. *Clotel* is a novel consisting of several essays, which raise vital themes such as race, miscegenation, religion in connection to slavery and most importantly- the inhuman treatment of slaves as piglets for various medical experiments. Each essayistic element has its agenda, which mostly concerns arguing against slavery and race politics. However, at the same time, the structure of the novel has elements of fragmentality, as some of the essays have no relation to the protagonist. For example, the *Narrative of The Life and Escape of William Wells Brown* or *The Religious Teacher*, which does not fit into the plot structure. Even though they have the same agenda, these chapters look like two completely separate texts as their characters have only episodic appearance throughout the text. When it comes to *TPD*, it also has elements of fragmentality due to the fact that Chase-Riboud has not just one narrator but several narrators at

the same, each of them performing his own role. In including affidavits and letters, Chase-Riboud just like Brown, claims that her novel is reliable yet at the same time the author is careful, as she knows that her novel is used rather on assumptions because the fact that Harriet Hemings had relation to the President's family still remains arguable.

The theme of religion is absent in *TPD*, although present in *Clotel*. Thus, not only does Brown use Declaration of Independence in order to criticize race politics, but he also includes the Bible, exposing the hypocritical side of the Church, which approves of slavery. In a sense, Brown illustrates how the representatives of Christianity misinterpret the Holy Book, deliberately choosing only some parts of the dogmas while avoiding those which stated brotherly love and equality of all the nations. In writing about religion, Brown employs Georgiana as one of the characters who reflect his ideas, who could clarify his negative attitude regarding the Church. Harriet's voyage to London, Paris and Italy gives her a chance to try to reconnect with her past, explore her relationship with father and mother, get a better knowledge about politics, abolitionist movements and also geography. In addition to that, one of the first things the female protagonist does is attending a Unitarian school for women where she got an education. William, the fictional character who reflects Brown goes through the same passing journey: he escapes slavery and gets relatively good education, which helps him access the "white" world.

Another factor, which connects the plots of the given novels, is a name theme. Shifting the name and adopting a new one is clearly one of the main elements of racial passing. A new name usually constructs a "white" identity and helps to conceal the old one. Just like William, the former slave, George and Mary in *Clotel*, Harriet adopts a name which does not refer to her slave past. "Petit" is a "white name", and therefore it performs a function of the protagonist's guardian during passing. What is also important here is the fact that a new name is usually inherited from the person who help a slave to pass. Thus, Harriet Hemings becomes Harriet

Petit, adopting the last name of her father's majordomo, who guides her out of slavery; Mary marries a Frenchman who purchases her and becomes Mrs. Devenant; William adopts a last name of a white man, who gives him a shelter during his escape. Hence he becomes William Wells Brown; George adopts his master's name and becomes George Green.

The issues of identity and duality are present in both novels. However, unlike Brown, Chase-Riboud's novel exposes it to a much greater extent. Harriet Hemings is torn between multiple roles she has to perform in order to be assimilated into the society she passes to. Her duality causes a sense of anxiety; fear to be rejected by her husband and children, eventually pushing her towards total rejection of her previously established identity of Harriet of Monticello. Harriet Heming's tragedy is found in her inability to expose her identity and to redeem her past because this would automatically cause consequences turning a well-respected woman Harriet Wellington into a felon who crossed the color line, an illegitimate child of Thomas Jefferson and most importantly a slave. While Harriet Hemings struggles with her identity crisis, *Clotel's* duality and loss of identity are less evident due to her episodic presence in the novel. Unlike Chase-Riboud, who makes her protagonist one of the leading narrators, Brown takes a leading role and voices the protagonist's story from his perspective, which makes it difficult to regard him as a reliable source.

A state of duality is also found in keeping the slave names as an attempt to reconnect with the lost identity. Thus, the repetition of such names as James, Madison and Beverly indicate the tendency of the history to repeat itself. For example, the protagonist's son James Wellington dies at a relatively young age, just like James Hemings, Harriet Heming's uncle. Chase-Riboud also keeps names Beverly and James, which transit, from Sally Heming's family into Harriet Heming's family. Therefore being renounced with her family, the protagonist makes an attempt to make a connection between her lost family and the one she has created with Thance and Thor. Not only is Harriet Heming's identity is doubled, but she also leads a

double life, marries twice, gives birth to twins and chooses for her children previously used names in her family.

The theme of duality is partially exposed through the slave marriage plot and William who is Brown's replica. In writing about William, Brown deliberately creates mainly positive image about himself, praising his talents as a famous abolitionist and a writer. Hence it gets difficult to differentiate between the author and the narrator because the line, which usually separates a character from the writer is clearly diminished when it comes to *The Narrative of The Life And Escape of William Wells Brown*. Clotel on the contrary, is almost absent from the novel, hence her state of duality and loss of identity are less evident; yet after a close examination one comes to the conclusion that her identity is also doubled. If Harriet Hemings, who is employed as a strong-willed character, that chooses to pass for white despite all the obstacles on her way, Clotel has only one option, and that is to become Horatio's mistress. Her existence is divided between the role of Horatio's mistress, Thomas Jefferson's daughter and finally, a slave. While Adrian Petit performs a role of a guide, who at a certain point takes out of slavery both the protagonist and her mother, Currer, Clotel's mother, plays a role of a guide who sells Clotel into sexual slavery. In a sense, this kind of love slavery equals to the original one. Clotel becomes a slave of her love, serving Horatio by living in his cottage as his concubine. Despite the romantic elements, their relationship is based on mutual profit: Clotel is granted relatively secure life while Horatio solves his personal male complexes and proves his ability to purchase the most beautiful woman who will satisfy his sexual needs. When it comes to Harriet Hemings, the choice between love and freedom also raises. The protagonist differs from Clotel with her urge to be independent; therefore her image achieves almost feministic features during her close friendship with Mrs. Willowpole. At the same time, if Harriet chooses her freedom in passing for white, Clotel finds her way out in committing a suicide. In a sense, Clotel is unable to find her place in the nineteenth century racist society, which manipulates

slaves by creating a higher and a lower caste. In both novels racist society is a historical structure, which has an enormous influence on the course of development of the racist ideology.

Despite the fact that Harriet Hemings successfully passes for white, achieving all her life goals such as big family, friends and an active social life, the pain of loss, fear and inability to be accepted for who she reduce her happiness making her life at some point of time unbearable. In other words, being who she really is instead of masking her uniqueness so that she would be accepted by the society she lives in. Thus, even though Harriet Hemings does not commit a suicide, her death is not a coincidence. Chase-Riboud “kills” her protagonist because she would never be able to redeem her past, because her identity will be annihilated by her closest friends and family. The fact that Roxanne finds her diary and afterwards burns them, as is a possible threat, indicates that the identity of the protagonist is completely erased. In other words, she will always stay invisible both for herself and for others. In a sense, *Clotel* could be presented morally weaker than Harriet Hemings, yet she is the one who is strong enough to take an unalterable decision and to choose death her as ultimate sovereignty.

If passing is a traumatic experience that leaves its traces on the whole generation, than Roxanne, is the next who will have to carry the burden of the family secret. Mary, *Clotel*’s daughter is also a carrier of the secret burden; however unlike Roxanne Mary’s description alongside with her understanding of the issue of passing seems limited. Brown is more occupied with drawing a parallel between England and America, stating that England is the land of freedom and equality. This echoes to his personal experience as an abolitionist. Therefore Mary and George Green would have to hide there in order to avoid oppression. It is also worth noticing that Brown’s description of his female characters differs from Chase-Riboud’s who is very accurate in exposing of Harriet stream of consciousness alongside with the voices she hears during her trip to Paris. Mary and her mother look quite unexplored on the

contrast with the detailed and expressive illustration of Harriet's life. This peculiarity can be explained by the time difference and dissimilar narrative techniques. Brown works within established antislavery tradition of narration most likely coping other writers, while Chase-Riboud is a contemporary writer with a distinct agenda to voice the story of the lost generation who had to keep silence in order to survive in the racist environment. Not only does Chase-Riboud include Thomas Jefferson but she also invites Abraham Lincoln in the discussion of the raised issues. If Thomas Jefferson "enslaved" Harriet Hemings, then Abraham Lincoln "frees" her but at the same time does not justify the expectations because racism and the color line division are still present even after the Civil War. Paralyzed by the fear of being revealed, the protagonist does not want to recognize Sarah, Madison's niece as her closest family member. The color line separates her even from her own brother who unlike his sister, chooses to stay on the "black" side of the color line while Harriet Hemings sells herself for "whiteness".

The ideology of the representation of the class system is also found in the episode with Salome, a German woman who was made a slave against her own will. Salome is as white as Harriet Hemings or Clotel, however what makes her stand out is the fact that she does not have a mixed background. According to the racist One Drop Rule her blood can be considered white, yet, due to the fact that Salome's father is a poor man, that is representative of a lower caste, the woman is sold and used for slave breeding. In a sense, the episode illustrating the woman's tragic story manifest the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the Declaration of Independence alongside with the image of the America being the land of equality, where everyone could accomplish so called American Dream. In reality, both novels illustrate the opposite, stating that race is only a socially constricted category and Salome's story is one of the examples illustrating this claim.

Both *Clotel* and *TPD* expose a transition from the enslaved life to the free one. Not only do they expose possible obstacles on a way to passing for white but they also raise issues

and ideas, which push towards reestablishing of the understanding of the notion of freedom. Basically, what is at stake here is the fact that one can be “white” while perceived as “back”. The power of racial prejudice turns the lives of the characters into a constant struggle in which only those who have adapted survive. Brown’s fictional character William and Clotel’s daughter together with her lover turn out to be those who manage to go through this transition. This happens because they represent a new generation, which gives a hope for the future free of slavery. The same tendency is kept within the plot of Chase-Riboud’s novel. Thenia Boss, Thance Wellington, Thenia’s husband, Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson and Harriet Hemings die being replaced by the new era in of the American history. Chase-Riboud erases not only Harriet Heming’s personal history but also frees her from the burden of hiding her identity. The protagonist will never be able to acknowledge her past and therefore when she dies, her personal history alongside with her relation to the ancestry and her family disappears. Paradoxically but Harriet Hemings just like Clotel has been dead since the day she passed for white, hence her death on the physical level does not change the fact that she has been spiritually dead. Thus, Harriet Hemings becomes a victim of her own secret while Clotel choses to stay on the other side of the color line. In any case, both of them die leaving the invisible trace of their fictitious existence. Indeed, an act of self-erase in the name of freedom they have never obtained.

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