"Do I look like someone you can come home from where you may be going?": Re-Mapping Interracial Anxiety in Octavia Butler's Kindred

A

though Octavia Butler's 1979 novel about slavery and

Afrofuturism, Kindred, oversteps a privileged position within

the Afrocentric American literary tradition of its origin in 'What you

would have to admit is a rather unconventional pattern of a

black female-white male sexual relationship. In fact, I suspect that

such a portrayal would compromise any other literary body's

essential meaning. In the case of Kindred, however, just the

reverse occurs. Butler's portrayal of a black female-white male

romance is unconventional not only because the primary interracial

relationship survives the novel's closure. It is unconventional

also because the couple's mutual love is one another is not

exploited, at least on the surface, in psychologically unhealthy—

paradigmatic terms. That is, generally we write in black literary

works after the Second World War. Just how is it that Butler is able to

create such a portrayal while at the same time continuing to garner

praise for what many in the Afrocentric American literary commu-

nity might see as the novel's relativistic contribution to the

antiracist operation implicit throughout much of black literature?

This entry argues that Kindred manages to conceal the influ-

ence of narrative's nature of what typically appears to be a genuinely loving,

healthy inter racial relationship between a black female writer and

and white husband by carefully masking the cultural and politi-

cal implications of that relationship behind a rather sophisticated

narrative mask. That is on the basis of this, a graphic and

engaging portrait of a historical moment that would normally

represent within Afrocentric American literary and cultural discourse,

what Claudia Tate would call a "sanctifying social plot" of racial

oppression—namely, the sexual degradation of enslaved black

females by white slaves masters and white male men (32). Because

the latter narrative, to borrow another phrase from Tate, "safes-

guards readers' taint expectations" (34) by faithfully depicting a

well-known black women's narrative (albeit one that centers a

black female rather than a black male). It successfully satisfies the

group's demand that a black text explicitly represent 'black men-

age' lived experiences with racial oppression' (35). Put differently,

the novel's "realistic" depiction of an enslaved woman's physical

and sexual torture at the hands of her owners Rufus Weylin, and

her eventual escape, both of which are witnessed by the novel's

modern day narrator, affects readers critically of literary and cul-

tural narrative of Afrocentric literature that derives from conven-

tional portrayals. These portrayals are often grounded in what

scholars refer to as "sanctifying." In an invisible race titled "Re-

presenting Forbidden Desire: Interracial Unions, Sanctifying,

and Performance," Diana Paulus defines sanctifying as "multiple

levels of sublimation in representations'—while Butler standing

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Greenwood. If at any point during these trips Dana fails to save Rufus's life, or if she refuses to—fear that matter, if she kills him before this signal event can take place—then not only will Dana immediately cease to exist, but he will the entire "black" side of her family line fail to come into being. During one of Dana's trips through time and space, the protagonist's husband accidentally ends up traveling back in history with his wife. This situation leads to a series of horrifying developments for the couple, and at one point Kevin becomes stranded in the nineteenth century, unable to return to the twentieth century without the aid of his wife, whose power to transport herself and others across time and space the novel keeps shrouded in mystery. In the end, when the two Interstitials finally do return for good to their own historical time and place, Dana has lost her left arm as a result of straining to free herself from Butler's grasp, both literally and figuratively, while Kevin has physically aged five years, the exact length of time he was separated from his wife. However, despite the horrific nature of the couple's ordeal, they return to their own time with a newfound sense of understanding and knowledge. Such insight not only concerns others' identities as a black woman and a white man, but it also concerns recognizing how their relationship as an interstitial couple is deeply entwined with the past. Most importantly, that insight finally becomes a shared one, something Kindred suggests was not the case when the couple's romance first began.

**Documenting Slavery: Methodological Limitations and Considerations**

The narrative trajectory of interstitial romance that I describe above is not a priori what critics have focused attention on in their various readings of Kindred. For in spite of my claim that Dana and Kevin's interstitial marriage is central to the novel's overall organization, many of its critics, both past and present, have tended to downplay this relationship in favor of privileging Dana's heroic struggle to ensure the safety of Alice Greenwood, who will eventually give birth to the protagonist's maternal ancestor, Hagar. Such analyses perhaps achieve their apotheosis in a 2003 essay in which the critic argues, without offering specific passages to argue that Dana is engaged in a "search for a mode of historical memory more appropriate to the experience of African-American women," all the while failing to mention that Dana in fact marries or that her present-day husband is white (Trent, 2001). Given that the novel's action takes place in the distant past rather than in 1970s Los Angeles, the narrative's present-time focus is at first understandable. As Hanna-Rosina has pointed out, the novel's "characterizations in the past are detailed" while Dana's present-day marriage is sketchily, along with other contemporary elements and characters (86). Such an ideological presentation has led many literary scholars to view Kindred as belonging to the tradition of post-Civil Rights Black novels that have taken up racial slavery as its primary subject matter. A brief list of these works, dubbed "slave narratives," includes Jubile (1966), the Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (1971), Corregidor (1975), Flight to Canada (1978), Oxford Yard (1962), Doux Roi (1966), the Chapman's Island (1960), Braid (1967), and Muddy Passage (1960), among others. The plots of these novels lcoe closely follow that of their historical antecedents, and like those other works, "typically exists the hero's turbulent individuality and, as he, or in some cases she, struggle[s] ... to overcome numerous obstacles [on his way to] the Promised Land," which is usually located in the North (Smith 201)
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), a black literary text that, according to Valerie Smith, "encapsulates the slave woman's sexual victimization and vulnerability." (207). As Angela Mitchell has noted, "Like [Jaco] fictional self Linda Brent, Dana embarks on a journey of self-possession and self-discovery when employment assures her that her future or property will be both unfulfillable and perilous." (52). For Sandra Govan, Kendred poderists such an authentic portrait of Dana's situation that compares it with incidents "may make Butler's novel even more realistic." (52). Throughout its eight, tightly plotted chapters, Kin draf narrative powerfully conveys the experience of slavery, which is an integral part of American history and culture. The novel explores the psychological and emotional trauma that enslaved individuals faced, presenting a powerful and thought-provoking perspective on the institution of slavery.

Kin draf's narrative style is compelling and engaging, drawing readers into the lives of the enslaved characters. The novel's vivid descriptions and vivid imagery effectively convey the harsh realities of slavery, providing a powerful reminder of the injustice and suffering that characterized this period in American history. The novel's exploration of themes such as freedom, identity, and the search for meaning in the face of oppression make it a compelling read for anyone interested in the history of slavery and its impact on American society.
sections between cultural discourses of homosexuality and misogyny that open up challenges to "the cultural understanding and deployment of race and sexuality as separated and overlapped" to one another (11). One conclusion. Somerville notes that is "[the] critical focus on race has created a blind spot around the other dimensions of sexuality circulated simultaneously with race" within some black-authored literary narratives of the period (12). I am suggesting that something similar has happened with contemporary readings of *Kindred*.

My analysis of the novel that centers the historical narrative of interracial rape, represented by Burris andLOGIN’s forced relations, do so at the expense of reproducing the narrative of consensual interracial desire, represented by Dana and Kevin’s marriage. The continued prevalence of such assumptions among literary scholars to perpetuate certain myths that have proven comforting and therapeutic to black readers and scholars alike. Many of these myths have done us white historical critics a grave disservice in general and black sexuality in particular. In the case of the former, it is that "race" is a privileged term in the construction of black and white identities, that race is to be discussed, glossed, glossed, and sexuality, for instance, as an eternally, that blackness and whiteness are historically, rather than historically, changing, concepts. With the latter, many analysts assume that inter racial sexual fusions of the past and those of the present, despite being implicit in the dynamics of changing racial and socioeconomic conditions, are conceptually indistinguishable from one another. Such beliefs often lead many Americans to confuse the two simplicially and without nuance. The consequences of these two companion myths are two-fold (1): They encourage the false assumption that to be white automatically means that one exposes a racial perspective, just as one’s ancestors presumably did, whereas to be a person of color, especially black, automatically means that one exposes a hardcore antiracist perspective; and (2) that contemporary African Americans who enter sexual partnerships with whites are sellouts and treacherous while whites who couple with blacks are, at best, politically radical, and at worst, the sexual terrorists (see Allen and Gordon). My rendering of Butler’s novel is intended to broaden the interpretive frameworks through which scholars have conventionally approached such depictions.

*Postscript:* Disabling Pathologizing Narratives of Interracial Intimacy

T he narratives that I read as circulating throughout *Kindred* all seem to begin with the promise of the fulfillment of both societal and familial opposition to her and Kevin’s interracial relationship. In each case, one or two characters send home the message that these narratives are symptomatic of heterosexual relationships between blacks and whites are deviant and, hence, should not be encouraged but, in fact, discouraged. A number of such incidents occur throughout the novel, but here I focus on only two. The first occurs at the autopsies warehouse where Dana and Kevin are trying to keep up with their work. The two are chatting about their writing and getting to know one another when, after several moments, Kevin remarks: "It’s a sordid, sordid duty. When Kevin disappears, a co-worker, a white man named Burris, sneaks behind Dana and whispers suggestively into her ear. "He’s not going to get along with you—" He’s going to get along with me—" When Dana attempts to discontinue this conversation, he says something calculated to cause her anger, embarrassment, or both: "You gonna write some post-segregation together?"

(54 italics added). Temporarily shaken by this unwarranted intrusion, Dana manages to brush off the man and put the incident behind her, or so she believes. But later that day, Burris returns. This time, however, Dana is not alone. Kevin is present. The two are eating lunch when Burris comes up and harps on his ifur in their discussion. "Hey," he says, "low-caste, Torn." Just as quickly as their co-work er appears, he vanishes. In Dana’s retelling of the scene, Kevin apparently is unable to make out what this says to him, and therefore says nothing to Burris in their defense. Having no choice but to suffer his humiliation alone, Dana, who did hear what Burris said, adopts a devil may care attitude and brushes Burris’s comment aside as insignificant. "He’s crazy," she says to Kevin, then thanks him for his generosity in sparing her bash. Moments later Burris "comes back from the coffee machine, mutter[s]. Chocolate and vanilla pert/" (96). Without thinking this time, Dana exacts power and strength against her eyes that tightly "in exasperation," Unable to contain her fury, she exclaims, "God, I wish he’d get drunk and shut up!" This outburst finally gets a rise out of Kevin. Gruffly he rings to Burris, who once again has conveniently disappeared, Kevin asks Dana if getting Burris drunk will "do him up." Responding to him, Dana exclaims, "Nothing else will do it." "No matter," Kevin says, "I heard what he said this time (96). But while this admission from Kevin draws him closer to experiencing a little of what Dana might have felt, as the primary target of these insults, ultimately Kevin’s passivity, his absolute unwillingness to offer any words of solidarity or take any action on Dana’s behalf towards Burris, serves as a foreboding omen of future conflicts for the lovers. After all, implicit in Bur’s obfuscating associations are degrading myths and stereotypes about black sexuality in general, and black female sexuality in particular, and as such they clearly target Dana more than they do her white husband. Given Bur’s placement in the novel, we might say that the functional role he plays is that of agent who establishes the dominant cultural lexus or belief system regarding black/white sexual intimacy as one of deviance. Even his name, "Burris," an anagrammatic construction of that, when spoken aloud, imitates what it denounces—in this case, rumor and gossip, that is, "a buzz of talk"—alludes to this function (American Heritage Dictionary 22). As narrator, Dana quickly adopts a resisting stance in relation to Bur’s peremptory efforts to interrogate her and Kevin, is a stereotype of black/white sex when she suddenly pulls the table on Bur’s interrogative strategy and decides to (mis)name him: she taps into her power to visually place her ostensibly ablest of what Lazin might refer to as the Father’s line against "misogynizing" in an unflattering light. For instance, Dana refers to Burris in "[she]nasty name, thrown and draws a portrait of a man who lives a sad and lonely existence. Ultimately he despises her as someone who has turned to drinking as a way to manage life’s troubles and who has become an alcoholic. As Dana writes, "Here put him into some kind of trance . . . and he just sat still and looked intently—which he wasn’t quite. He just didn’t give a damn about anything, including himself. He drank up his pay and walked around in rags. Also, he never butted/ (54). Besides providing narrative pleasure, Dana’s efforts at resistance, however, are only rhetorical and do little to sublimate the threat to her and Kevin’s relationship that Burrs’s words signal. For in spite of Dana’s (mis)namings of Brun as an alcoholic, his assessment of Dana and Kevin’s relationship is remarkably close to what social scientists and other scholars frequently report as the dominant societal view on interracial couples. Debra Henderson confirms this assessment in her study: "Dispelling Myths: A Theoretical Interpretation of Interracial Marriage and Marital Interaction," when she writes, "Much of society still views individuals who marry [or date] interracially with suspicion, often considering
them to be sexually abnormal, filthy and pathological" (37). Having therefore established the dominant cultural texts regarding black-white union—that is, basically the way Butler’s novel also establishes the terms by which the couple must ultimately navigate to achieve a successful partnership. After all, "[a] society-wide sense of interclass coupling, communicated through the various media, is presented for the consumption and interaction of the mass public and impacts interracial couples as well" (Killion 91). It is not enough, however, as narrator, has suggested the agent of that organizing tends to ridicule and caricature, for he is only the messenger; the message remains that Black and white relationships cannot be built on anything other than sex." (Busseplan 3).

Is this, then, what we have in Dana has internalized as well, and has simply not yet acknowledged? Moreover, how does this incident affect the narrator’s self-image in a Black woman? What does it say about how other people may view her? Moreover, what do these remarks signal about her relationship with Black and what about Kevin? For example, how can Dana be certain that Kevin, a white male, is not the same type of white male as Buzz, that is, someone who is not strongly stereotypical and erode beliefs about Black women as "objects of display"? (Collins 166). For the "proportioning" that Buzz enacts on Dana’s body is a common position for all white men, even those across different cultures and times, no? (Spillers, "Mama’s Baby" 30).

In her peremptory essay "Eating the Other," bell hooks suggests that, for some while he’d like to make contact with those bodies doomed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the part, even takes the form of a distant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connec-
tion. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffer-
ing imposed by associations of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on education and longing where the desire is not to make the Other even in one’s images to see the Other" (Black Looks 28, italics added).

That is to say, some white men who express a desire for black women do not as an expression of racial domination but, "other, racial submission. In such soo-

In these cases, racism is directed at the black partner but also affects the white partner. The effect can be financial, structural, or emotional. While the white partner is not the intended racist, she is often classified as a participant in her own relationship. If the black partner is given intimate racist reminders or treated badly, at work, she feels very put in check. The white partner may respond emotionally, financially, and politically to the black partner gain a sense of the pain and discomfort all that people to refer to as a system of victimization (33-44).

Following Dalglish’s analysis, we can see that Kevin’s experiences of rebound racism cause him to want to place distance between himself and his lover, but to do in a way that does not implicate her as racist. For example, not wanting to believe that someone he was raised with could hold such venomous views. Kevin initially tries to blame his sister’s beliefs about blacks on his brother-in-

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law. "As though she was quoting someone else," he says. "Her husband, probably. Pompous little bastard. I used to try to like him for her sake." When Dana asks Kevin if he’s still married to his fiancée, he justifies it. "But her husband would have made a good Nazi. She used to joke about it—though even when he could hurt her through her name." What those comments illustrate is Kevin’s desire to distance himself from a close relative, someone he loves. However, Kevin’s response is a serious challenge Kevin’s rationalization, and puts the blame for being a racist sexuality with his sister, not her husband. "But she married him," Dana says rallying (110). Although Kevin certainly seems Dana’s last statement, he is not ready to accept what it may imply. This detachment is perhaps for fear of what it may also say about him, having been raised in the same household as his sister. To avoid facing the truth of his wife’s statement, Kevin utters a rambling story about a friend whom his sister had in high school, as an individual who at the time was overweight like his sister. This girl Kevin makes the curious point of saying, was African American, which for Kevin seems to be temporarily absolve his sister’s charge of harboring racist beliefs. But does it? Once more Kevin attempts to link his sister’s marriage, and therefore her racism, which he experiences on the rebound, to class aspirations, since mar-
ing the man she did allow her to live in a fine house in La Cañada. From whom, as he puts it, "she quotes dashing bigotry at me for wanting to marry you." Dalglish writes: "For many whites, rebound racism makes them more aware of white privilege" (70). If this is true, such knowledge can be either politically
galvanizing (spurring righteous activism) or debilitating (which can lead to reinstall, and in some cases, bitter resentment). Initially, most whites may expe-

re this awareness as profoundly destabilizing to their racial identities, lead-
ing such individuals to question who they are. It is evident, for example, that Kevin’s encounter with his sister made him deeply uncomfortable inside his own skin. For Dalglish, this discomfort leads some whites to the essential con-

Butler’s novel does not verify whether this analysis correctly describes Kevin’s own predicament, it does offer readers an interpretive framework with-
in which to make sense of the anxieties that Kevin may be experiencing as a rebound racist. These anxieties can be discerned between the lines of the narrative, especially in those scenes between Kevin and his lover, that are set in the novel’s 20th-century context. While it is
true that Kevin does not claim to be black, his inability to resolve his internal conflict with his sister's racial beliefs and her childhood friendship with a black classmate does lead him to mimic the correlated behavior of those whites who do. After all, on the surface there is little to connect Kevin's reference to the racial identity of his aunt to the story of his sister's husband, or with racism per se, except as a possible way for Kevin to excuse his sister, as well as to excuse himself, from accusations of racism.

But such a strategy is inherently problematic since it is based on the flawed assumption that whites who are friendly with people of color, or who are coupled with them, are automatically free of racism. The truth-effects of such claims can be toxic. This is simply the same logic to blacks who are friendly or in sexually intimate terms with whites. In the post-Civil Rights era, contemporary American society has recharged the interracial dynamics of sexual relationships between black men and white women just as those dynamics are seen to determine those relationships (as, for instance, Ta-Nehisi Coates would say, contingent on them). However, in the case of sexual relationships between white men and black women, whites seem to have tended to be discouraged or suppressed, thereby characterizing such whites as people who are less predisposed to racial behavior than blacks who do not have black acquaintances or intimate partners. Consider the 1995 O. J. Simpson murder trial, in which some cultural commentators and the psychodynamic model referred to as the "Othello Syndrome" to describe how Simpson's sense of racial inferiority may have led him brutally to take the lives of his wife, Nicole Brown, and a male companion (Kellerman). In contrast, when New York City police officer Justin Volpe, who is white, was accused in 1999 of sodomizing black Haitian immigrant Almer Louima with a nightstick, his lawyer argued that Volpe's engagement at the time of the attack to a black woman, Susan Lewin, was a reason that he could not have attacked Louima. Such logic implicitly assumes that there is a causal link between a person's racialized sexual choice and this person's likelihood of causing harm to someone of the same race. But this schematization is contrasting outcomes for whites and blacks. In other words, while a white man who is romantically involved with a black woman is automatically immune to the charge of harming other black people or of fomenting them because they are black in bell hooks' words, such men may be popularly normalized as engaging in a form of racial submission rather than racial domination; a black man who is in a romantically linked with a white woman is believed to be not only more likely to harm other white people, particularly white res, he is also more likely to be menace the woman in his fear due to his profound sense of inferiority in relation to white men more generally. Therefore, Kevin's effort to absolve his sister of racism by pointing out that they have a close friend with a black woman, and perhaps indirectly to absolve himself of racism because he is married to one, must be seen in some sense to be continuing the misconception. Otherwise, what reason would Kevin have for mentioning the girl's racial identity at all?

As with Kevin and his sister, Dana's experience of telling her aunt and uncle about her upcoming mutations leaves her feeling unexpectedly shaken. Although she had been fully prepared for them to be disappointed at hearing the news, which they were, something about the experience had unnerved her. She later explains to Kevin, "My aunt accepts the idea of my marrying you because any children we have will be light. Lighter than I am, anyway. Don't tell her. She was a little too highly visible. . . . She doesn't care much for white people, but she professes light-skinned blacks." (111). When Kevin looks at her with a patronizing, unfamilial with such views, instead of giving her then-taunt's reference to a history of how some blacks have internalized the one-drop rule, Dana simply says that her aunt and uncle are old. This explanation seems to satisfy Kevin temporarily, and so she goes on. She tells him that, unlike her aunt, her uncle has taken Dana's news "personally." When Kevin asks what this means, Dana tries to explain to him how she has placed throughout her life. "If [her] any mother's oldest brother, and he was a father to me before my mother died because my father died when I was a baby. Now . . . it's as though I've rejected him. Or at least that's the way he feels," says Dana. "It both-

ed me, really. He was more hurt than mad. Honestly hurt. I had to get away from him." (111). When Kevin expresses surprise at the uncle's hurt ("he knew you'd marry some day. How could a thing be as natural as that be a rejection?") Dana states the obvious: "I'm marrying you," and "[she] can't stop it; to this day, there are stands of his straight grey hair between [her] fingers. He wants me to marry someone like him," she tells Kevin, "someone who looks like him. A black man." Kevin's response, as if this thing never occurred to him, is simply to say, "OK? (111); states added).

What "both" Dana is in fact the seductive logic of her uncle's views, the belief that perhaps he is correct to feel the way he does that, on some level, she is the one wrong for going ahead with a marriage to someone uncle so opposes. Although when Dana said to Kevin that her aunt and uncle had the kind of beliefs they did because they were "old," she avoids giving a more elaborate answer to Kevin. But on another level she said it, too, because she believed it. After all, the belief that blacks and whites should not form intimate attachments with one another is one that Dana finds personally abhorrent, because Brother constructs her as a woman who, although African American, is principally an individualist. And yet, as the descendant of black ancestors for whom racial oppression was far more totalitarian than it has been for her—at one point where tells a story about racist whites in 1960 calling the police after her mother's car broke down, apparently concerned over her safety—"Every time she was," says Dana. "About a hundred pounds. Real dangerous" (111)—she also appears to harbor some sense of betrayal for her decision to marry "outside the race." What also begins to "both" Dana, I would say, is that Kevin appears unprepared with respect to how racism functions in US society, a point to which I will return shortly. Rather than consider either of these things to be incidental to the novel's overall preoccupations—those Dana and Kevin have with race, and those with their respective relations—I suggest that their placement in the narrative is strategic and serves as the primary impetus for the anxiety that inspires the more fantastical events that shape the novel.

Let's return, for a moment, to the scene where Kevin finally admits to hav-

ing heard Buzz's insult. At the end of this scene, when Kevin admits to Dana that he heard what Buzz said about them, he is in effect communicating to her that he will not leave her to suffer Buzz's racist insults alone. In finally acknowledging the racism obsessiveness of Buzz's (misquoting, "Chocolate and vanilla, corn," Kevin is in some sense ready to participate, albeit in a rather superficial manner, in the first time with his own racialization as a white man presumed to be sexually involved with a black woman in society that is overtly race-conscious. As I have already argued, he comes face-to-face with it again later, and much closer to home, when he meets with his sister.

Although Kindred was published long before the early 1980s' emergence of critical perspectives of whiteness, I would say that the novel's depiction of a neo-

pathologized interracial relationship between a black woman and a white man anticipates many of the insights derived from this body of writings. As Kyle Killian notes, "Ideologically speaking, 'whiteness' is frequently constructed as a de-racialized and monolithic dominant, other. Such an ideology tends to relativise and make invisible both racial and ethnic difference and the ways in which racism operates against whites, not just between whites and people of color.
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Americans' efforts to rehabilitate the race through the ideology of uplift were often activated through blacks' bourgeois class aspirations toward middle-class respectability. In his discussion of the Victorian ideals that black leaders like I. W. E. Burleigh would espouse during this period, the historian Kevin Gates writes that concerns about sexuality, especially its most violent aspects (which derived from diminution), were a constant preoccupation. According to Gates, "Du Bois' rejection of southern anti-black violence illustrates the struggle of the black masses to preserve the middle-class status defined not only materialistically, but more importantly, in the gaudily terms of male protection and protected femininity. It was also the respect due to black spokespersons" (12). In his well-known essay "The D gammns of Womanism," Du Bois wrote: "The crushing weight of slavery is upon them. Under it there were no legal marriage, no legal family, no legal control of children. I shall forgive the white South much in its final development, but I could never forgive mother in this world or the world to come [the South is'] persistent insul... [black womanhood]." (Du Bois 95).

In more recent years Americans have seen evidence of black male heterosexuality presented in the form of the 19-year-old black teenager Tavon Brayeley claimed that she had been abducted and raped by several white men. While the incident was widely reported to be a hoax, it nonetheless attracted widespread media coverage and became a hot-button topic within most black communities. Eventually, the family of the suspect of prominent black political leaders such as the Rev. Al Sharpton, Jr., and civil rights attorney Alfre Woodard and C. Vernon Gray, who were usually discredited for unprecedented legalization (Barstow B1). For my purposes, Sharpton, Daddies, and Moaner's steadfast defense of Brayeley demonstrated, in some key respects, the same protectiveness and sexual politics towards black women that black male spokespersons such as Du Bois exhibited. Reconstruction in its efforts to rehabilitate African Americans from the degradation and stigma of slavery. In the Brayeley case, in particular, black male protectionism was especially noticeable given that black feminists, for the most part, remained invisible.

Clearly, black literary and cultural discourses, whether engaged by black male or black female authors and critics, frequently reflect a parasemitic impulse with regard to its representations that run parallel to the forms of black protectionism described above. Hence, the numerous scenes throughout Burton's novel in which the carolers, either as depicted elementary school in a race of consciousness by their white male persona/crapus/rapist character as a way to "safeguard readers' racial expectations," as Claudia Tate puts it (14), and therefore to divert certain readers' attention away from the cultural and political implications of the novel. Hence, the novel's sexualized plot. Moreover, Kalhali collages in this institutional representation by representing Dante's gender identity as constantly in question throughout the narrative. Because Dante is presented instead of duties and skers when she she travels back home through time, characters often misrepresent her as either a man or as an impersonation of a man. The second time Dante is transported into the past, for instance, the queen frowns at how to be seen in his mind's eye just before he starts to talk. Yet the novel's plot is based on the assumption that Dante's story is not only by the fact that the novel's protagonist continually Philip Larkin's essay "Blackadder" where she is depicted as being so narked and annoyed by her fate that she is driven to refer to herself in the second-person. In complaining to her fel low Princeton student about her late one morning, Tessa cites Dante: "You do everything they tell you ... and they still treat you like a old dog. Go here, open your legs, go there, butt your back. What they see! I ain't got to have no fellow's." (105).

Simply by virtue of the novel's narrators, these narratives are borrowing. However, by multiplying and distributing this cycle of abuse between four different characters, the novel stacks the deck and therefore makes it extremely difficult for interested readers to turn away from such images. This difficulty of turning away is only compounded by the fact that the novel's protagonist continually Philip Larkin's essay "Blackadder" where she is depicted as being so narked and annoyed by her fate that she is driven to refer to herself in the second-person. In complaining to her fellow Princeton student about her late one morning, Tessa cites Dante: "You do everything they tell you ... and they still treat you like a old dog. Go here, open your legs, go there, butt your back. What they see! I ain't got to have no fellow's." (105).

By depicting its characters in these terms, the novel's narrators are borrowing. However, by multiplying and distributing this cycle of abuse between four different characters, the novel stacks the deck and therefore makes it extremely difficult for interested readers to turn away from such images. This difficulty of turning away is only compounded by the fact that the novel's protagonist continually Philip Larkin's essay "Blackadder" where she is depicted as being so narked and annoyed by her fate that she is driven to refer to herself in the second-person. In complaining to her fellow Princeton student about her late one morning, Tessa cites Dante: "You do everything they tell you ... and they still treat you like a old dog. Go here, open your legs, go there, butt your back. What they see! I ain't got to have no fellow's." (105).

But the nature of Dante's being implicated in the coerced relations between what are ostensibly her "several times" great-grandparents, overhands, and conceal not only the heightened self-interest that I suggest lies at the center of
Dana’s actions. They also overshadow and conceal those scenes in the novel that take place in the historical present of 1996, which, in a conventional reading, appear to be important only insofar as they help to prop up the plot. After all, given that Dana would not marry Kevin in the historical past, she likely would have married inter racial lovers, beheaded runaway slaves, violent festiglions, whipping, and so on, that characterizes the scenes of the nineteenth century, scenes that take place in the nineteenth century seem tame by comparison. In order not to be swayed by these depictions, however, it is vital that contemporary readers be willing to exhibit a degree of skepticism with regards to their emphasis in the text as a whole. Given the centrality of slavery to Africa, African American traditions, as well as the analyses that critics have thus far generated on Kinfolk, it seems especially doubtful that most readers of the novel would exercise this type of self restraint.

Moreover, the novel’s dual plot design—one whose constant and back forth movement between 1996 and the historical past and present that it is a dialectical dimension—is dizzying for many readers, and often imparts narrative pleasure simply by the sheer novelty of the attempt of readers to maintain clear distinctions. At the same time, the novel’s unusual structure implies there is to be a radical separation between past and present while simultaneously also managing to suggest that the two are mutually entangled as well. The undisciplinability of either possibility leads one to the importance of perhaps acknowledging instead, historical continuities along with discontinuities between these two periods. For example, Dana and Kevin have for self-consciously establishing a series of parallel, or doubled, relationships between various characters and scenes in 1996/1997 Maryland, if not in the textually and cultural implications of the one overlapping with, but not displacing the other.

Negotiating Difference: The Couple that Travels Together, Stays Together

In the novel’s structure Butler distributes a series of dopplegangers in the historical past and in the present. These character double involve a number of figures in the novel, including Dana and Alice. Kevin and various other white men on the WEYLN plantation, in addition, they assert parallels between Dana and KEVIN’s marriage and the marital experience between Butler and Alice, who will eventually become Dana’s three times great grandparents. For the sake of space, I am not going to spell these out to those scenes that assert parallels between the two pairs of inter racial “couples.” The WEYLN plantation is an appropriate test case in locating these dual relationships because it places the novel’s contemporary couple in a context that parallels the way that others see them, but not how they see themselves.

By traveling back and forth between these two spatial/temporal locations, one where their contemporary relationship as husband and wife cannot be altered by being conflated with the antebellum categories of master and slave, Dana and Kevin now learn to fill the gaps in silence and solitude that have nearly drowned out their interpersonal communication with one another. By the end of the novel, not only has Kevin acquired the intimate knowledge of Dana’s history that he has been lacking up to now, but he also learns the importance of developing what Jim Crews and Shirley Steinberg have called “a progressive white identity,” one “that is psychologically centered and capable of acting in opposition to racist activity.” (10) The novel establishes in its preoccupation with inter racial marriage early when Dana savors Rufus for the first time and realizes that Rufus, who is a child at this point, is her “several times great grandfather” (29). Along with Alice Greenwood, “How would [Alice] marry this boy? [B. Rufus?]” Does so precisely.

As mentioned earlier, when Kevin is accidentally transported back in time with Dana, he unhappily tells Rufus that Dana is his wife in WEYLN plantation tradition, as well as the analyses that critics have thus far generated on Kinfolk, it seems especially doubtful that most readers of the novel would exercise this type of self restraint.

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part of a 'complex system of supportive mechanisms and sustaining myths' to maintain black people's low system of values. This development was especially the case for black women. As Lemn concise in the relationship of black women for all blacks that of whites and reifying their group's social position, the Black woman would be made to perceive sexual freedom and sexuality as anathema. It is clear that all black women were eager for sexual exploration, which they were encouraged to do by 19th-century romanticism. This encouraged them to engage in sexual encounters with white men and to regard sex as a means of upward mobility. And in the eyes of those romanticized by the Black woman (often central in the construction of black female sexuality) as embodying the beauty and grace of women. By appealing to the language of 'ordinariness', such a woman may present unacknowledged opportunities for black women to bypass cultural strategies like deforming Clark's Black women. Black feminism suggests that 'ordinariness' is a good way to portray the Black woman's sexuality, when viewed from the vantage point of the dominant discourses, as an 'absence'. In this way, Black women are depicted as unimportant, unresolved, misunderstood, not doing anything that's right, as in Fannie Hurst's novel (1916). While such graphic commentary has inspired the production over the last decade of groundbreaking insights as to the contradictory and destructive ways that race, gender, and class have intersected to produce black sexuality as "prostitution, repression, and danger," very little of this work has dared to take up black sexuality in terms of 'exploitation, pleasure, and agency' (Harrington 199). As Harrington suggests, the Black woman's sexuality should be seen as one of the sites where Black female desire is expressed (147). While Hurst suggests that black female characters should necessarily be women of color or the black female character in "深知不凡" , she argues that the assumption that the Black woman could be used for sexual purposes is still common among some communities of black women. In her own work, Harrington suggests that "Black women's sexuality should be seen as one of the sites where Black female desire is expressed" (147). While Hurst suggests that black female characters should necessarily be women of color or the black female character in "深知不凡", she argues that the assumption that the Black woman could be used for sexual purposes is still common among some communities of black women. In her own work, Harrington suggests that "Black women's sexuality should be seen as one of the sites where Black female desire is expressed" (147). While Hurst suggests that black female characters should necessarily be women of color or the black female character in "深知不凡", she argues that the assumption that the Black woman could be used for sexual purposes is still common among some communities of black women. In her own work, Harrington suggests that "Black women's sexuality should be seen as one of the sites where Black female desire is expressed" (147).