
Migratory Impulses: Fantasy Border Crossings in the Novels of Pauline Hopkins and Tananarive Due

Marlene D. Allen*¹

¹United Arab Emirates University – United Arab Emirates

Abstract

From its very beginnings, the African American experience involved the crossing of borders not only between countries but between continents. This historical experience of travel and migrations is often replicated in works by African American fantasy writers, as these writers use the creative freedoms inherent in fantasy fiction to revisit the past, stressing how it is ever-present in the lives of African Americans. Two fantasy novels, Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) and Tananarive Due's *My Soul to Keep* (1998), evoke the migratory history of African Americans that began with slavery and illustrate how this history has contemporary ramifications upon the lives of African Americans, especially black women. In a sense, the characters of the two novels cross not only spatial borders but also temporal ones, as they become literal embodiments of the African American past coexisting in the present. By having the characters Reuel Briggs and David Wolde travel between the United States and Ethiopia, the texts espouse alternative and empowered visions of Africa than have traditionally been portrayed in Western culture and history. Ethiopia is figured in both texts as a synecdoche for the greatness of past, present, and future African culture and civilization. Thus these two novels are enlightening fantastical tales that signify upon the lived historical experiences of African Americans and project visions of a future Africa as a utopia.

*Speaker