

Almost White But Not Really: The Tragic Mulatta in William Wells Brown's *Clotel*

Nirupama Dey

*Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English, Duliajan College
(niru11992@gmail.com)*

Dr. Shreyashi Mukherjee

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Assam University, Assam University,
Diphu Campus
(shreyamukh2014@gmail.com)*

Abstract :

This brief study takes 'critical race theory' as a framework and looks at William Wells Brown's *Clotel* as a mixed race novel. Critical race theory, which examines the emergence and consequences of racial discourses, presents the tragic mulatta as a literary rendition of mixed race identity that emerged during slavery and worked as a gendered racial identity. Tragic mulattas are mostly quadroons who look exactly white. They are depicted as sad and self-destructive figures who fall in the middle of the black-white racial polarity. This study suggests that in *Clotel*, the in-between location of mixed race women add to their burden and make them tragic mulattas, which remains true for *Clotel* too. Her harsh life tells us about the evils of slavery. However, rather than being a fragile figure, *Clotel* is a strong woman who fights institutional slavery for her child. She 'passes' as a white man to meet her child, indicating the tenuous nature of racial ideology based on physiological difference. If *Clotel* can take on the identity of a white man, there is no essential whiteness or blackness as slavery posits. Hence, because of her sad life and death, *Clotel* is a tragic mulatta. She is a resilient figure who fights the institution of slavery and reveals its biases and weaknesses.

Keywords: 'Critical Race Theory', Slavery, Mixed Race Identity, 'Tragic Mulatta,' 'Passing'.