

STRIKING FEATURES

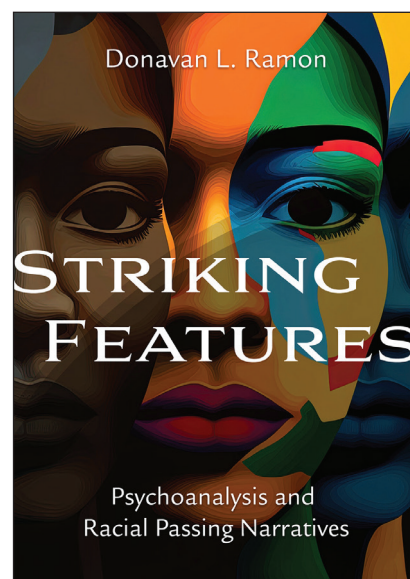
Psychoanalysis and Racial Passing Narratives

by *Donavan L. Ramon*

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Macon, Georgia—"STRIKING FEATURES deploys Freudian psychoanalysis in innovative and provocative ways to frame its discussion of racial passing in American literature," says Sinéad Moynihan, author of *PASSING INTO THE PRESENT: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION OF RACIAL AND GENDER PASSING*. "Privileging thematic continuities (race learning, the death drive) over texts' historical proximity and foregrounding works of fiction and nonfiction by both white and African American writers, *STRIKING FEATURES* significantly expands both the 'canon' of passing literature and existing scholarly treatments of the subject. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the ongoing ramifications of racial passing in American literature and life."

Donavan L. Ramon's work is deeply interdisciplinary, threading psychoanalysis and other theoretical perspectives throughout persuasive close readings of twentieth and twenty-first century racial passing narratives. Beginning with the premise that Sigmund Freud created psychoanalysis to contend with his own anxieties about race, Ramon explores canonical and non-canonical passing narratives using psychoanalytic perspectives. He closely reads narratives by Charles Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Jessie Fauset, Anita Reynolds, Danzy Senna, Vera Caspary, Anatole Broyard, and Philip Roth to advance several provocative claims about the intersections of passing and psychoanalysis. Chief among them are the youthful trauma and psychological consequences of racial passing. For instance, while the death drive motivates fictional racial passers to hasten their own deaths, those who pass in real life often seek their own immortality through print despite hiding their Blackness. Throughout this analysis, Ramon underscores the nuances of racial passing in school as the place of trauma for Black subjects. The monograph concludes with a meditation on today's ineffective language of race, which hinders racial progress.

"*STRIKING FEATURES* is a fascinating and timely application of analytic theories to the question of racial passing. Through subtle, empathetic, and insightful close readings, Donovan Ramon suggests new ways of thinking about both Freudian theory and contemporary debates on race: his book is an important contribution to both fields."

—*Rubén Gallo*, author of *FREUD'S MEXICO: INTO THE WILDS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS*

"*STRIKING FEATURES* is a thoughtful, nuanced, and eminently readable analysis of racial passing, cogently arguing that a psychoanalytic lens offers us a new and dynamic way of reading a narrative that is part and parcel of American cultural history."

—*Baz Dreisinger*, author of *NEAR BLACK: WHITE-TO-BLACK PASSING IN AMERICAN CULTURE*

"Donavan Ramon's probing study of light-skinned African American's motivations to pass for white connects to psychological principles of Freud, Fanon, and others. Their themes of figurative death (of identity and family), sexual deviation (miscegenation), and racial gratification (white privilege) adds an important perspective on both the literary imagination and the lived experience."

—*E. Dolores Johnson*, author of *SAY I'M DEAD: A FAMILY MEMOIR OF RACE, SECRETS, AND LOVE*

Donavan L. Ramon is assistant professor of English at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He holds a BA in English from Hunter College and a PhD in English (African American Literature) from Rutgers University. Ramon has published articles in the *College Language Association Journal*, *Philip Roth Studies Journal*, and was a guest editor for *South Atlantic Review*. Learn more about him at www.donavanramon.com.

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