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Diplomová práce

Láska a bigotnost uvnitř afroamerické komunity v
románech Zory Neale Hurston *Jonah's Gourd Vine* a
Jejich oči sledovaly Boha a vybraných povídkách

Intraracial Love and Bigotry in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and
Their Eyes Were Watching God and Selected Short
Stories by Zora Neale Hurston

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Anotace

Diplomová práce se bude věnovat analýze vztahů postav ve dvou románech a vybraných povídkách Zory Neale Hurston z hlediska rasové tematiky a rasismu, a to speciálně uvnitř afroamerické komunity. Rozbor se bude zaměřovat zejména na projevy rasismu, rasově motivované bigotnosti, případně násilí, a naopak projevů náklonnosti, lásky či sexuální přitažlivosti založené na vzájemném vnímání rozdílů v sytosti tónu pleti (tj. světlejší a tmavší Afroameričané) vybraných fiktivních postav. V počátečních kapitolách se práce pokusí definovat pojmy týkající se fenoménu odlišných tónů barvy pleti uvnitř afroamerického etnika ve Spojených státech amerických a taktéž historickému pozadí, které se zkoumanou problematikou velmi úzce souvisí. Dále se práce bude snažit nastínit motivaci, předpoklady a osobitý přístup autorky rozebíraných literárních děl k tomuto jevu afroamerické kultury, jenž propojuje prvky osobní zkušenosti, antropologického výzkumu a literární tvorby. V hlavní části práce analyzuje a interpretuje způsob jakým Hurston zobrazuje danou problematiku v románech *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Jejich oči sledovaly Boha* (1937) a povídkách "Magnolia Flower" a "Now You Cookin' With Gas" zakončené závěrem.

Abstract

The diploma thesis will examine relationships in two novels and a few short stories by Zora Neale Hurston regarding race and racism within the African-American community. The analysis will focus on individual manifestations of racism, racial bigotry, possibly violence and signs of affection, love and sexual attraction based on mutual perception of skin tone differences (lighter and darker pigmentation) between the selected fictional characters. In the introductory chapter the thesis will try to define key terms used to describe the phenomenon of differing skin tones. A brief insight into the historical background to the history of the United States related to the topic will be presented in the following chapter. The thesis will further address Hurston's inner motivation, prerequisites and individual approach to this phenomenon of the African-American culture which skillfully connects elements of personal experience, anthropological research and her literary qualities. The main task of the thesis will be the analysis and interpretation of the style that Hurston uses to depict the theme in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and short stories "Magnolia Flower" and "Now You Cookin' With Gas" followed by a conclusion.

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Introduction

“It would be against all nature for all the Negroes to be either at the bottom, top, or in between. We will go where the internal drive carries us like everybody else. It is up to the individual.”¹

– Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

The scope of themes in Zora Neale Hurston’s works of fiction is very extensive and her significance in the field of African-American literature, anthropologic studies, folklore and Harlem Renaissance is unexceptionable and praised by many. Her legacy does not revolve around literature but is far more complex. Using her literary works, she has established her own, fresh perspective for viewing black people with no fear to show their genuine lives as she had seen them through her anthropological experience, stripped from idealization, political ideologies or stereotypes as she did in writing *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*. Other times, she just let herself celebrate the black culture, romanticize, and provide the reader with an undeniable vital strength through the persistence of her powerful female characters as it was the case with Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The famous American literary critic Harold Bloom sums up his reflection of Zora by calling her a vitalist, finally assessing her as “outrageous, heroically larger than life, witty in herself and the cause of wit in others [who] belongs now to literary legend.”²

In the following chapters, this diploma thesis tries to cover the theme of the intraracial relationships within the African-American community as Zora Neale Hurston depicted it in her works. Being a member of the Black America allowed her to witness, experience, understand and subsequently record innumerable intraracially motivated situations. Her fictitious characters impersonate various patterns of behavior reflected in their love relationships, bigotries, violent acts, usage of language, all driven by intraracial forces. The central part of this diploma thesis singles out these types of situations from the plots of novels *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and selected short stories by Hurston. It determines how these situations impact, either advantage or disadvantage light-skinned or dark-skinned

¹ Hurston, Zora, N. (2010). *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*. (New York: HarperCollins), 192.

² Bloom, Harold. (2009). “Introduction,” in H. Bloom, *Bloom’s Guides: Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York: Infobase Publishing), 11.

African-American protagonists and it also explores and interprets those situations, trying to identify the internal motifs for such intraracially-colored behavior.

The outline of this thesis begins with the more theoretical chapters that somehow relate to and are necessary for a full understanding of the intraracial relationships within Blacks in American literature. Those are e.g. the key terms definitions, historical background, Hurston's personal conception and the concept of the mulatto in nineteenth and twentieth century American literature. The thesis then proceeds with the practically-focused sections, which consist of four parts dedicated to individual analyses of Hurston's novels and short stories. The final chapter is a conclusion, which summarizes the findings of the thesis.

1. Key Terms Definitions

Some of the crucial and frequently used terms that will be worked with throughout the upcoming paragraphs will be defined. The phenomenon of the “intraracial” as in the opposite to its well-known and largely used counterpart – interracial - might need further explanation as it is not so common in an ordinary speech and is even not to be found in professional literature nearly as often. The scope of the term will also be specified as it will be worked with throughout the thesis.

Next, the word bigotry will be briefly defined and its difference from other words having similar connotations that are often misused and incorrectly interchanged in common speech, such as racism, discrimination, intolerance and prejudice will be explained. The word bigotry as well as the first term employed above carries major significance for the correct understanding of the analysis which the empirical part of the thesis is dedicated to.

1.1. The Intraracial

The subject of race has been a controversial topic. However, overall a lot more has been written from the viewpoint showing the black versus white dichotomy rather than examining the discrepancies on the inside of one racial group. This thesis, as its main concern is to analyze books of one black American author, will therefore focus solely on blacks living in the time correlating with the setting and publication of both novels since they are both based on her own life in combination with her scientific research. The timeframe in focus thus consists of experiences of Blacks of nineteenth century, specifically a few years before Hurston was born for *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and twentieth century for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and “Now You Cookin’ with Gas”. The United States of America (mostly the South) of that time is the target location, which will be provided with necessary further context and history preceding the contemporary standards and ethos of Hurston’s time. The main distinguishing criterion will be the intensity of their skin tone. Lighter skinned blacks and blacks of dark complexion – both of an African-American descent – which makes them a part of the same group as it is perceived by society in general and which society refers to as homogenous, appears highly incoherent due to their skin tone. The fictional characters in the examined stories and novels experience life events and relationships differently, their complexion

constituting a strong factor alongside the ones of gender, material status, personality traits, etc. Historical background to the skin shade problem will be discussed in the following segments of the thesis.

1.2. Bigotry

According to Cambridge Dictionary, bigotry is “the fact of having and expressing strong, unreasonable beliefs and disliking other people who have different beliefs or a different way of life.”³ The meaning of the term bigotry (in this context racial bigotry) is often conflated with terms such as racism, discrimination and prejudice. Yet, these are not synonymous and cannot be equated. Out of these four terms, racism is the most complicated one. It is rather a system or complex consisting of many sociological and psychological levels. It can (and usually it does) involve each one of the other aforementioned phenomena. Racism refers both to a mode of thought that purports to explain differences between population groups and a system of racial hierarchy that privileges members of one racial group over the other.⁴ Both differences and hierarchies based mainly on status and power stemming from them are believed to be natural in various racial theories of so-called scientific racism branch. These are for instance biologically-determinist views such as Gobineau’s theory of inequality of the human races using anthropology and biology to justify the idea of one race being superior, and the other ones inferior. Through phenomena such as slavery, segregation and other forms of oppression of racial and cultural minorities, deeply ingrained in experience of modern society, the concept of racism represents a power structure that protects the interests of the dominant ethnic group.⁵

Harrell defines racism as:

a system of dominance, power, and privilege that is rooted in the historical oppression of subordinated groups that the dominant group views as inferior, deviant, or undesirable. The dominant group creates or maintains structures and ideology that preserve their power and privilege

³ BIGOTRY | meaning in *the Cambridge English Dictionary*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bigotry>

⁴ Ansell, Amy E. (2013). *Race and Ethnicity: The Key Concepts*. (New York: Routledge), 129.

⁵ Yee, June Y. (2008). Racism, Types of In Richard T. Shaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society* SAGE. pp. 1118–19.

while excluding subjugated groups from power, status, and access to resources.⁶

Racial bigotry in contrast to the quoted definition of racism lacks the structural dimension and is experienced more on an individual level. Secondly, bigots themselves do not necessarily possess the power to actively oppress the victims of their hatred on a larger scale. Therefore, they are not practicing racism as such. The fact that bigotry does not require the element of power for it to occur, allows for it to arise between members of the same race group or in a direction from the minority towards the major race (sometimes called reverse racism which became an unpopular term amongst scholars, who argue that it does not exist and moreover disrespects the real victims of institutional, systematic racism – the minorities). This is a crucial premise for the analysis.

The notion of racial bigotry goes hand in hand with the other terms of intolerance, discrimination and prejudice. Bigots according to the previous statements show preferable treatment to persons, who do not possess the qualities they tend to dislike, in this case skin tone, therefore they express **intolerance** against them. The victims at that point suffer racial **prejudice** due to the typical physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, facial features etc. **Discrimination** is hence a major consequence of all the factors combined, the apparent, tangible moment of worse treatment of a person because of their otherness.

⁶ Harrell, Shelley P. (2000). A Multidimensional Conceptualization of Racism-related Stress: Implications for the Well-being of People of Color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(1), 42-57.

2. The American “Mulatto”

In correspondence with Edward B. Reuter’s usage of the term “mulatto” in his *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918) The word will also be used in the sense he defined i.e.: “all those members of the Negro race with a visible admixture of white blood.”⁷ Defined as such, this term thus includes all persons of mixed blood regardless of the degree of whiteness or blackness. Given the nature of things, formerly the word mulatto was simply used to describe a mixture between a pure Negro and pure Caucasian race. As the race mixing went on throughout the years, there was a variety of different skin shades, depending on whether the person showed more of the Caucasian or Negro ancestral elements. These race mixture types were later categorized and some of the most distinguishable ones were given a name. In the table below, Davenport gives the following classification:

Factors.	Gametic formulæ.	Color.	Relative frequency.	Range of p. ct. in offspring.	Popular names (Jamaica).
Both absent	a_2b_2	White	1 : 16	0-11	{ “ Pass for white.” Mustifino. Mustiffee. Octoroon. Quadroon.
One present	Aab_2	Light colored	4 : 16	12-25	
Two present	$AaBb$	Medium colored (F ₁)	6 : 16	26-40	Mulatto. Mangro, Sambo. Negro.
Three present	A_2Bb	Dark colored	4 : 16	41-55	
All four present	A_2B_2	Black	1 : 16	56-78	

Picture 1: Heredity of Skin Color in Negro-White Crosses⁸

Mulattos in my conception when analyzing Zora N. Hurston’s works possess typical visible mixed blood features (light skin and tufted hair, black skin and blue eyes, dark skin combined with lank hair, fair skin, light but curly and by the structure reminiscent of negro person’s hair) and a wide variation of them.

Race mixing has clearly neither been happening exclusively in America, nor has it occurred just between black and white ethnicity. As Reuter states the obvious facts that

⁷ Reuter, Edward B. (1969). *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 11.
⁸ Davenport, Charles B. (1913). *Heredity of Skin Color in Negro-White Crosses*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 14.

“Mixture of blood is a characteristic of all races.”⁹ However, ordinary race mixing phenomenon itself might be, the circumstances under which it happened in the history of the United States, are certainly not. In fact, the whole problem is immensely complex with many historical events, personalities, laws, cultural, time and even regional specifics interfering in it. The whole black and/or white dichotomy with nothing in between made lives of those of a mixed origin complicated. Especially the so called “one drop rule,” according to which all people of any African ancestry were automatically and unexceptionally considered black, therefore did not acknowledge any biracial identities. The latent reasoning behind this simple rule was the danger, which all mixed people posed to the legally created institution of slavery dividing people to the oppressed (black) and dominant (white).¹⁰ Consequently, the presence of mulattos leads to a different perception of them in the African-American diaspora and their role in literature in the USA. Zora Neale Hurston’s characters are particularly being displayed in many intraracially motivated situations, which remains the main concern of the thesis.

⁹ Reuter, Edward B. (1969). *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 14.

¹⁰ Fontenot, Kara J. (2006) The Sociopolitical Construction of Race and Literary Representations of the Biracial Subject (Master’s Thesis) *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 12.

3. The Historical Background

3.1. Slavery

Harry H. Johnston (cited in Reuter, 1969) points out that: “in every case the half-caste races have arisen as the result of illicit relations between the men of the superior and the women of the inferior race.”¹¹ In a similar fashion, Edward B. Reuter develops the idea further, when he gives examples of such mingling between races from places all around the globe like Eskimos and Danes in Greenland, Chinese people and native Filipinos, or race mixing in Latin America, Native Americans and the first white settlers, Haiti and Malaysia. (Reuter, 1969 92-96) Even including Europe, a fitting example could be found in current Russian federation, which extends the Caucasus Mountains, where Asian races speaking Russian have mixed with Slavic people for centuries. Finally, the example of the African race mixing with the white race on the Northern American continent stands out among them all, as it entails the crucial element of the existence of slavery. None other of the mixed-blood races in the various regions were successfully and completely enslaved. The institution of slavery is unique to the African-American mulatto case and plays a significant role in the African-American history as well as in literature and to an extent still effects black Americans’ lives to this day.

To build on Johnston’s statement, in the case of African Americans, the unequal relation status stems not only from the premise of superior (white) and inferior (any other) race in general, but also the specific position, purpose and circumstances under which they were brought and kept in the newly established colonies of the New world. Unlike the indentured servants, who previously served the purpose of land care-taking, black slaves were not signed in by any contract, nor did they have any hope of obtaining freedom.¹² By the eighteenth century, however, the indentured servants started to dry out, which increased the popularization of African slavery. Partly stemming from this distinction between white indentured servants and black slaves having been brought from Africa by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, a variety of further differences in treatment of these two groups of workers began

¹¹ Reuter, Edward B. (1969). *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 88.

¹² Wolfe, B., & McCartney, M. (2015, October 28) Indentured Servants in Colonial Virginia. In *Encyclopedia Virginia*.

to occur. The indentured servants were often offered special privileges, since they became harder to obtain. They were also assigned to do lighter labor than the black slaves.¹³ This phenomenon seems crucial for later development of the hierarchies in which slavery operated and provides a basis for a specific intraracial division between mulatto slaves and dark slaves.

The means of bringing slaves under total control of their white masters were several – juristic (slave codes i.e. – a set of laws defining a slave as a piece of property with no rights), social – separation of slaves into groups dividing house slaves and field slaves.¹⁴ Finally, another huge factor in slavery times as Stephan Talty suggests in his *Mulatto America* was slaves' introduction to the white interpretation of Christianity,¹⁵ which will be elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

3.2. Slave Hierarchy and the Mulatto

The racial factor in slavery relates closely to the house and field slave partition. As a form of continuation of privileging of the white servants, the lighter skinned slave, the better the treatment and the lighter the labor. As the domestic work was easier to perform, the mulatto slaves were often given these inside-the-house duties such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, driving and taking care of the master's children. Spending quite a large portion of their lives close to their masters, their families and acquaintances, the house slaves acquired white people's habits, most notably their language. Although learning, intentionally, how to read or write was illegal, they still frequently managed to catch up on some knowledge just from everyday life experience, having access to master's books etc.

In stark contrast to house slaves, field hands – the darker slaves, spoke indigenous languages [or spoke African American Vernacular English] carried African names, and maintained a strong connection to the culture of their ancestors. They were often considered the most dangerous and prone to rebellion.¹⁶ This was, however, more of a circular than linear

¹³ New World Labor Systems: European Indentured Servants · African Passages, Lowcountry Adaptations. *Lowcountry Digital History Initiative*.

¹⁴ Lynch, Hollis. (2018). African Americans. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American/Slavery-in-the-United-States>.

¹⁵ Talty, Stephan. (2003) *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*. (New York: HarperCollins), 30.

¹⁶ House Slaves: An Overview. Gale Library of Daily Life: Slavery in America. Retrieved from *Encyclopedia.com*: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/house-slaves-overview>.

process. The main reason as to why the lighter slaves tended to find themselves under better conditions (meaning they remained house slaves as opposed to field hands and therefore performed less physically draining labor) lies in the fact that these mulatto slaves were often the result of a rape or seduction of a female slave by her master. Therefore, the master naturally showed some preferential treatment to his own children by making them house slaves. Ingraham describes this occurrence as follows:

Differences between the work of house servants and field hands led to sharp social class distinctions within the plantation system. Socially speaking, house servants were considered a privileged class among the enslaved population. Because of their physical proximity to the home of the plantation owner, they often absorbed the culture and associated material benefits of the master.¹⁷

These mulatto slaves were also considered to be “superior in intelligence,”¹⁸ (this speculation coming both from the white tone admixture and literacy caused by the presence of educated white people) which also underlined their better position.

What needs to be clarified though, is the fact that the “better treatment” of the mulatto descendants of the white masters, does by no means have an absolute validity and is not to be confused with a totally incorrect impression that such children were not obliged to work as hard as their darker counterparts in the same position. On the contrary, mixed slaves were more likely to receive a large amount of resentment and hatred from various people, on a psychological level, especially from the white mistress, who might have been jealous of a clearly illegitimate child plus the other non-mixed slaves, who might keep distance due to the slave’s visible connection or even resemblance to their master, her own husband. What Reuter perceives as a distinct occurrence caused directly by the institution of slavery, he expressed in the following comment, when he compared subordinate to superior relations under different conditions in other non-slavery cultures:

It seems to be the usual situation everywhere that the women of the lower races or the lower castes desire, seek, feel honored by the attention of the higher class men, and are enormously proud of their light-skinned, halfcaste children. The effect of slavery, so far as any effect can be shown, seems to

¹⁷ Ingraham, Joseph H. (1860). *The Sunny South: Or, the Southerner at Home, Embracing Five Years’ Experience of a Northern Governess in the Land of the Sugar and Cotton*. Philadelphia: G, G, Evans Publisher, 34-36.

¹⁸ Reuter, Edward B. (1969). *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 378.

be to lessen the amount of intermixture by separating and restraining the vicious elements, and so preventing an indiscriminate sexual relation.¹⁹

Such behavior would not be likely under the given conditions, where the women involved in such situations had been both physically and mentally terrorized and taken advantage of by the slave-holder. In common practice of adultery and rape, one could hardly imagine the African-American women “desire, seek and feel honored.” Therefore, since the very beginning the mother’s relation to her newly born light skinned baby frequently suffered major distortion.

Ultimately, the tension between the field and house slaves, created by the aforementioned practice, accordingly correlates with the tension between lighter skinned and darker skinned African Americans depicted by many authors of U.S. Southern literature as well as Zora Neale Hurston’s contemporaries and members of the Harlem Renaissance movement blossoming in the first half of the twentieth century.

3.3. Mingling

To give a brief framework of the whole issue with the African Americans with a mixed origin, Talty goes back to the mid-1600s, when it really started with Native Americans and black and white intermixtures, so that marriages were restricted by laws.²⁰

Later, with slavery double standards occurred concerning these types of relationships. These double standards had to do with gender. Stephen Talty mentions that “white men could have a black woman on the side and never pay any social cost.”²¹ White women, or more specifically women in general, remained at a disadvantage. Another important factor was a geographical one. The perception of miscegenation differed hugely depending on whether the South or the North was in question. Similarly, the situation appeared worse in the countryside and provincial towns as opposed to cities. The one part which stood out that Talty discusses as a highlight of the Northern environment is Five Points where:

race almost didn’t matter a kind of a free state where New Yorkers came to explore the most American taboos. And where the most despised and

¹⁹ Reuter, Edward B. (1969). *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 93.

²⁰ Talty, Stephan. (2003) *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*. (New York: HarperCollins), 53.

²¹ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 56.

written-off became some of the first Americans to raise their own mulatto flag.²²

In the South, however, the subject of amalgamation “was a private affair”²³ and not to be spoken of seriously, or in public. Most of these affairs were de facto rape resulting in a divide between the raped woman and her black partner. The word “partner” is intentionally used here instead of “a husband” because slave marriage did not belong among legally acknowledged acts and the legitimacy of the slave family relations as well as the futures of their children depended strongly on the slave master’s will.²⁴

There were also several cases of white masters engaged in long-term relationships with their black domestic slaves. These informal relationships could not be turned into marriages legally, since the purpose behind violation of black slaves’ civil rights in this specific matter was to keep the leading white race pure and unmixed. However, a lot of these informal relations between the whites and their mulatto or darker slaves were subject to assessment of the locally formed communities, especially in the later emancipation era.²⁵

By the end of 1863, a pamphlet about mixing races was issued and Talty marks this impulse as the time when the discussion of the topic went public.²⁶ Many years followed full of all sorts of different points of view, public figures and human rights activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Charles W. Chestnutt and Malcolm X., speaking in favor of race mixing in America and ways of how to make blacks free, including human rights, means and quality of education etc. A young intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois, “believed that culture was the way up and out of misery for African Americans,²⁷ in which regard he “saw the combination of black and white culture as producing the true, the final American.”²⁸ Talty goes as far as to claim that in writing *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) Du Bois had created a founding document of mulatto culture.²⁹

²² Talty, Stephan. (2003). *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*. (New York: HarperCollins), 62.

²³ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 62.

²⁴ Finkelman, Paul. (2006). *Encyclopedia of American Civil Liberties Volume 1 A-F*. (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group), 964.

²⁵ Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of American Civil Liberties Volume 1 A-F*, 964.

²⁶ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 70.

²⁷ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 85.

²⁸ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 100.

²⁹ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 102.

3.4. The Initial Effect of Christianity

Another factor that played a significant role among the enslaved African Americans and as Stephan Talty implies indirectly also a somewhat dividing factor within the race was Christianity. If the dark slaves were already in disadvantage in the matter of labor difficulty, with the introduction of Christianity, one more reason to be jealous of their lighter complexed brothers and sisters added up and that was their looks. As Talty highlights the importance of the skin color in Christianity through one black Baptist saying that: “Jesus came to me just as white as dripping snow” and a vision of “a small white man”, he points out that “this insistence on white visions became a tradition in black conversations.”³⁰ Not only were the whites and the light blacks considered more beautiful, innocent and human, with Christianity they were also supposedly closer to God. At least according to the white interpretation of the whole concept, which the white-focused society kept implanting into their understanding of the world. The rivalry, however, only apply to intraracial relations. The effect in the sphere of the interracial relationships was, in fact, entirely different in respect that “the slavemaster and the white man in general lost his final importance; there was now a higher source...”³¹

What occurs from what Talty described is that with the arrival of Christian religion, the amount of prejudice inside of the African-American race increased but on the other hand a new hope for all slaves – darker and lighter – emerged in relation to the white people.

Christianity started slowly but surely to replace the original hoodoo and magical beliefs that African Americans had formerly held, which is worth mentioning. Zora Neale Hurston was heavily preoccupied with the motif of voodoo rituals and practices.

³⁰ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 39.

³¹ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 41.

4. Zora Neale Hurston

4.1. Family Background from the Point of Skin Color

The topic of this thesis concerns the intraracial relations in her works and Zora Neale Hurston's own life appears to be the perfect source of the underlying experience and knowledge for many of the fictional characters. The analysis of the novels and stories in further paragraphs will make the similarities and parallels connected to Zora obvious.

As an African-American writer, Zora Neale Hurston without a doubt stood out among her contemporaries. Born in Alabama but raised in Eatonville, Florida, she was a sixth child of Lucy Ann Potts and John Hurston. Lucy's parents were both of an African-American descent and had personally experienced slavery. As Deborah G. Plant puts it, when she describes Lucy's childhood, Zora's mother was "small and nut brown"³² and "the prettiest and smartest black girl around."³³ Her family settled in the Notasulga area after Emancipation. John's parentage on the other hand was questionable. According to the description of his appearance as "yaller"³⁴ having "gray-green eyes"³⁵, Hurston's father was a mulatto, whose biological father was "some white man".³⁶ Zora Neale Hurston fictionalized the story of her parents and her own early childhood in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934).

To stick to the skin tone element, out of all the Hurstons' children, Zora was the one who "most resembled her father physically."³⁷ On the other hand, she inherited her mother's spirituality and determination, which most likely persisted and eventually brought her to anthropology studies and her fascination with mythology and voodoo ritualism. Diana Miles summed up Hurston's field of interest with an introduction to her *Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston* by stating that: "her works critique cultural responses to the complex race, class and gender constructions that shaped her own rural community."³⁸

³² Plant, Deborah G. (2007). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group), 9.

³³ Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*, 9.

³⁴ Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*, 9.

³⁵ Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*, 9.

³⁶ Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*, 9.

³⁷ Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit*, 14

³⁸ Miles, Diana. (2003). *Women, Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Vienna, Austria: Peter Lang), 1.

4.2. Hurston's Anthropological Experience

4.2.1. Anthropological Influences and Race

Not only does Zora Neale Hurston get recognition as a talented writer, but also as a cultural anthropologist, which plays a significant role in her writings and her distinctive, unique conception of the colored characters. In fact, as Hemenway puts it, Hurston “helped remind the literary participants in the Renaissance – especially its more bourgeois members – of the richness in the racial heritage.”³⁹ Hemenway further asserts that “she embodied a closer association with racial roots than any other Renaissance writer. Where they were Los Angeles or Cleveland, she was Eatonville. She was the folk.”⁴⁰ Hurston's Eatonville heritage served the perfect ground and predetermined her perfect suitability for her later fieldwork and studies.

In terms of anthropological knowledge and approach that Hurston took, there were several people, who had been a formative influence on her. Most importantly the “Father of American Anthropology” and her prime mentor, Franz Boas, accompanied also by one of the first anthropologists, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits, a pioneer of African-American studies. Hurston first encountered anthropology during her Barnard College studies. Boas discovered her potential for an anthropological study of “the folk”. He recognized that she was the one person (Hurston was his only black pupil), who would be able to infiltrate communities he himself could not, because of the skin color. Therefore he gave her the space to develop that potential further. Boas helped her to conduct several anthropological studies and field trips e. g. in Harlem and extensive travels throughout the American South.⁴¹ Later, she also carried out Haitian and Jamaican study relying on the financial support of the Guggenheim Foundation.

The racial component to her anthropological experience was omnipresent. Despite some of Boas' ambivalent⁴² ideas, as a strong proponent of the cultural approach to

³⁹ Hemenway, Robert E. (1980). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 61.

⁴⁰ Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 62.

⁴¹ Jones, Sharon L. (2009). *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), 210-211.

⁴² Vernon J. Williams Jr. In an introduction to his *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries* (2015) mentions his thoughts on inferiority of blacks in intelligence due to smaller size of their brain.

anthropology, he successfully fought against scientific racism. With Herskovits, Hurston experienced training in Anthropometry, which was supposed to disprove the theory of racial inferiority by measuring and comparing human bodies.⁴³ Most importantly, the encounter with anthropology provided her with a new way to approach her literary aspirations and desire to absorb as much of her own African-American roots as she could.

4.2.2. Anthropology and Literature

Hurston's style in works of fiction was undeniably strongly influenced by anthropology. The distinctiveness over other black Harlem Renaissance authors lies in her efforts to combine art and science. She used sort of a scientific approach to her fiction and inspired by her non-fictional books, she took her knowledge from anthropology and ethnographic research and applied it to her fictional characters' behavior in her novels and stories. Hemenway explains that with Hurston's introduction to anthropology:

The Eatonville folk became no longer simply good storytellers, relaxed in their lifestyles, remarkable in their superstitions, the creators of a profound humor – all the things that made for a rich source of exciting, local-color, fiction. Now they became a part of cultural anthropology: scientific objects, who could and should be studied for their academic value.⁴⁴

Hurston herself describes this fusion of fiction and anthropology in her *Mules and Men* (1935) as having the “spy-glass of Anthropology.”⁴⁵ This way, she could use it as an instrument to examine her own culture with the eyes of the non-member while remaining the member, who understands the inner language of black people. This ability became a great advantage she had over other Harlem authors and it also became helpful in her capability to accurately portray the intraracial conflicts in her fiction.

Furthermore, she captured her experience in Haiti and Jamaica in her Afro-American folklore book called *Tell my Horse* (1938). The approach she used to study this area of interest was not only the blend of the science and art, but it also conveyed the skin color undertone in it. As Franz Boas correctly recognized – Hurston's skin color was a benefit. Gwendolyn Mikell directly states that:

⁴³ Kaplan, Carla. (2007). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group), 82.

⁴⁴ Hemenway, Robert E. (1980). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 62.

⁴⁵ Hurston, Zora. N. (2009). *Mules and Men*. (New York: HarperCollins), 1.

Hurston approached the study of black people with an assumption that the best researcher was the one who had an element of commonality with the people being studied” [and further that] “Hurston being an “insider” she was able to obtain the depth of cultural description and detail in folklore that would have been difficult for white researchers to obtain.⁴⁶

The choice of the author for the sake of the thesis exploring intraracial love and bigotry seems valid enough, given Zora’s competence of understanding the black culture in connection with her own family background.

4.3. Critical Views

In addition, her unorthodox views, style of writing within the Harlem Renaissance and her overall role in it, also her relations to the leading figures of this movement cannot be omitted. The personalities involved in the Harlem Renaissance were not quite united in their aims and means of presenting of the “negro culture” to its public. Missy Dehn Kubitschek sums up the recognition by fellow writers in claiming that „The common critical portrait of Zora Neale Hurston is that of a romantic elitist separated from the day-to-day life of most of her black contemporaries.”⁴⁷ Although the approaches of all the authors were generally diverse, the two vast opposites that stand out in publications, are undoubtedly Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright.

4.3.1. The Message Behind Her Writing

Wright strongly criticized Hurston’s works and the way she conducted her message to the public. As a matter of fact, he was dissatisfied even with the public itself and claimed that her books were targeting – according to his opinion – the white public. In a review he famously goes as far as to say that Hurston’s writing “carries no theme, no message, no thought...her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy.”⁴⁸ (cited in Cronin, 1998) From this predicament, it is clear that the view

⁴⁶Mikell, Gwendolyn. (1982). When Horses Talk: Reflections on Zora Neale Hurston's Haitian Anthropology. *Phylon* (1960-), 43(3), 219.

⁴⁷ Kubitschek, Missy D. (1983). "Tuh De Horizon and Back": The Female Quest in Their Eyes Were Watching God. *Black American Literature Forum*, 17(3), 109.

⁴⁸ Cronin, Gloria L. (Ed.). (1998). *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co.), 76.

of both authors differed greatly. What really matters in concerning this thesis, however, is their approach to the theme of racism in their works.

Valerie Boyd explored Hurston's life in a biography called *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (2003) and depicted factors that shaped Hurston as a black female novelist, anthropologist and folklorist. Growing up in an all-black community Eatonville, Hurston's upbringing experience was very dissimilar to the environment, where most of her Harlem Renaissance colleagues were raised.⁴⁹ As Boyd puts it: "Eatonville was largely untrammelled by racism and its debilitating effects [...] where black people were free from any indoctrination in inferiority."⁵⁰ Although Boyd further claims that most black Americans suffered exposure to the blatant racism resulting in a form of psychological damage that "Zora could hardly imagine,"⁵¹ I find the statement rather inaccurate mainly because of Hurston's college years. According to official website of Columbia University in the City of New York, she was the first black woman in history to attend Barnard College, (women's college in partnership with Columbia University) which did not go without inconvenience that she obviously had to deal with, given the circumstances, rather frequently. "Hurston faced many instances of discrimination during her time at Barnard"⁵² and she even "lived off campus to avoid any controversy that might arise from her presence in the residence halls,"⁵³ which suggests that not only could she very much imagine the everyday struggle of the black people outside of Eatonville, but that she shared it with them.

Even though the untroubled childhood period of Hurston's life was followed by her recognition of the reality of contemporary standards in treatment of African Americans, most notably once she enrolled in Barnard College, it may have ultimately impacted her enough not to utilize the issue of racism in her novels in the same way as her Harlem contemporaries. Influenced by Eatonville upbringing, she maybe did not have the urge to make racism a central element driving her plots. Unlike Wright, she took a more passive stance and the depictions

⁴⁹ Boyd, Valerie. (2003). *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. (New York: Simon and Schuster), 144.

⁵⁰ Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, 144.

⁵¹ Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, 144.

⁵² Columbia University in The City Of New York. *Post-1865: Students*. Retrieved from <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/content/post-1865-students>

⁵³ Columbia University in The City Of New York. *Post-1865: Students*. Retrieved from <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/content/post-1865-students>

of racist acts are on the more subtle, indirect side, yet they still are present. On the other hand stands Richard Wright's „protest fiction“⁵⁴ depicting black people in all sorts of cruel real-life situations and his characters serve as vehicles to expressing his political and social ideas. Similarly, majority of the Harlemites based their literature on portraying wrongdoings committed on blacks, the injustice they were forced to face in society and struggles of everyday life. Unlike them, Hurston approached the life of the African-American community in a more indirect way, as she strived for depicting their inner world, which then leads to their respective actions and self-presentation. In fact, her approach focuses more on showing the similarities between blacks, whites, simply people in general as opposed to focusing on the differences regardless of color. Her works strive to celebrate black culture itself, without any need to compare it to white culture. Hurston manifests this intention in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), writing:

“From what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race problem. I was and am thoroughly disinterested in that subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color.”⁵⁵

Her decision concerning these racial matters did not always meet with appreciation. Her refusal to make race discrimination central in her works was by her peers (besides Richard Wright also Alain Locke) seen as undermining their efforts in the socio-political field. It is ironic that Hurston became such a target of criticism for not being political enough, when her works are naturally political. Precisely by omitting the typical way of portraying people of color in literature, she expresses her rejection of society-prescribed norms and moves beyond the boundaries of race as well as social stratification based on race, which, in fact, was a sophisticated sabotage of the American system of that time.⁵⁶

4.3.2. The Role of Dialect

Lastly, as a part of her attempt to introduce the traditional and in a way intimate image of a black culture to the reader, Hurston opted for the usage of an African-American

⁵⁴ Hardison, Ayesha K. (2013). Crossing the Threshold: Zora Neale Hurston, Racial Performance, and *Seraph on the Suwanee*. *African American Review* 46(2), 217-235. Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved from Project MUSE database.

⁵⁵ Hurston, Zora N. (2010). *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*. (New York: HarperCollins), 171.

⁵⁶ Miles, Diana. (2003). *Women, Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Vienna, Austria: Peter Lang), 85.

Vernacular English in her fiction. Although oral tradition was mostly avoided by her contemporaries for its ties to slavery, the common opinion that vernacular was a sign of inferiority and low intellectual ability⁵⁷, there were several reasons for Hurston's choice of the vernacular language.

Firstly, as it is widely known, Hurston was deeply interested in the African tradition of storytelling. This interest of hers is mirrored by the fact that she "had been the most important collector of Afro-American folklore in the country".⁵⁸ Therefore, affected by her folklore research, she incorporated the rural elements of speech into her writings. Secondly, in her short stories as well as her novels, she uses a combination of standard English and African-American Vernacular English. This linguistic tool allows her to shift between the narrator and the individual characters. Not only does the narrator outline and introduce the characters, but the individuality of each character seems to be maintained by the way they speak. In this sense, the vernacular helps Hurston express each characters' own voice, specifics and subjectivity. Holloway (cited in Candia, 2008) concludes that the dialogues of Hurston's narratives capture something about the character of the person, who is speaking and provide a record of his/her own language.⁵⁹ The linguistic choice, though not unjustified, did not go without critical attack.

Sieglinde Lemke in her *The Vernacular Matters of American Literature* argues that "Hurston's vernacular lyrical modernism departs from the dominant style of black literature of the 1930's, differing from Richard Wright's and Ralph Ellison's social realist modernism."⁶⁰ Hurston's efforts to utilize the vernacular language were not universally appreciated, most notably again by Wright, who criticized the simple language. Richard Wright understands the literary articulation of AAVE exclusively as minstrelsy. In a famous review, he also implies that the usage of African-American Vernacular English served as a tool for providing entertainment to white people:

⁵⁷ Candia, Michela R. D. (2008). 'Signifyin(g)' Womanhood: The Short Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker (Doctoral dissertation) *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 69.

⁵⁸ Hemenway, Robert E. (1980). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 4.

⁵⁹ Candia, Michela R. D. (2008). 'Signifyin(g)' Womanhood: The Short Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker (Doctoral dissertation) *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 71.

⁶⁰ Lemke, Sieglinde. (2009). *The Vernacular Matters of American Literature*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan), 77.

“Her dialogue manages to catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind in their pure simplicity, but that’s as far as it goes. Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the “white folks” laugh”⁶¹ (emphasis in original).

Despite the incomprehension by the contemporaries, the incorporation of the black vernacular makes Hurston a source of inspiration and influence for the next generation of modern authors namely Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, among others.

⁶¹ Wright, Richard. (1937, October 5). “Between Laughter and Tears”. *New Masses*. 25.

5. The Mulatto in American Literature

As race has always been a thorny issue in America, wide-ranging discussions took place. It played an important role in all sorts of areas in the lives of the Americans. Apart from politics, the issue was repeatedly put on display in literature. Although biologically, being of a mixed race is a common natural occurrence, from the sociological point of view, the phenomenon may be problematic. Consequently, the mulattos represent an attractive topic for the novelists as well as something worth reading about from the readers' standpoint. Mixed race people served a significant role in literature, though their purpose slowly transformed over time. In the next section of the text, the changing role of the biracial characters in American literature will be addressed and also the newly formed trope of a tragic mulatto or more precisely the tragic mulatta will be briefly touched upon as this phenomenon more often than not concerned female characters.

5.1. The Mulatto in the Antebellum American Novel

Given the historical background of nineteenth century America, the focus of literature or arts in general was rather functional. Most of the authors were heavily influenced by the contemporary political and social situation, which was as such reflected in their fiction. The fictional characters in the nineteenth century novelists, poets and essayists including the mulatto characters frequently epitomized the authors' political views and ideas, which resulted in omitting and sacrificing the representation of reality and truthfulness of their characters and instead just portraying their propagandist values and pleas for justice, equality and anti-slavery thoughts. Such authors, who put an effort into influencing the politics using the mixed characters to show their abolitionist ideas were e.g. Richard Hildreth; Harriet Beecher Stowe; William Wells Brown; John Townsend Trowbridge; and H. L. Hosmer.⁶²

There was a recurring pattern in the plot of these mixed characters' stories: the main mulatto character is of course a victim of slavery but what is supposed to be concerning about it, aiming predominantly at the white reader is that the mulatto is, in fact, nearly white. The whole story is strongly sentimental, intentionally emotional and emphasizing race pride. The noticeable resemblance to a white person should make the reader re-evaluate and hopefully

⁶² Bullock, Penelope. (1945). The Mulatto in American Fiction. *Phylon* (1940-1956),6(1), 79.

condemn the institution of slavery. Nonetheless, as Stephen Talty points out in the first chapter of *Mulatto America*, the white slaves are no myth, they indeed existed and not only as a likely confused mulatto character in fiction.⁶³

The fair-skinned main character is in most cases a son or a daughter of a Southern white gentleman and his favorite slave mistress. In nineteenth century fiction, the mulatto is usually a tragic character. Though he inherited his father's intellectual skills and mental capabilities, he still possessed some of his slave mother's physical traits, which prevented him from fulfilling his life desires, potential and living a happy "white privileged" life, which he might have inherited from the parental side. Slavery and racial injustice prevailed in society and the abolitionist authors tried to fight against these ills through these types of novels. In some cases, the struggle of their mulatto characters concludes with the act of "passing".

To evoke fear and doubt in slavery, mulatto novels were a tool that anti-slavery activists and sympathizers used. Talty mentions *The Slave* (1836), a novel written by the historian Richard Hildreth about a nearly white mulatto, who after failing to blackmail his white father to recognize him as his son, escapes slavery and then returns as a white man, watching and trying to understand the mind of slaveholders. This infiltration amongst the slave masters eventually sharpens his anger and disgust with the set social order.⁶⁴ The purpose of the main character of Hildreth's book was to bring the (white) reader to the realization that he is no different from the reader themselves.

Another influential but controversial book that deals with the mulatto figure as an almost white person, posing a potential threat to the white reader of the time, is the famous anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe called *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Stowe's novel became an immediate success right after its publication and according to Harold Bloom it "helped to cause"⁶⁵ the Civil War which can "affirm the role of literature as an agent of social change"⁶⁶. Although the novel's main protagonist is Uncle Tom – a dark black, long-suffering slave with a strong Christian faith, there are other characters of high importance, who are

⁶³ Talty, Stephan. (2003). *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*. (New York: HarperCollins)

⁶⁴ Talty, *Mulatto America: at the Crossroads of Black and White Culture*, 22.

⁶⁵ Bloom, Harold. (2008). *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (New York: Chelsea House), 7.

⁶⁶ Vollaro, Daniel R. (2009). „Lincoln, Stowe, and the "Little Woman/Great War" Story: The Making, and Breaking, of a Great American Anecdote“. *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*,30(1), 18-34.

relevant to the topic of race-mixing. George, Eliza and their little son Harry are a mulatto slave family. Both George and Eliza are trying to escape from slavery but for different reasons and more importantly from different conditions concerning their treatment by their masters. George is a very intelligent, light-skinned slave to “a vulgar, narrow-minded, tyrannical master,”⁶⁷ who fears George’s superiority in reason, whereas Eliza’s mistress Mrs. Shelby is “a woman of a high class, both intellectually and morally”⁶⁸ and she puts “benevolent efforts for the comfort, instruction and improvement of her servants.”⁶⁹ Incidentally, the different kinds of treatment and perception of female and male mulatto characters also appear as a noteworthy topic in the following analysis of Hurston’s novels and stories in the following segments of this thesis.

Both *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* light-skinned protagonists can be considered tragic figures during the time spent as slaves due to their inability to have a legal marriage as well as protect and keep the family together (Harry is supposed to be sold to a slave trader). However, unlike slaves of dark complexion, they have the chance to run away to Canada, try to pass as white and obtain security and freedom which they successfully achieve at the end of the novel. Stowe thereby challenges the tragic mulatto stereotype by not letting her mulatto characters die or end up suffering in the end. The unusual, promising ending suggests that “Stowe shares the mulatto’s experience with her white readers by depicting how this figure’s white lineage gives them their tool to be free. Thus, the mulatto undermines the very institution that assisted in his/her existence.”⁷⁰

Besides Hildreth and Stowe, other authors such as Frances E. W. Harper or W. W. Brown also challenged the Black Codes of the Reconstruction era, Jim Crow’s “separate but equal” and overall injustice and often ridiculousness contradicting common sense of laws of those times.

⁶⁷ Stowe, Harriet B. (2016). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. (New York: Race Point Publishing), 12.

⁶⁸ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 9.

⁶⁹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 10.

⁷⁰ Rambo, Stephanie S., ““A Very Different Looking Class of People”: Racial Passing, Tragedy, and the Mulatto Citizen in American Literature” (2013). *Honor’s Theses*, 65.

5.2. The Mulatto in Twentieth Century American Literature

While the nineteenth century fictional mulatto was an agent of the social change appearing most of the time to be just an instrument for a greater cause, the post-Civil War works of the twentieth century writers of fiction focus more on the psychological side of the biracial person. The inner world of the mulattos, their perception of their complexion bearing a social stigma and their self-perception as well as their position and relationships inside of the black community – all these were subjects of the shift in the interest of the authors.

Charles W. Chestnutt, a near white African American himself, was very sensitive to the mulatto issue and gave a lot of space to the biracial characters in his works. He represents the transition between the approaches and centuries, as he published at the turn of the nineteenth century and starts the trend of portraying mulattos not mainly for their power to change the readers opinion but he rather “creates characters convincing in their realism”⁷¹ as Bullock mentions and gives the example of his first novel *The House Behind Cedars* (1900).

Among the authors that used the biracial theme and were interested in the biracial identity as well as struggles of their protagonists’ physical ambiguities were for instance Nella Larsen, a Harlem Renaissance author of a mixed and Danish origin with her *Passing* (1929) and *Quicksand* (1928), James Weldon Johnson, who wrote *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Langston Hughes, an author of the play *Mulatto: A Tragedy of the Deep South* (1935), and last but not least Zora Neale Hurston.

What appears to be a noticeable difference between the former and the latter group of writers, is their approach to the whole mulatto motif and the change of lens, through which this type of character is being shown to the reader. Unlike the majority of the nineteenth century writers and some early twentieth century ones, Zora Neale Hurston and the fellow Harlem authors abandoned the theme of the afore mentioned “passing (for white)” (meaning the characters opportunity to choose a life as a member of the white race thanks to his undeniably light complexion) that has until then been incorporated in relation to the biracial heroes of their predecessors. In fact, Werner Sollors maintains that “Passing was swept aside

⁷¹ Bullock, Penelope. (1945). The Mulatto in American Fiction. *Phylon* (1940-1956),6(1), 82.

in social history by the civil rights movement and in literature by the combined success of Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, who no longer employed the theme.”⁷²

Until Zora Neale Hurston, the main goal was to show the interracial aspect and importance of the biracial characters. Hurston on the contrary focused almost exclusively on the intraracial relations and the world as experienced by the mulattos within the black community.

⁷² Sollors, Werner. (1999). *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 284.

6. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* Analysis

If *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are to a certain extent influenced by her anthropological studies alluding to voodoo rituals and her knowledge of the oral tradition as has been mentioned in the previous section of the thesis, then examining Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, there can be no doubt about it. According to Josie P. Campbell's *Student Companion to Zora Neale Hurston* (2001), Zora herself actively participated in many folklore activities from storytelling contests to Hoodoo rituals. Material from her fieldwork in combination with her understanding of the mentality and the fact that she was put in touch with all sorts of people engaged in voodoo, provided her with an inspiration for writing *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.⁷³ Furthermore, she also utilizes her own life experience, as the novel is based on her own father John Hurston from his youth to his marriage to Zora's mother Lucy. In addition, Hurston employed biblical motifs as the title suggests. Although John Lowe maintains that initially Hurston intended the novel to be named "Big Nigger," which obviously carries a racial message in it, Hurston had changed her mind. As it could most likely have been misread by the white audience and confused with "bad nigger" meaning, instead of "an important nigger" meaning of an African-American oral culture, she dropped the idea.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, thanks to Hurston's skillful combination of all the aforementioned sources for re-discovering the pure African-American way of life from the insider and outsider perspective, she was able to write a very empathetic first novel. The novel offers a closer look into the social, economic and religion-related values of the Black rural community at the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and how these values can possibly affect the quality of life of a person of a mixed racial background.

The main protagonist of the novel, John Buddy Pearson, is of a mixed-race origin. This distinct characteristic of his has a crucial impact on him from early childhood throughout his whole life. Focus will be given to John's story, mainly those aspects of his journey that are affected by his lighter skin color. The analysis focuses on how John's biracial status has a positive effect as well as when any type of racial bigotry occurs. Unlike Janie in *Their Eyes Were*

⁷³ Campbell, Josie P. (2001). *Student Companion to Zora Neale Hurston*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 5.

⁷⁴ Lowe, John. (1997). *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy*. (Urbana (Ill.): University of Illinois Press), 87.

Watching God, John Buddy possesses the advantage in the matter of gender. The gender inequality factor becomes an advantage for light-skinned John as a male figure and thereby another perspective on the quality of life of a mulatto person within the African-American community may be revealed. The majority of the mixed-race characters in African-American fiction consists of females,⁷⁵ thus John Pearson has the potential to serve as an exemplary male mulatto character along with some other instances of famous male mulatto characters from e.g. James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1927) or Charles Waddell Chestnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and his final novel *The Quarry* (written 1928; published 1999.)

6.1. John's Family Background

Hurston's *Bildungsroman* type of novel starts when John is in his teenage years. The narrative opens in the household of the Crittenden family *in medias res* of an argument between the father of the family – Ned – and the mother, Amy, which just illustrates how a normal day in their lives goes by because arguments between the couple are nothing out of the ordinary. The apple of discord often happens to be the main character, a sixteen-year-old light-skinned boy John Buddy Pearson, who is not Ned's biological son.

In contrast with Janie Crawford from *Their Eyes*, who only found out that she was colored from a photograph that was taken of her playing with her white friends, John's experience is much different. Apparently, from the very beginning, he is forced to be very self-conscious about his otherness within the family. With no support from outside of his family at all, unlike Janie again (raised in a white neighborhood), John has been brought up in an unsophisticated Southern plantation region in Alabama, surrounded by Black people, raised by his dark-skinned mother and his also dark-skinned step-father Ned.

Obviously, something is not right in the father-son relationship immediately at the very first interaction between Ned and John. "Shet dat door John!" Ned bellowed "you ain't got the sense you wuz borned wid."⁷⁶ John stops for a moment watching some white folks walking by that catch his attention, which seems to have aggravated Ned tremendously. Additionally,

⁷⁵ Bercovitch, Sacvan., & Patell, Cyrus. R. (1994). *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume 6, Prose Writing, 1910-1950*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 299.

⁷⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1990) *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 2.

even though John was the first one to run inside the house, so logically he would not be the first one to come to mind, when considering who to scold for not closing the door after himself, he automatically is Ned's first choice. The fact that John is not of the usual darker skinned complexion like the rest of the family members is further indicated by Ned, when he angrily continues with: "Yo' mammy mought think youse uh lump uh gold 'cause you got a li'l' white folks color in yo' face but Ah'll stomp yo' guts out and dat quick!"⁷⁷ From the point of view of Ned's impact on John's psyche, a possible explanation could be that the abusive manner in which Ned interacts with John (and Amy as his wife) surely must have a harmful effect on him as an adolescent. Ned's constant remarks on John's worthlessness connected to his light complexion might have eventually led to John's continual need for women. Therefore, an unconscious following of his step-father's pattern of behavior also could be a contributory factor for his future relationship problems.

The novel sets out with an instance of two contradictory perceptions of a light-skinned person in the African-American Southern reality. Ned, on the one hand, represents a bigot despising every connection of the person to a potential white slavemaster. He is also jealous of his wife's previous relationship, more so because the man was white. On the other hand, as Ned indicates, Amy in his eyes epitomizes an example of a person who celebrates her son's light-skinned heritage. By comparing John's Caucasian looks to an item as precious as gold, one can assume that having some of the white blood is generally considered an advantage over the common dark-skinned blacks. This can also be supported by a presumption that Ned has got a good reason to know the value of gold given the fact that his family belongs to the poorest and therefore is aware of John's mulatto worth.

Not only is John Ned's step-son, which by itself might be a good enough reason for a brute like Ned to treat him disrespectfully, but John is also a product of miscegenation, the white in him reminding Ned of his subordination to the white oppressing class. Ned's racist remarks at John's expense reflect in a full-range of the damage that was done by the institution of slavery in the black people's mindset. Ned, who still bears in mind the cruelty, humiliation, but most importantly the mentality of the slavery times in the postbellum Southern America, mistreats young John severely. Ned's ill-treatment is reflected in various

⁷⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 2.

aspects of the cohabitation of John and Ned under one roof including verbal abuse, physical exploitation, and a mild sort of segregation within the house setting.

In terms of verbal attacks against John compared to his other two sons, Ned uses harsher language against John. In almost every utterance, he does not forget to mention John's illegitimate origin or color of the skin calling him e.g.: "dat li'l' yaller god"⁷⁸, "Ahm de pappy uh all but dat one,"⁷⁹ "dat half-white young'un,"⁸⁰ "dat punkin-colored bastard,"⁸¹ "yaller nigger."⁸²

Once all members of the family are home, Ned sits in front of the fire place while he begins to give orders like lighting up fire in the fireplace or pouring some water in the wash-basin. All tasks are directly or indirectly intended for John to execute. It is also noticeable that John is separated from the rest of the children, sitting on the floor of "*the farther end of the cabin.*"⁸³

6.2. Intra-racism's Connection to Slavery

Ned, however, rejects John not only based on his lighter skin itself, but also because of the slave hierarchy on a plantation as he remembers it. Ned's increasing irritation leads to a situation, where he insists on John fetching some water for him from outside the house despite the heavy rain. On that occasion, Amy tries to stand up for her son and oppose Ned's demands by protesting that he was in the house longer than John so he "coulda done been got dat water"⁸⁴. Yet her objection does not improve the situation and even makes her husband use it against John Buddy, when he utters: "Dass right," Ned sneered, "John is de house-nigger."⁸⁵ Here Ned points out to the fact that lighter skinned black slaves were often put to work on easier kinds of work, usually inside of the house.

⁷⁸ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 3.

⁷⁹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 3.

⁸⁰ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

⁸¹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

⁸² Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

⁸³ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 3.

⁸⁴ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 4.

⁸⁵ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 4.

He continues by commenting that from his own experience, the “yaller niggers” always got tasks like “totin’ silver dishes and goblets tuh de table,”⁸⁶ which he contrasts mockingly with the darker skinned slaves’ duties. In a feisty manner, Ned uses the parable, when saying that “us black niggers is the ones s’posed tuh ketch de wind and de weather.”⁸⁷ Focusing on his choice of the pronoun “us” he decided to use in this utterance, he undeniably took Amy’s observation personally. In this particular scene, a feeling of inferiority is ignited in Ned by Amy’s remark that he was the one, who was supposed to fetch the water. For Ned, Amy in this case seemingly represents the slave master, who would rather just choose the dark slave to do the job instead of his light skinned counterpart. Due to this overwhelming impression that Ned formed in himself, he also acts on it as the conversation proceeds. Moreover, Ned’s vocabulary indicates that he still maintains the derogatory naming practice that was passed over to him by white slaveholders using the derogatory term “niggers” when talking about members of his own race.⁸⁸

Afterwards, Ned gives an account of how sternly he had been treated by ‘Ole Marse, his master, and brings up the question of equality when he says that “Dese younguns ain’t uh bit better’n me.”⁸⁹ Ned indirectly maintains that John is not to be privileged on the basis of skin color as the case would be with light-skinned house slaves. John’s biracial visage bothers Ned not at all because of the beauty aspects as it is with Mrs. Turner from *Their Eyes*, but Ned is predominantly preoccupied with what John’s light complexion represents from a historical perspective. The very fact that a black woman conceived a baby with a white man in slavery automatically reminds the black man (in this case Ned) of his inability to protect black women from rape.⁹⁰ There is no direct piece of evidence in the novel, whether Amy was ever raped or not, however, it is important to elaborate on the master-slave relations. The light-skinned children were not always a product of a plain physically violent act of rape as one could imagine. Subsequently, rape did not always take a form of a direct sexual assault. The acts of sexual violence performed by the white slave masters on African-American female slaves are often referred to with such euphemisms as “sexual relations,” “committed miscegenation,”

⁸⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 4.

⁸⁷ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 4.

⁸⁸ Miles, Diana. (2003). *Women, Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Vienna, Austria: Peter Lang), 16.

⁸⁹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 4.

⁹⁰ Miles, *Women, Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*, 30.

“seduced girls,” or “patronized prostitutes” as Rachel A. Feinstein states.⁹¹ It is clear that rape in slavery took many forms such as seduction, exertion of power by using threats, tricks and manipulation to make the enslaved woman sexually engage in an exchange for possibly better conditions or treatment by the master. Regardless of the exact circumstances of John’s conception, it can be assumed that Ned struggles to make it clear that he is the head of the family, therefore, as patriarch he has the power to decide and command. His incapability to prove his superiority as he wishes, he instead uses violence, and abuses the rest of the family both physically and psychologically.

6.3. Amy’s Conception of Intra-racial Love

Amy, however, does not plan to succumb to Ned’s ideas and beliefs concerning the treatment of their sons. Neither does she agree with his philosophy of raising of their children. She finds his point of view strongly distorted by his slavery experience and tries actively to prove him wrong. Amy was also born a slave in 1853 but by no means does she share Ned’s opinions. What should be emphasized in connection with the theme of this thesis is the passage where she describes the intra-racial love as a problem within the African-American community. She actively tries to prove her point to Ned and in doing so, she comes to an interesting, bold statement that “We black folks don’t love our chillun.”⁹² She identifies the issue very accurately when she associates racial bigotry and the lack of affection that Ned shows towards his own children with the damaging effect of slavery. The way Amy sees it, the black people should not care as much about white people anymore now that they are “free folks”. They should stick together as a community and instead of looking for causes that set them apart (like all the different skin shades caused by race mixing that Ned overly pays attention to), they should practice “on treasurin’ our younguns”⁹³ She strongly criticizes Ned’s excessive racial prejudices and tries to remind him the importance of racial coherence.

⁹¹ Feinstein, Rachel, A. (2018). *When Rape was Legal: The Untold History of Sexual Violence during Slavery*. (Routledge), 5.

⁹² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 5.

⁹³ Hurston, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 5.

6.4. The Question of Racial Inferiority and Mulatto Stereotypes

Another way of indicating how much Ned dislikes John for his mixed-race heritage shows up right after Amy suggests that due to financial reasons they should move back “over de Big Creek,” where she comes from. Ned announces that he has already taken care of financial difficulties in his own way. He has made an agreement with a former overseer, Captain Mimms, that John is bound to work for him on the plantation he gained by marrying a plantation owner’s widow. This gesture is potentially meant to fulfil two purposes. Firstly, it is true that the Crittenden family could use more money and John is a well-built hard-working boy, who manages to perform an above-average amount of work. Hence the fact that he would conveniently bring some extra money is valid. More importantly though, Ned is aware of the fact that Mimms used to be one of the cruelest overseers in southern Alabama, “ain’t nothin’ but po’ white trash”⁹⁴ and according to Amy he “whipped niggers nigh tuh death,”⁹⁵ so Ned’s other motivation could be getting rid of the very much despised light skinned step-son. His decision to bind John over to Mimms appears symbolic. In relation to his heritage, Ned wants to put John in a subordinate position, so he symbolically “rents” him out into slavery. For Ned, a vision of not having John permanently in the house as a constant reminder of an obsessive feeling of his own racial inferiority seems like a priority at this point.

At the peak of the argument about the dispute over bringing a bucket of water, the argument escalated to a full-on intraracial equality discussion; Amy’s progressive insights flatly contradict Ned’s old-fashioned opinions the most significantly. Ned expresses directly his desire that John leave the house, adding that “he don’t b’long heah wid us nohow,”⁹⁶ which is an obvious attack on John’s biraciality. Furthermore, in saying that: “yaller niggers ain’t no good nohow”⁹⁷ along with: “dese half-white niggers got de worst part uh bofe de white and de black folks”⁹⁸, he also verbalizes Southern white man’s Reconstruction belief that light-skinned black people are inherently evil. Ned in his rigid attitudes represents a typical post bellum ex-slave man, who is traumatized by slave history, lacks education as well as

⁹⁴ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 7.

⁹⁵ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 7.

⁹⁶ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

⁹⁷ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

⁹⁸ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

decent job opportunities, suffers extreme poverty and projects his own frustrations straight on to his ignorant opinions about race mixing.

In comparison, Amy disagrees and sees the problematics in a more complex measure. She points out that John is not the only mixed child in the world, merging all black people together as “uh mingled people.”⁹⁹ Getting to the core of the matter, she apparently embraces race mixing as a natural part of human existence. Amy defends her son against Ned’s accusation of not being any good by giving examples of equal intelligence, criminality levels, and sufficiency in other skills to black and white people combined. On top of that, she even claims that white folks are “jealous uh de yaller ones.”¹⁰⁰ She is building on a commonly experienced notion of honor and wealth surrounding the house slave. She particularly underscores that the mulatto house slaves get to enjoy spending time inside the pretty house almost for longer than the white master himself as well as can they drive his car, have access to their kitchen and touch all the precious objects in the house while cleaning it.¹⁰¹ At this point, she doesn’t stick to explaining that lighter and darker skinned black people are equal, but rather suggests a different, rather ambitious perspective on the issue. She goes as far as to argue that the light-skin black person possesses advantages over a white person.

6.5. “Crossing Over”

The ambiguity of being a mulatto and the perception by both white and black people is present throughout the whole novel. In this sense, an important moment on John’s life is his transition from his birth house “over de Big Creek”. From an abused, intraracially-oppressed step-son, he becomes an admired and well-treated man over a course of a short period of time. Moving out from his family serves as a symbolic act in the novel. This can be observed from John’s announcement that he is about to go “over de Big Creek” because he “ever wanted tuh cross over.”¹⁰² The process of “crossing over” is not just geographical in this context but may also be symbolic concerning John’s well-being as a light skinned black man. Ned’s fears and cruel behavior towards John for symbolically representing a threat to him because of his fair complexion turn into acceptance by various people in his

⁹⁹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 9-10.

¹⁰² Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 10.

new home. Additionally, Ned's presumptions that blacks with light complexions possess certain social as well as economic advantages over darker skinned black people ¹⁰³ actually come true for John. Owing to his light skin, he is able to gain both a better job and an opportunity to receive education. What used to be his disadvantage in relation to his black step-father, changes into an advantage regarding his, apparently, biological father, a white man, named Alf(red) Pearson.

6.6. Situations Involving Intra-racial Prejudices

Mister Alfred Pearson hires him immediately claiming that the reason is John's physical strength. Alfred, however, admits that John's "face looks sort of familiar"¹⁰⁴ and that he knows his mother. From those remarks, it appears that he recognizes John as his own son. John's looks constitute a strong factor for being hired by Alfred and they also do not go unnoticed with the other man working with Pearson. One of them comments on John's light skin tone calling him a "house-nigger".¹⁰⁵ He also immediately questions Alf's decision to put John to work with a plough, pointing out that "his kind don't make good field niggers. It's been tried. In his case it's a pity, because he'd be equal to two hands ordinary."¹⁰⁶ This situation is analogical to the one, where Janie from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* doesn't join the others working in the fields in the Glades and therefore is thought of as something better only based on her lighter-skin. The man in the field does not deny John's physical potential or his suitability for the plough work, yet, still he would rather put him in the house "where he belongs". The stereotype of a light-skinned black person performing lighter kinds of labor is manifested strongly in this instance. It is, in fact, so powerful that it overpowers the man's common sense and visual observations. The man, regardless of John's visible physical strengths, claims that he would still not use him for the outside work just because in his eyes he is still somehow weak thanks to his light-skin. These assumptions made solely on the basis of his skin color provide John with kinder treatment and later opportunities in various spheres of his life.

¹⁰³ Jones, Sharon L. (2009). *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), 70.

¹⁰⁴ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 17.

¹⁰⁵ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 18.

Similarly, John's newly-found grandmother, Pheemy, is concerned whether the bed in her own cabin is "good 'nough fuh yuh [John]," for she got under the impression that John is "one uh dese uppity yaller niggers,"¹⁰⁷ meaning he belongs higher than herself on the social ladder. Only after John assures her that he "laks it jes' fine" and "he is "po' folks jes' lak [her]"¹⁰⁸, Pheemy "softens". Judging by this first encounter of Pheemy and John, the skin shade represents a strong differentiating factor in the question of her treatment of people. She shows uncertainty whether it is appropriate to put someone of a near-white complexion in such a poor-quality bed. Her behavior supports the idea that was already indicated in the previous part of the thesis – that in the African-American community, one's skin shade determines their social status within the social hierarchy.

A situation depicting the complicated relation between the dark blacks that worked in the fields and light-skinned John happens a few moments later, when they have returned from work. They came in "eyeing John suspiciously."¹⁰⁹ Only John's friendliness along with an unspoken protection that was provided by Pheemy's approving attitude towards him prevented the dark black field hands from further harassment. On this occasion, John's complexion almost deprived him of a chance to socialize, feel accepted and became a part of the community. If it wasn't for Pheemy, whom as an older and dark black woman they seem to respect, he would have probably been treated as an outcast.

6.7. Mulatto as Mule

Another rather symbolic indication of an ambiguous status of a mulatto in an African-American social hierarchy could be detected in Hurston's frequent usage of a mule as a significant symbol in connection to John Pearson. As the offspring of a mare and a donkey, which are different species, the mule can be considered a hybrid. Analogically, the mulatto is not only etymologically linked to the mule (derived from a Spanish word for a young mule) but also the ancestry of the mulatto is half white, half black meaning a conjunction of two different (and incompatible as seen by a racist Southerner of that time) races. Koy points out that

¹⁰⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 19.

“Mules play a major role in the symbolism within African-American folklore.”¹¹⁰ While he focuses on the mule imagery in Chestnutt’s fiction, he also mentions Hurston as the main figure, who assembled African-American folklore talking about mules in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹¹ Zora Neale Hurston has knowledge of the connection between the mule and the mulatto figure consciously employed the imagery in her fiction. Regarding the topic of this thesis, it will only be focused on those instances, when the trope of the mule reflects the perception of John as a fair-skinned individual.

The mule metaphor appears most distinctly in Ned’s conduct towards John after he makes his brief comeback to the family home at Amy’s request. In the scene where both men work in the field side by side, Ned addresses the mule offensively as a “hard-tailed bastard,”¹¹² then continues his speech to John giving the impression of a double-meaning. He had used the word “bastard” to refer to John many times before (e.g. p. 3). Since John is of a mixed ancestry, an association of his persona with a hybrid animal is inappropriate and comes across as racist. It is apparent that Ned is primarily vexed by the fact that John has returned. He at first uses the mule as a tool to relieve his frustration instead of John, when he verbally attacks it. Later, after the two have gotten into an argument, Ned “took part of his humor out on the mule”¹¹³ along with uttering: “Damn biggity rascal! Wisht Ah had ‘im tied down so he couldn’t move! I’d put uh hund’ed lashes on his bare back”¹¹⁴. Ned obviously does not differentiate between the mule and John very much. He even wishes that John figuratively became a mule so that he could gain advantageous position over him, which in his conception equates to physical abuse. The conflict results in Ned threatening to shoot John.

Eventually, John metaphorically “loosed the mules from the plows”¹¹⁵ internalizing the identification of himself with the mules when coming to a revelation that he resents the place and symbolically gets loose from slave-like labor by making the ultimate decision to leave.

¹¹⁰Koy, Christopher E. (2005). “The Mule as Metaphor in the Fiction of Charles Waddell Chesnutt”. *Theory and Practice in English Studies*, vol. 4. Masaryk University Press, 95.

¹¹¹ Koy, “The Mule as Metaphor in the Fiction of Charles Waddell Chesnutt”, 95.

¹¹² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 43.

¹¹³ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 44.

¹¹⁴ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 44.

¹¹⁵ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 46.

Another instance of John's association to a mule, comes this time under much more pleasant circumstances. In a love note to his future wife, Lucy Potts, he playfully wrote:

Dere Lucy:
Whin you pass a mule tied to a tree,
Ring his tale and think of me."¹¹⁶

The note is short with bad spelling, but the form is not what matters the most. What is worth noticing, is the message behind the writing and its purpose. The meaning is very ambitious and intense. John stylizes himself as a mule, expressing his own sexual desires, the mule's tail representing his sex organ. Moreover, he passes this note to Lucy in church, right before the eyes of God, which alone is daring. Sending the note at a spiritual place like a church, John is trying to get her excited and demonstrate his genuine, burning interest in her. By this gesture, he continues courting Lucy, who is his presumably ultimate key to success.

6.8. Light Skin as Disadvantage in the African-American Community

In chapter six a curious moment caused by John's very light skin complexion occurs. John encounters a group of men, who at first sight confuse him with a white person because it is dusk-dark, and they are sitting by the fire, so the conditions for seeing are poor. They get startled and begin to run away, mistaking John for "De buckra"¹¹⁷ (= a poor white person). From this event, one might assume that generally, it is harder for John to make a favorable initial impression for his skin color often triggers negative reactions in members of the African-American community. Admittedly, some are more prone to respond in a racist fashion than others. In this case, one of the men, Coon, embodies the bigot from what one can tell from his behavior. "He looked up at John out of red, angry eyes and growled: "You oughter quit goin' 'round skeering folks. You better hail fo' you tuh walk up on me again."¹¹⁸ Just because John is of a lighter skin tone, he is automatically advised to call out to attract their attention before he approaches next time, which means taking extra action compared to fellow African Americans.

¹¹⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 52.

¹¹⁷ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 59.

Another situation, in which John's light complexion turns out to be disadvantageous occurs, when he strives for and courts a girl. Generally, meeting the parents of a girl that a man intends to marry for the first time belongs to the more stressful situations in life. This issue is exacerbated when it is taken in account that the girl's family has a much higher social status and is well-off compared to the boyfriend. John's experience was no exception but there was a racial undertone involved in it. In his case, a situation like that did not go without intraracially-motivated comments as well as racial prejudice, especially from Lucy's mother's side. The reluctant attitude of Emmeline towards John is evident beforehand, when Lucy receives a Christmas present from John. Emmeline expresses a strong disagreement to Lucy fooling around with boys "specially uh yaller bastard."¹¹⁹ In one single statement, she condemns both his pale skin and his illegitimate background related to it. In the timeframe that the novel is set, religion played an inconsiderable part in the lives of African-American families as, indeed, the Potts family display. Lucy's family, who were the higher-class blacks, clung tenaciously on the Christian morals. Judging by Lucy's mother's conduct, she took Christianity very seriously and had strong faith in God. Therefore, for her to use such word as "bastard" does not only indicate the blatant insult but also, she expresses her concern for a Christian purity of her daughter by choosing this wording. Since he is visibly light-skinned, John is in Emmeline's conception a product of an extramarital sexual intercourse that was accordingly not approved by God. Consequently, John is a child of the devil and on no account an acceptable or suitable match for her innocent daughter.

Lucy's mother later adds to the disapproving attitude and makes it unmistakable from the way she addresses him later, when she meets John. John asks, whether he could escort Lucy home from church. Emmeline not only explains that Lucy is too young for a company of a man, she also makes it clear that not any man is going to be allowed to keep in touch with Lucy. Lucy's mother really expects just two things from her daughter's potential suitor: material security and social standing, i.e. making sure he is not some "trash,"¹²⁰ as she calls John. As a mulatto, John is designated as "trash." From the way Lucy's mother speaks about

¹¹⁹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 65.

¹²⁰ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 68.

John mainly before the upcoming wedding as: “dat trashy yaller bastard”¹²¹ and “dat yaller wretch,”¹²² she represents a similar bigoted attitude as Ned.

Emmeline ultimately prioritizes her own reputation in the community over one of the most important events in her daughter’s life. This decision of hers only affirms the previously assumed importance of one’s skin tone in the context of the intraracial understanding of an individual’s worth within the African-American community with its connection to Christianity. By refusing to attend John’s and Lucy’s wedding, she is “gointer let folks see whar Ah stand”¹²³ and therefore making it clear to the community as such that she does not support the marriage between the penniless, illegitimate, light-skinned man, who came out of an illicit affair, and her well-raised daughter from a respectable black family.

6.9. Light Skin as Advantage in the African-American Community

The treatment John has been receiving due to his light skin comprising of a violent step-father, disparaging men in the fields and suspicious field hands, all come from male personas. Up to this point, majority of adult males that John has encountered acted on their bias towards his mixed heritage. Exceptions could be firstly Alfred, who is, however, his own father, which played its role. Secondly, John’s little brothers (mainly Zeke), who witness their own father’s cruelties committed against John and Amy and mostly sympathize with John, even look up to him and desire the same independence he had gained “over de Creek”, yet they are unable to fully grasp Ned’s perspective of a former slave. As previously mentioned, perception of John by members of both races, white and black can be described as ambiguous. What is important to examine, are the gender differences that occur in the way John Pearson is thought about.

Susan Meisenhelder observed that “Hurston in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* suggests racial component in the gender relations of black life,”¹²⁴ which shows in a divergent conduct of men and women towards young John. Men, precisely dark-black men, seem to be either jealous of John, which makes them aggressive or distrusting, either way they have hostile

¹²¹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 78.

¹²² Hurston, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 78.

¹²³ Hurston, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 78.

¹²⁴ Meisenhelder, Susan E. (1999). *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 43.

feelings for him. Female characters, again dark black ones, on the other hand give a completely opposite impression. From the very beginning, when John first appears in Notasulga, girls go crazy for him and being a mulatto is the key factor for it. Given the fact that John does not even possess a pair of shoes, nor is he well-spoken by the time of his first appearance on the other side of “de Big Creek,” his light-skinned looks is his only advantage.

All the local girls take an interest in him right away, when he joins them for a play of hide and seek. However, after a while Mehaley, Phrony and Minnie, none of them wants to count because it means they would not get a chance to spend time with John hiding in a secluded location. The game comes to a point when Phrony and Mehaley fight seemingly over a hair brush but truly because “ole fish-mouf Phrony mad’ ‘cause John wouldn’t hide wid her”¹²⁵ Also, during the game Mehaley by her comment towards John: “De hair on yo’ head so soft lak” [...] “Lemme smoothen it down”¹²⁶ confirms that she admires John’s white-like features as “soft hair”, which is a typical Caucasian trait as discussed in the *Their Eyes* part of the thesis. Mehaley also manifests her affection to John specifically for being a mulatto man when confessing that she loves him because “You so pretty and you ain’t color-struck lak uh whole heap uh bright-skin people.”¹²⁷ She addresses his handsomeness as well as the fact that he is half white, which in this context is synonymous.

On his very first day of school his ability to blush shows, when he is forced to admit that he does not know his family name because he is illegitimate. All of the children except for Lucy “burst into loud laugh. John colored and he stole a glance at Lucy”¹²⁸. The fact that he is light enough to visibly blush sets him apart from the rest and makes him more attractive. After some time, another woman interested in him appears, Exie, the wife of Duke, who tries to seduce him during the celebration of the end of cotton-picking harvest season. John receives a warning from Alfred Pearson not to get involved with her. When he assures Alfred that he is not pursuing Exie but it is the other way around, Alfred remarks that he is a “walking orgasm,”¹²⁹ which demonstrates John, as a mulatto man, literally becoming an object of affection and sexual desires of the darker black women, even married older women. He

¹²⁵ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 24.

¹²⁶ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 24.

¹²⁷ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 52.

¹²⁸ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 26.

¹²⁹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 50.

continues to possess this affect throughout the novel, repeatedly having many extramarital affairs.

6.10. Colorism and Love in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

John Pearson could be described as a forever lustful, disloyal man full of sin, who always avoids solving his problems and instead chooses to escape them. The repeated acts of adultery he practices during all three of his marriages, may partially have their roots in his light-skinned appearance along with the impact his light pigmentation had on his upbringing. He has never suffered from a lack of women – on the contrary – he has always appeared to be the first man, whom women desired to be around.

Mehaley took a great deal of interest in John as the first girl in his life. She unmistakably recognized John's uniqueness and was immediately driven to him. Girls have tried to seduce him, but John aimed high right for the brightest¹³⁰ i.e. most intelligent girl from a reasonably wealthy family, Lucy Potts. Although his aspirations in other areas of life (e.g. career, reputation) might have been largely credited to Lucy Ann later on, since John was called "uh wife-made man,"¹³¹ his driving ambition with women was what John pursued from his own initiative. Sexual relationships have been John's forte, which I believe relates to his consciousness of light skin color and at the same time a desire to prove his manliness as well as competence to the other black men, psychologically his main father-figure, Ned.

Women in John's life see him almost as a "mulatto god" combined with his considerable verbal skills, except for Lucy. She does, however, certainly pay attention to physical appearance. She opposes her mother's suggestion that she should marry Mimms by saying that she does not want "no ole springy-leg husband"¹³² suggesting the contrast between John's handsomeness and young age and Mimms's ugliness and old men's limping. She refuses to follow Emmeline's advice to marry one that "kin feed yuh"¹³³ prioritizing love based on John's charming personality and light skin to Mimms's financial security. Additionally, Lucy also indicates that she is not willing to submit to her mother's wish for an arranged wedding with a significantly older man, whom she found rather repulsive. The

¹³⁰ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 27.

¹³¹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 113.

¹³² Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 77.

¹³³ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 77.

arranged marriage within the African-American community seem to be a reoccurring theme in Hurston's fiction. Similarly, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that will be analyzed later in the thesis, Janie's grandmother arranges the first wedding for her with Killicks. The relationship is loveless, which makes Janie ultimately flee the marriage. The idea of a marriage that is planned for without paying much attention to the, in these cases, daughter's own will, does not apply only for the mothers being the decision-maker. In "Magnolia Flower", it is the father, Bentley, who tries to force his daughter to marry a man named Crazy Joe (the fact that he is called crazy obviously suggests that he would not be an ideal husband material but is still preferred by the father to a mulatto) instead of an educated and perspective but light-skinned teacher.

As their relationship develops, Lucy purposely chooses not to pay attention to his flaws repeatedly. It seems like she overlooks John's infidelities (Big 'Oman, later Hattie) because John is just too exceptional in the Negro community. By bringing out his potential, she accepts the subordinate role and lets her husband sweet talk her and benefit from his irresistible charisma and intraracial advantage.

If two of the similar couple relationships (Ned and Amy; John and Lucy) were to be examined and compared, it could be discovered that even though both women seem dignified and spiritually powerful, there are differences in how they handled their problematic husbands. Whereas Amy actively defends herself and their children as a "black lioness,"¹³⁴ Lucy acts differently and remains rather passive. She does not use her wits against John, even though she is smarter than John, she is "paralyzed by her devotion."¹³⁵ Lucy suppresses her own talents, supports and elevates John's respectability and accountability instead. Unlike Amy, who behaves as Ned's equal, Lucy follows the general pattern of the Negro community and as a darker skinned woman (meaning double oppression), permits John's dominance and infidelities.

¹³⁴ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 2.

¹³⁵ Meisenhelder, Susan E. (1999) *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 56.

6.11. John as an Ambitious Mulatto

John Buddy Pearson as a light-skinned African American, who was brought up in extremely humble conditions and was perpetually terrorized by his step-father ever since he was born, managed to reach a relatively high social position later in his life. As a matter of fact, there are several moments in the novel that helped him gain success. At the same time, the fact that he was not an average Negro, but a light skinned one, was greatly beneficial.

Firstly, the psychological violence that he was forced to endure as a young boy in his birth home granted him the opportunity to leave and avoid his mother's possible disapproval if nothing else. Amy knew just as well as John himself did that his only chance to get out of Ned's power was to leave the family.

More importantly, John did not let his own internal integrity and self-esteem get destroyed too much by Ned. Contrarily, he is a very ambitious character. Even though Alfred Pearson does not acknowledge him publicly as his son, the encounter with Alfred lifts John's social status immediately. Because of John's light skin and features that Alfred recognizes as "familiar," he actually treats John more like a proper father than Ned. He gives him a job, sends him to school, obtains some clothes and shoes for him and John even takes his last name after Alfred. As Sharon Jones observes:

"Learning to read and write permanently changes his life. John gains in self-confidence and becomes an even more useful employee to Alf Pearson, who eventually promotes him to an administrative position overseeing accounts. This propels him into a higher class and it gives him an even greater status among blacks in the community, particularly women."¹³⁶

His apparent popularity ensured by being a light-skinned man is seriously improved by Alfred's influence, which ultimately helps John advance his position and contributes to his great ambitions.

Another ambitious goal that John sets for himself to achieve ever since he crosses the Creek is pursuing Lucy. Given Lucy's physical characteristics combined with her initial unattainability, the choice of his future wife is essentially ambitious. When John first meets

¹³⁶ Jones, Sharon L. (2009). *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), 78-79.

Lucy, he immediately assumes she “must have been a leader.”¹³⁷ She is further described as: “a little girl,”¹³⁸ and compared to the other girls from the neighborhood who had rounder figure and “were looking little bit like women,”¹³⁹ Lucy was not. Clearly, from what her description reveals, he did not choose her for her looks. While John did not suffer from a lack of attention from girls and he could have got any of the other girls easily, nevertheless, he ambitiously aims for the hardest girl to get – the smartest, the wealthiest, one from the most respectable family around. Even though he is aware of the great deal of determination and effort it will require to win Lucy over to become his wife, he does not change his mind. He admires Lucy’s intelligence several times, saying “Take Lucy Potts for instink. She’s almost uh ‘fessor now. Nobody can’t spell her down.”¹⁴⁰ He also knows of the Potts family’s wealth and prosperity because his friend Charlie mentions that: “All dem Potts is smart. Her brother leads de choir at Macedony Baptis’ Church”¹⁴¹ and he also gathers from Phrony that “She [Lucy] live over in Potts town. Her folks done bought de ole Cox place. [...] Dey’s big niggers.”¹⁴² In getting Lucy Potts, John senses an opportunity to gain for himself a wife that is not only educated, but also that he could be culturally edified by her and therefore elevated in the society. In comparison to Jody Starks, who is also a very ambitious man, John does not need a wife to be his trophy. As explained in the chapters dedicated to the analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jody mainly prides himself in having a wife as beautiful and as light-skinned with straight hair as Janie for others to admire him, though John’s motivation goes beyond the spheres of superficial longing for beauty. On the contrary, he does not look for a girl, who is prettiest or lightest in complexion. What he cares about, is improving his social position and he understands Lucy’s potential to achieving that at once. The importance of Lucy in John’s life is tremendous. Sharon Jones asserts:

She helps John in his many roles; she encourages and gives him advice, especially on how to handle his congregation as a successful preacher. She functions as his moral center and conscience, reminding him of wrongdoing. Her death has a dramatic impact on the community and on John.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 13.

¹³⁸ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 13.

¹³⁹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 27.

¹⁴¹ Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 27.

¹⁴² Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 23.

¹⁴³ Jones, Sharon L. (2009). *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), 86.

Moreover, John's desire and determination for reaching his social ascension can be supported by his announcement to Ned right before he leaves the area for good: "Ahm goin' way from heah. Ahm goin' tuh Zar, and dat's on de other side of far, and when you see me agin Ahm gointer be somebody. Mah li'l' finger will be bigger than yo' waist."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*. (New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library), 47.

7. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Analysis

Their Eyes Were Watching God is generally considered one of the most important works of twentieth century American literature. In her most popular work of fiction, Zora Neale Hurston mostly avoided reference to racism practiced by white society. Nevertheless, the Jim Crow presence is noticeable throughout the novel.¹⁴⁵ Hurston refused to create representations of essentialized blackness struggling against the forces of white oppression.¹⁴⁶ Instead, she merely touches upon the intra-racist tendencies among black Americans through the character of a mulatto Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods. Janie as a central character transcends the classified racial, gender and communal identities. On her quest to self-discovery and love, she reflects a full range of the complexities of human life, especially life in such a world where black and white are no longer the only shades of one's skin color.

Janie Crawford, the main character *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is of a mixed heritage as the reader learns from Nanny's story. Janie's grandmother was born a slave and as Nanny recalls her memories of that time she mentions that her baby had "gray eyes and yaller hair"¹⁴⁷ as well as explicitly mentioning that "her baby look white"¹⁴⁸ despite Nanny being a dark black woman. Janie's mother later gets pregnant by a teacher and Janie is the result. The mother is absent from the novel as well as the father.

As a biracial character, Janie will serve as a key element for this portion of the thesis. Her mixed appearance affects her life and Hurston made sure the reader gets a full understanding of this key fact from the very beginning, giving the reader both subtle clues and direct hints. Besides Janie, who remains the central character for the analysis, Mrs. Turner, another light-skinned black woman and a comparatively minor character, who represents a vastly different approach to her mulatto heritage from Janie, will also be discussed in a few chapters.

¹⁴⁵ Lester, Neal A. (1999). *Understanding Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 14.

¹⁴⁶ Miles, Diana. (2003). *Women, Violence & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Vienna, Austria: Peter Lang), 85.

¹⁴⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 17.

¹⁴⁸ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 17.

7.1. Janie's Mulatto Heritage

When Janie returns to Eatonville, getting all the judgmental looks from her former neighbors, Pheoby brings her some dinner consisting of some unknown rice-based dish. The name Hurston used to call that dish should be interpreted, when she writes that Pheoby “went in the intimate gate with her heaping plate of mulatto rice.”¹⁴⁹ It may be no coincidence that she decided to use the word mulatto when naming this unknown made up dish since she may be alluding to Janie as a mulatto.

As Hurston lets the narrator begin to tell Janie's life story, her grandmother's slavery-time memories and the circumstances constitute a mini-slave narrative, which later formed Nanny's scrupulous attention to ensure a better life for Janie through her marriage to Logan Killicks. Nanny explains to young Janie, how she escaped the whipping she was supposed to receive for having a mixed baby and that she “wouldn't marry nobody though Ah could have uh heap uh times, cause Ah didn't want nobody mistreating mah baby”.¹⁵⁰ From this fear of hers it can be understood that having a near white or white people resembling child would be a great obstacle if she had married a black man. Nanny as a dark black woman herself, supposedly knowing the black community and the Negro men's logic well enough decided that raising her mixed child on her own was a more plausible option than having a black man at her side. From this reasoning, it seems quite clear, how much of a burden having a biracial baby in the black community may be. Nanny sacrificed her future romantic life by simply avoiding any kind of anticipated bigotry coming from the potential black husband towards her baby.

Janie's mother, Leafy, as a child of a white man and a black woman, was a mulatto in the true sense of the word according to the race mixing theory mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis. From Nanny's narrative Janie is revealed as a quadroon – a product of a rape of her mulatto mother by her white schoolteacher, when her mother was seventeen. Leafy could, in fact, be seen as an example of the “tragic mulatta” character, considering the

¹⁴⁹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 4.

¹⁵⁰ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 19.

rape in her young age as well as her disappearance and her abandonment of a product of rape and her only child.

7.2. The Impact of the Intra-racial on Janie's Interaction with Men

The first marriage with a black, land-owning man, Logan Killicks, Janie only agrees to for her grandmother's sake and perhaps for her rather naïve idea of love coming later as a part of every marriage. While Logan Killicks does not seem to show any apparent signs of even having a slight awareness of Janie's mixed-race looks but treats her like any other mule on his sixty-acre large piece of land, Joe "Jody" Starks surely does notice. I would even argue that without some of Janie's exceptionally Caucasian looking features, Joe Starks might never have taken notice of her. One of the most prominent signs of Janie's biracial heritage is her hair, which is exactly what seems to attract Joe's attention, when the two first encounter. Hurston describes Joe Starks as "a seal-brown color"¹⁵¹ man, which implies that he is way darker skinned than Janie, but also not totally black. She also adds that "He didn't look her [Janie's] way nor no other way except straight ahead,"¹⁵² which besides of expressing that he came across as a very confident black man, might simply convey the message that he is the type of man, who was hard to impress. Janie watches Joe and instantly desires him to notice her, so she runs to the pump to make some noise, which she hopes would draw Joe's attention to her. The pumping sound, however, is not the reason, why he eventually starts paying attention to Janie. Pumping the water out, it "made her heavy hair fall down"¹⁵³ and that was when "he stopped and looked hard, and then he asked for a cool drink of water."¹⁵⁴ Joe then mentions her hair once more right before their common departure, when he asks her to "Kiss me and shake yo' head. When you do dat, yo' plentiful hair breaks lak day."¹⁵⁵ Guessing from the encounter as such, Joe obviously praises Janie's beauty in general but judging from these two quotes, it is likely that the main motif for the admiration lies between the lines of the intra-racial aspects.

¹⁵¹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 27.

¹⁵² Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 27.

¹⁵³ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 30.

At this point of the story, when the reader first meets Joe, he is introduced by Hurston as a very charismatic, well dressed, confident and proud man. He “acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that.”¹⁵⁶ This statement also contributes to the likeliness of my previous assumption about the racial undertones of the encounter. In a sense, the statement implies that Joe acts white, therefore, there is a certain positive attitude or a personal preference towards the white people’s ways, potential beauty and their ability to confidently achieve their goals. Jody’s confidence may also imply that he has lived in the north for some time and, therefore, could look to have higher self-esteem. Joe Starks himself has a great goal. He has always wanted to be “a big voice”¹⁵⁷ and he’s heading to “dis place dat Colored folks was buildin’ theirselves”.¹⁵⁸ He sees this tiny little piece of white in Janie and takes her with him to contribute to his future success.

Throughout the whole novel, there are plenty of cues and cases of dark-skinned men showing flirtatious behavior toward light-skinned Janie. A good example of this premise occurs for instance when Joe and Janie first arrive to Eatonville and meet the two black men sitting under an oak tree. Firstly, Hicks is having boastful comments such as “But dat wife uh hisn! Ah’m uh son of uh Combunction if Ah don’t go tuh Georgy and git me one just like her”¹⁵⁹, recognizing her mulatto beauty right away. He is planning on trying to get her to like him later that day. As soon as he attempts to make a conversation with her, she doesn’t really respond in a fashion he would have liked, which bruises his ego. After the unsuccessful attempt, he tells his friend that “dat ‘oman ain’t so awfully pretty no how when yuh take de second look at her”.¹⁶⁰ Although he verbally denies her beauty after he got rejected, he does not forget to mention her alluring Caucasian hair by saying “Tain’t nothin’ to her ‘ceptin dat long hair.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, the other black man confronts Hicks with a harsh reality that Janie clearly does not want him and tells him to get over it because “all de women in de world ain’t been brought up on no teppentine still, and no saw-mill camp. There’ s some women dat jus’ ain’t for you tuh broach. You can’t git *her* [emphasis in original] wid no fish sandwich.”¹⁶² By this speech he

¹⁵⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 27. Note: Mr. Washburn is a white man and an only male role model for Janie while growing up.

¹⁵⁷ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 28.

¹⁵⁸ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 28.

¹⁵⁹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 38.

¹⁶¹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 38.

¹⁶² Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 39.

gives to Hicks, he points out the fact that Janie, from what they could see, belongs in the higher end of the black community hierarchy. Not only was she wearing silk and was accompanied by the black man overflowing with confidence and an ambitious vision, but she also had lighter skin than all of them. Therefore, this goes to show that a level you are at on a social class scale in a black community is considerably determined by the person's skin tone. Of course, Janie comes from significantly lower class. Her black ancestors were never house slaves enjoying advantages at all. However, Jody intentionally left out the truth about Janie's ancestry, when interacting with the blacks of Eatonville and let them believe that she was a higher-class mulatto girl, who chose him, Jody Starks, for her husband. Consequently, this gave the impression of a more credible, noble and respectable black man to him.

Another example of a situation, in which Janie's light skin determined the course of things, happened on the occasion of the opening of the store. Tony Taylor delivers a celebratory speech, which turns out to be more of an ode to Janie's beauty. Hurston through Tony's choice of words mentioning that "he [Joe Starks] seen fit tuh bring his, er, er, de light uh his home, dat is his wife amongst us also"¹⁶³ highlights Janie's status in the community. The word "light" in this context is ambiguous, referring both to the positive impact she has on the household, but also her light complexion. From the speech and the treatment Janie has received from the (mostly male) members of the community, it could be concluded that she has been highly-valued and acclaimed. I would argue that after Tony has called Janie as Mrs. Mayor to make a speech and Joe takes the floor and belittles Janie in front of the townspeople by saying that "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home."¹⁶⁴ He purposely uses the man-woman (dominant-subordinate) level to affirm and show his dominance. Once he senses Janie's natural superiority due to her light skin tone within the all-black community, there is no other tool left for him to take control over her than her womanhood.

7.3. Janie's Hair as an Intra-racial Determinant

A reoccurring subject of the intra-racial notion in relation to Janie is her hair. Her long, straight hair, white-like with its texture it has become a symbol especially in the middle section

¹⁶³ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 27.

¹⁶⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 43.

of the novel while she is married to Joe Starks. Joe orders her to wear a head-rag around the store to hide her hair. Meanwhile, her hair as such was an often-eroticized object and hiding it served as a protection to Joe's jealousy. It also conveys the social order power in it. The head-rag becomes a tool for getting rid of Janie's most prominent mulatto feature and providing Joe with a superior position to her, especially in the public eye on store premises. Furthermore, the symbolism of the head-rag was not only for a kind of social control but was supposed to metaphorically make a slave woman out of Janie, especially a field slave, the most maltreated type of slave. According to *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*, field slaves usually tied a rag around their heads to cover their hair, prevent it from mixing with cotton and protect themselves from the blazing sun, ringworm, flies and overall to hide their frizzy, poorly styled hair.¹⁶⁵ "The head rag became ubiquitous in slave culture"¹⁶⁶, which marks how important source of power such object was for Joe Starks. Only after Jody's death, she is free again to let her hair down. By letting her hair down, she freed herself from his power and restraints. The third man of her life – Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods – is no exception to the hair allurements. He too notices the smoothness of her hair saying: "it's so pretty. It feels jus' lak underneath uh dove's wing next to mah face."¹⁶⁷ By comparing it to a dove's wing, Hurston not only hints the pleasant, sleek texture, but also as a dove is associated with the color white, she might be indicating Tea Cake's notion of her light-skinned appearance through the hair. As Bertram D. Ashe argues in his *African American Review* article:

Although Janie enjoys possessing these features, she refuses to allow her light skin and long hair to separate her from the Eatonville community. Indeed, much of the novel concerns Janie's struggle against the community's attempts to place her, because of her features (particularly her hair), on a social level that is above and apart from the community.¹⁶⁸

This struggle of hers is traceable on the example of her second marriage to Joe as well as later, when she moves to the Everglades with Tea Cake.

¹⁶⁵ Byrd, Ayan D., & Tharps, Lori L. (2002). *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 13.

¹⁶⁶ Byrd & Tharps. *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 103.

¹⁶⁸ Ashe, Bertram D. (1995, Winter). "Why Don't He Like My Hair?": Constructing African-American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*". *African American Review*. Vol. 29, No. 4. 580.

7.4. Mulatto Appearance as a Social Stratification Factor

Right before leaving Eatonville with Tea Cake, she explains her point of view to her friend Pheoby. She likens her marriage to sitting on a high chair (as her grandma wished for her) and how she, being put above others “nearly languished tuh death”,¹⁶⁹ as well as it made her feel “like de world wuz cryin’ extry and Ah ain’t read de common news yet.”¹⁷⁰ This shows her desire to join the common (black) folk and just enjoy ordinary, everyday life with them rather than being considered superior. This longing becomes even more tangible, when she later starts working at the bean fields.

Janie gets married to Tea Cake and the newly-weds come working “on the muck” of the Everglades. At first, it is only Tea Cake who goes picking beans in the bean fields. That is when rumors start to spread about Janie and “it was generally assumed that she thought herself too good to work like the rest of the women.”¹⁷¹ There is not a single mention before this quote of whether Janie has already had the opportunity to irritate or give anybody a reason not to like her. Yet, people would say she thinks herself to be something more than others just from the superficial knowledge of her, which most likely consists exclusively of her color and mixed ethnicity. In this case, the fact that Janie was light-skinned, was enough of a reason for the black community to assume that it equated her with being too good for working in the fields alongside of the ordinary dark-skinned black workers, particularly women, as if she would only be a “house slave” rather than a “field slave.”

7.5. Mrs. Turner’s Conception of Beauty

Following Florida-based sections of the novel are, however, crucial for understanding and an in-depth interpretation of intraracial hierarchies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. With the introduction of the Turners, both the latent and manifested racial discrepancies within the black community become exposed. In fact, Mrs. Turner’s and her brother’s presence impacts the direction of the story and mainly the relationship of Janie and Tea Cake tremendously.

¹⁶⁹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 114.

¹⁷⁰ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 114.

¹⁷¹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 133.

Although Mrs. Turner is described by Hurston as “a milky sort of a woman that belonged to child-bed”¹⁷², having a figure that had been “shaped up by a cow kicking her from behind”¹⁷³ and looking like “an ironing board with things throwed at it”¹⁷⁴, the reader can conclude that she is a kind of an ugly and unattractive woman. She herself does not seem to be bothered by that. On the contrary, she thinks highly of herself and she especially praises her own thin lips (compared to large, full Negro lips), pointed nose (as opposed to a typical African-American wide-shaped nose), her buttocks in basrelief¹⁷⁵ (meaning flat which is typical for white people compared to the typical plump butt of a black woman). The theme of white society’s image of beauty is brought up here. Tea Cake sees her ugliness because he does not overly praise the Caucasian features, though for Mrs. Turner those features are all that matters because they define beauty. On the matter of beauty, Mrs. Turner later suggests that the main reason, why the whites oppress and do not associate with the black people, is not being poor (as Janie thinks) but “it’s de color and de features.”¹⁷⁶ In Turner’s mind, the black complexion itself along with the typical African facial features embody the purest form of ugliness. She even illustrates her point by making a simile that “lil ole black baby layin’ up in de baby buggy¹⁷⁷” looks exactly like “uh fly in buttermilk,”¹⁷⁸ which expresses her disgust in a very cruel form using something as innocent as a baby for such a negative example.

7.6. Mrs. Turner’s Racial Views Regarding Love

Mrs. Turner is a representation of a radical intra-racist person. Just like Janie she is of a mixed race, but unlike Janie, she is aware of all the above-mentioned characteristics of her body that “set her aside from Negroes”¹⁷⁹ and that is why she loves them. For Mrs. Turner a person’s skin tone is a factor of such a huge importance that it was the first determinant for her to seek Janie’s friendship¹⁸⁰ Janie’s skin being described as a “coffee-and-cream”¹⁸¹ color

¹⁷² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 139.

¹⁷³ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 139.

¹⁷⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

¹⁷⁵ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

¹⁷⁶ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

¹⁷⁷ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

¹⁷⁸ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

¹⁷⁹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

¹⁸⁰ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

¹⁸¹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

in connection with her “luxurious”¹⁸² hair arouses Mrs. Turner’s liking in the first place. Being of a mixed race in a black community, Mrs. Turner makes it clear during one of a number of conversations with Janie that she despises dark-skinned black people. She also makes a few points and expresses some of her strong opinions on the racial problems concerning people of the mixed heritage socializing with ordinary dark blacks.

Firstly, she cannot wrap her head around the fact that someone as white-looking as Janie married a man as dark-black as Tea Cake. She cannot imagine, how a light-skinned woman with features so superior to those of a darker African American could possibly love her inferior. Therefore, she tries to find other motifs that could in a way justify Janie’s choice. For this reason, Mrs. Turner mentions to Janie: “Yo’ husband musta had plenty money when y’all got married”¹⁸³ otherwise, she could not imagine, how Janie could find Tea Cake attractive and worth marrying. Her views on this topic strongly contrast with Janie’s color-blindness regarding a person’s race. Overall, Janie finds it hard to keep up with Mrs. Turner in expressing opinions on race in general because she simply “ain’t never thought about it too much”¹⁸⁴ and “It don’t worry [her] at all.”¹⁸⁵ Mrs. Turner’s beliefs on the supremacy of the mulatto to the black is so firm that she does not even consider Janie’s explanation of her love to her husband and accuses her of being “hypnotized”¹⁸⁶. Owing to Hurston’s extensive knowledge of the African-American culture and rituals and her anthropological experience, her using this word might be no coincidence. Hurston often uses voodoo imagery and symbols in her works so in this context she might be alluding to the fact that black people were known to practice hoodoo, spells, conjuring and other supernatural elements in love-hate matters. Nevertheless, “hypnotized” as terminology is a civilized, white, scientific term rather than a term used by practitioners of voodoo, and Mrs. Turner is careful not to acknowledge voodoo.

¹⁸² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 140.

¹⁸³ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 140.

¹⁸⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

¹⁸⁵ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 142.

¹⁸⁶ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

7.7. Mrs. Turners Mixed-Blood Identity Problem

Mrs. Turner's ambitions are, as her speech continues, far bigger than just to make Janie doubt her marriage. She immediately moves the discussion to a more global sphere. She claims that the light-skinned people like her and Janie "oughta lighten up de race"¹⁸⁷ and "outta class off"¹⁸⁸. Mrs. Turner does not internally feel being a part of the black race as she thinks herself superior and gets upset that the whites still do not distinguish biracial people from the blacks. By stating that "It ain't fair [...] Ah got white folk's features in mah face. Still and all Ah got tuh be lumped in wid all de rest,"¹⁸⁹ she shows the reader the insufficiency of the black-white racial dichotomy from a racist point of view. Where does the mulatto belong? And why is it automatically with the African-American race? This thought of Mrs. Turner covers one of the crucial struggles of people of the mixed race in general, which is lack of their own authentic community apart from the African-American population. A quote by Charles W. Chestnutt from his short story "The Wife of His Youth" (1898) addresses the ongoing mulatto problem:

we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Out fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one doesn't want us yet, but may take us in time. The other would welcome us but it would be for us a backward step.¹⁹⁰

The norm being that the mulatto is perceived as kind of an outcast or an individual that does not fit in either of the racial groups also correlates with Naomi Zack's connection of the issue with the concept of identity of mulattos which according to her collapses into black racial identities.¹⁹¹ Identity seems to be a subject of anger in Mrs. Turner's case as well. She represents both self-hatred because of the black part of herself, but also pride and a feeling of superiority towards the other members of the local community because of the white heritage. I would argue that her hatred towards the dark-black African Americans stems from the discrepancy between where she would like to belong and where she is designed to belong. She identifies herself more with the white race, but society still takes her as black, which is

¹⁸⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 140.

¹⁸⁸ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 142.

¹⁹⁰ Chestnutt, Charles W. (1969) *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 7.

¹⁹¹ Zack, Naomi. (1993). *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 147.

very frustrating for her. Consequently, she aims her anger against those, who she does not wish to be associated with, i.e. the blackness in her which holds her back from full integration into white society.

7.8. Mrs. Turner's Political Views

Mrs. Turner also expresses her political stance when she mentions Booker T. Washington who in her opinion “didn’t do nothin’ but hold us back – talkin’ ‘bout work when de race ain’t never done nothin’ else.”¹⁹² Here she touches on Washington’s speech known as the “Atlanta Compromise” that epitomizes his beliefs and visions for the future of the African-American population in the United States of America. In the speech, he stated that “African Americans should accept disenfranchisement and social segregation as long as whites allow them economic progress, educational opportunity and justice in the courts.”¹⁹³ This path advocated by Washington is not agreed upon by Turner who further argues that he “wuz uh enemy”¹⁹⁴ and “uh white folks’ nigger”¹⁹⁵. What Mrs. Turner says is that Washington in his opinions sort of urges to conform to the established white system of race separation and wants the blacks (including the biracial African Americans) to adapt to this arrangement instead of the other way around. The accommodation as suggested by Washington unfortunately does not provide any space for the lighter-skinned African Americans like her to break free from being perceived as identical with the rest of the non-mixed black race.

The criticism targeting Washington tackles the question of the further direction for the black people in terms of the degree of equality with the whites. While Washington would make do with partial, gradual approach to equality without a rejection of racial segregation in public places, another political activist fighting for the African-American rights, W.E.B. Du Bois, disagreed. From Mrs. Turner’s political stands expressed directly by a denial of Washington, she much more sympathizes with the latter. As W.E.B. Du Bois was an advocate for full and completely equal rights and therefore criticized Booker T. Washington,¹⁹⁶ his approach seems

¹⁹² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 142.

¹⁹³ Booker T. Washington Biography. (April 2, 2014) Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/activist/booker-t-washington>

¹⁹⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 142.

¹⁹⁵ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 142.

¹⁹⁶ Booker T. Washington Biography. (April 2, 2014) Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/activist/booker-t-washington>

more plausible for Mrs. Turner as a mulatto. She realizes that following Du Bois, efforts would ultimately lead to a chance for fair-skinned people to get equal opportunities as whites.

7.9. Manifestations of Mrs. Turner's Bigotry

Mrs. Turner also takes fierce pride in her brother. She makes it clear multiple times that she thinks he would be a better choice for Janie than Tea Cake because her brother is "real smart and got "dead straight hair too"¹⁹⁷. In this case, hair once again expresses ethnic identity meaning that her brother is, too, mixed. From the choice of the only two examples of his personal characteristics she mentioned to Janie, the reader can reckon the extreme importance of one's skin tone for the light-skinned Mrs. Turner. She apparently values intelligence as the same level as light complexion. She also associates intelligence with physical looks as if these two were connected. Based on the slavery-times belief the correlation being the whiter the smarter as has been mentioned in the chapter entitled "Slave Hierarchy and the Mulatto," Mrs. Turner's suggestion in this sense would be nothing exceptional.

Mrs. Turner's distinctive mentality regarding the hierarchy of the black community based on the skin color as its main component is aptly described by the omniscient narrator as such:

anyone who looked more white folkish than herself was better than she was in her criteria, therefore it was right that they should be cruel to her at times, just as she was cruel to those more negroid than herself in direct ratio to their negroness.¹⁹⁸

These feelings of inferiority causing the tendency to worship those on the lighter side of the spectrum like Janie but on the other hand triggering intraracial bigotry and cruelty towards those darker than her seemed to be deeply ingrained in the African-American mindset in the USA due to the slavery experience.

¹⁹⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 142.

¹⁹⁸ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 144.

7.10. Tea Cake's Perception of Mrs. Turner

The hateful feelings Mrs. Turner has towards Tea Cake based on skin color are mutual. After the scene when Tea Cake overhears the conversation between Mrs. Turner and Janie, he articulates his opinion on her uttering: "Ah hates dat woman lak poison [...]Her look lak uh white woman! [...] Wid dat meriny skin and hair jus' as close tuh her head as ninety-nine is tuh uh hundred!"¹⁹⁹ He is primarily occupied by her light-skinned visage when criticizing her than her unpleasant character. That rather proves the importance of the complexion in the social stratification system within the black community. Furthermore, Tea Cake continues by admitting that he would rather "go tuh dat white man's place and git good treatment".²⁰⁰ The last statement intensifies the whole point of this particular instance of mutual intraracial bigotry. For a non-member of the black community it could easily come off as illogical. The fact that Tea Cake would actually prefer dining at a white person's place (who is a part of the oppressing class to the blacks) as opposed to a light-skinned woman's place (who, however, belongs to his community but still despises darker blacks) demonstrates the power and the complexity of the intrinsic system inside the African-American community. The conception of bigotry based on color does not only stem from the feelings of inferiority/superiority, physical ugliness/beauty, intelligence/stupidity, but is closely related to the concept of power.

7.11. Bigotry and Power

Racial bigotry and its connection to power in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* comes to attention most prominently with the character of Tea Cake. Since his and Mrs. Turner's authorities both have their source in a different principle (his in gender, hers in race), Tea Cake shows the need to affirm his authority over Janie by beating her. By the act of hitting her, Tea Cake tries to reverse the presumption that race beats masculinity and marital relation. The beatings as such, however, besides the inability to articulate the fear of losing her²⁰¹, reflect racial motivation especially in its consequences.

¹⁹⁹ Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 143.

²⁰⁰ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 143.

²⁰¹ Racine, Maria J. (1994). "Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*". *African American Review*. Vol. 28, No. 2, Black Women's Culture Issue (Summer, 1994), 291.

When Mrs. Turner's brother came over to be introduced to Janie, Tea Cake "had whipped Janie" [...] "No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss."²⁰² Later Tea Cake himself confirms that he "didin't whup Janie 'cause *she* (she in cursive) done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss."²⁰³ The manifest motif as to why he laid his hand on her was to demonstrate his masculine power over her, to exhibit that Janie is **his** (emphasis in original) wife and that she is not leaving him for any Turner brother. The latent, subtler but racially motivated reason for hitting Janie was to literally and visibly show off his – a black man's – possession of Janie.

Janie's feminine mulatto beauty that has been commented upon throughout the whole novel. Her light-skinned body and features, most prominently hair have been a subject to men's erotic thoughts as well as the first eye-striking feature to sexually attract them (Jody p. 30, Walter p. 55, Tea Cake p. 103). By beating and slapping Janie, Tea Cake gave her bruises, which wakes up interest in both dark women and dark men in the fields the following day. The black eye and bruises Tea Cake's beating caused on Janie's light-skin complexion as the narrator claims "aroused sort of envy."²⁰⁴ Women were jealous that Tea Cake "petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her,"²⁰⁵ supposedly because their own husbands never did. The reason behind this is again presumably of racial origin. The other husbands' wives were all dark-skinned black women and therefore when their husband hit them, the bruising marks of the violent act were not noticeable on their dark skin. Out of sight, out of mind, there were no reminders of the committed violence hence no reason for the husband to 'pet and pamper' his wife. Sop-de-Bottom brings the subject up by admiringly uttering: "Tea Cake, you sho is a lucky man" [...] "Uh person can see every place you hit her."²⁰⁶ The men in the community sexualize the act of violence and consider it beautiful just because of the light skin. It also reflects the notion of a black man beating a white person, something resembling revenge for the derogatory institution of slavery which whites forced blacks to endure.

²⁰² Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 147.

²⁰³ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 148.

²⁰⁴ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 147.

²⁰⁵ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 147.

²⁰⁶ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 147.

Janie's mulatto nature is further associated with gentleness, fragility, almost innocence that Sop-de-Bottom lacks in dark-skinned women as he continues: "Lawd! Wouldn't Ah love tuh whip uh tender woman lak Janie! Ah bet she don't even holler."²⁰⁷ The men are envious about Tea Cake's wife because he is able to hurt her and subsequently see the damage. As twisted as it initially seems, the brutality of the thought itself is not essential. It again points to the racial consciousness of the men involved, in this case representing the African-American community perspective.

An interesting point occurs concerning this masculine fascination by a black man giving a black eye to a mulatto woman as a female writer invented it. The question is, how Hurston even found out about this phenomenon bearing in mind that the subject allegedly belongs to a realm of purely male discourse. I would attribute this to the fact that Hurston wrote the novel while she conducted an ethnographic research in Haiti. She also simultaneously with *Their Eyes Watching God* wrote the study *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938) which evidently influenced the work of fiction.²⁰⁸ She probably picked the notion up while her anthropological explorations and field research.

An example of a legal power comes into play during the trial scene near the end of Janie's life story. It could be looked at from the point of view of race and to what extent Janie's evidently mixed skin tone affected the course and the verdict of shooting Tea Cake. The trial is inarguably racially motivated, but are there any intraracial influences to it? Even though they are denied the right to speak in the court room, the voice of the black men is key. Their word spreads and Janie overhears them talking from her boarding house room claiming that "dem white mens wuzn't gointuh do nothin' tuh no woman dat look lak her."²⁰⁹ Referring to her skin color and Caucasian features resembling more a white than a black person, the black men allude to the fact that it might have helped her be pronounced innocent.

²⁰⁷Hurston, Zora N. (1990). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 148.

²⁰⁸ Koy, Christopher. (2000) "Zora Neale Hurston's Literary Roots in Ethnographic Research." *Antropologické sympozium*. Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 66.

²⁰⁹ Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 189.

8. Hurston's Intraracial Short Stories

As a very versatile and gifted writer, Zora Neale Hurston utilized a broad range of writing genres. She was preoccupied with fiction as well as non-fiction. Among her best critically acclaimed non-fiction belongs her works of anthropology and folktales *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938). She also published an autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) and several journal articles. As far as fiction goes, besides writing novels, she also classified as a playwright. Her famous play *Color Struck* (1926) for example deals with colorism among Blacks. Even though she experimented with her literary composition and one could say that she sometimes even struggled on her mission of searching her literary voice and perspective throughout her writing career, she was an immensely prolific short story writer and writing short stories intertwine her whole career.

Most of her short stories she submitted for publishing in contemporary magazines, such as *Fire!!* and *Opportunity*. Hemenway notes upon development of Hurston's short fiction writing as follows:

Hurston's writing from the Harlem Renaissance is a mixed bag that culminates esthetically in *Fire!!*'s "Sweat" but looks back on a series of unsuccessful efforts to translate Eatonville into fiction, beginning with "John Redding Goes to Sea," her first story, for the *Stylus*²¹⁰

Her short fiction has been put together and published as *The Complete Stories* (1996) with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Sieglinde Lemke. Due to the richness in themes, language and fusion of influences reflected in her short stories, they make up a solid ground for her later longer fiction. Hurston's stories explore edgy issues in the Black community including color prejudice, marriage, gender, class and Sharon Jones observes that:

Hurston's stories stand out because these texts emphasize African-American people and their cultural traditions. Her stories often feature African-American characters as the main focus, rather than being relegated to secondary, or even stigmatized roles. Her characters are dynamic and complex, revealing multiple facets of their personalities or character. Readers will find in these stories that Hurston's own heritage influenced her

²¹⁰ Hemenway, Robert E. (1980). *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 65.

point of view and informed her representation of the African-American experience.²¹¹

In this section of the thesis my focus is directed at those short stories, which in different ways bring up the topic of the intraracial – “Magnolia Flower” (1925) and posthumously published “Now You Cookin’ With Gas”, an uncut version of her “Story in Harlem Slang” (1942). These two stories aptly illustrate Hurston’s diverse approach to her short fiction. While the former is strongly inspired by her African studies at Columbia University in its narrative and thematic apprehension, the latter taking place in a city district of Harlem, as opposed to a natural southern setting of “Magnolia Flower”, offers a completely different style. Both of the stories, however, contain an element of colorism in African-American community.

Published in 1925, “Magnolia Flower” first appeared in the newspaper and did not receive much critical attention at first.²¹² However, it shares many of the crucial themes with Hurston’s novels and in a sense, can easily be considered the epitome of her work. Susan E. Meisenhelder addresses one theme of the intraracial conflict between black men and their black wives that both previously discussed novels and this short story have in common, which she describes as:

the interaction of race and gender in models of masculinity played out in domination of black women through the character, Bentley, a freed slave so spiritually enslaved to the values of his former slave owners that he recreates master/slave relationships with his wife and his community.²¹³

This ex-slave mentality heavily contributes to the intraracial conflict central to this short story. Although “Magnolia Flower” especially stands out among other Hurston’s stories mainly because of the heavily used personification and skillful incorporation of nature’s voice into the story about human love, intraracism in fact forms the core of the plot.

“Now You Cookin’ With Gas” was under this title first published as late as in 1996 in *The Complete Stories*, however, the *American Mercury* magazine published a different version of the same story in 1942 entitled “Story in Harlem Slang.” The edited version excluded some of the authentic scenes that Hurston put in there such as a white police officer getting killed by one of the main black characters and certain sexually explicit slang words were omitted as

²¹¹ Jones, Sharon L. (2009) *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), XIII in Introduction.

²¹² Jones, *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*, 87.

²¹³ Meisenhelder, Susan E. (1999) *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 36.

well. Hettie Williams comments on the dual existence of the story with a remark implying that Hurston as a female and African-American writer had to face more limitations when publishing: “The two versions illustrate the politics and tensions circumscribing black women’s authorship generally but black folk language and expression particularly.”²¹⁴

8.1. “Magnolia Flower” Analysis

The technique of a frame story that Hurston chose for this story, very typical for African oral storytelling features animate but nonanimal narrators, the River narrates the story to the listener – the Brook. Nature seems to represent a force that transcends the anguish which human life encompasses. Moreover, nature is portrayed ambiguously, as it witnesses and participates in both pleasant and violent aspects of human life. In the beginning, the River for instance describes the horrors of the Civil war: “the tide brought trouble rumors to me of hate, strife and destruction, – war, war, war. The blood of those born in the North flowed to sea, mingled with that of the southern-born. Bitter Waters, Troubled Winds.”²¹⁵ More importantly, this ambiguous attitude of the River and other personified natural elements stand apart from members of the human race, so speaking of race itself becomes depersonalized from the point of view of the River, therefore, more objective. The intraracial component was only experienced by the characters themselves in her other works of fiction, and not perceived by any external entity. In this case, the frame narrative probes into Hurston’s thoughts on racial matters and at the same time serves as a remote access into the characters’ actions.

The River’s story begins with a depiction of one of the main characters – Bentley – who is also central to this analysis. Bentley is a dominant black man, a figure of authority to all, including his Native American wife, Swift Deer, who, as Hurston puts it “was no longer swift [...] too many kicks and blows, too many grim chokings had slowed her feet and heart.”²¹⁶ She therefore has little strength or mental power to contradict her husband, unlike for example Amy in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* or Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Bentley’s past as a slave, as was the case with Ned had a profound impact on his character. Bentley, although he is the father to a mixed-race daughter named Magnolia Flower, cannot stand people of his own race

²¹⁴ Williams, Hettie, V. (2017). *Bury My Heart in a Free Land: Black Women Intellectuals in Modern U.S. History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO), 113.

²¹⁵ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 35.

²¹⁶ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 35.

mixed with whites. As an ex-slave, Bentley managed to obtain enough wealth to climb up the social ladder. He “had built a house such as white men owned when he was in bondage”²¹⁷ and he became what he hated – a master to his workmen, who “must be black, very black or Cherokee”²¹⁸ for he “hated anything that bore the slightest resemblance to his former oppressors.”²¹⁹ His despotic behavior affects a lot more black people since he, unlike the aforementioned Ned, has the power and access to abuse them. He only accepts dark black African Americans to work for him, which paradoxically puts him in a position higher than people who physically resemble him rather than light-skinned blacks. Hurston adds that “he was hated but feared more.”²²⁰ The desire to avoid any type of contact with blacks of lighter pigmentation than his own, on the one hand suggests his absolute hate towards anything connected to his former white oppressors, but on the other hand can be assumed that he was still conscious of the white privilege mentality. He invariably shows fear by not taking the opportunity to figuratively and literally enslave them. Bentley’s efforts to keep mixed blacks away from himself and his family soon turn out to be a central component of the story.

A young teacher named John becomes a new resident to Bentley’s village and the River describes him as “a Negro yet not a Negro, for his skin was the color of freshly barked cypress, golden with the curly black hair of the white man.”²²¹ Bentley finds himself in an ambiguous position – he needs this teacher since he desires to build a school so that his beloved daughter can get an education but he “hated him at once”²²² for his mixed ancestry and light skin. Magnolia Flower, his seventeen-year-old daughter, on the other hand, does not share her father’s vision concerning John. Contrarily, she in fact falls in love with him. A few circumstances pointing towards their naturally divergent perceptions of John as a young mulatto man, and the intraracial phenomenon that comes with it, can be acknowledged.

Firstly, Bentley and Magnolia do not share the same life experience in terms of the conditions of their upbringing and quality of life, so that their world views differ. Magnolia was born just a few years before the Civil War, so for as long as she could remember, “all men

²¹⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 35.

²¹⁸ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 35.

²¹⁹ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 35.

²²⁰ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 35.

²²¹ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 36.

²²² Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 36.

walked free in the land.”²²³ Slavery times did not affect her in the way they did Bentley, her mind was not shaped by the cruel treatment from a slavemaster, nor did she ever experience any other forms of extreme abuse by a white man’s hand. No direct experience with the institution of slavery results in her being free of prejudice towards the obvious whiteness in John.

Secondly, as Jones notes, Magnolia Flower is “open to people of different ethnic backgrounds, and she does not place as much focus on color as her father.”²²⁴ The reason behind her embrace of John’s biraciality most likely stems from her own mixed identity. As a child of a Native American mother and an African-American father, the duality of heritage makes up her own life experience, and consequently she does not find it a reason to hate John as Bentley does.

In the third place, the aspect of beauty in being a light-skinned person, which has already been discussed in the case of both Janie Crawford as well as John Pearson, could be taken into consideration in this instance. Given that Magnolia Flower is a female and Bentley is a male, this fact contributes significantly to the disagreement in their opinions. Whereas Bentley does not care about John’s handsomeness as a mulatto, for his feelings of hate stem purely from what John’s ancestry represents as a link to the painful slavery memories, Magnolia as a young female sees him differently. Although “there were many Negroes in Bentley’s Village,”²²⁵ she falls in love with the newcomer, John, instantly, which most likely has to do with his exceptional looks and potentially his schooling. Furthermore, in this short story, light-skinned John is the only African American that is mentioned to have received education, which automatically implies his higher social status as opposed to the other exclusively dark black men, who work for Bentley. John’s previous access to education again draws links to the historical phenomenon of the light-skinned house slaves’ usual higher levels of education due to their frequently privileged position.

When their passionate feelings emerge as mutual, John insists on asking Bentley for permission to marry Magnolia Flower. He is confident about being a good man with a “great

²²³ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 35.

²²⁴ Jones, Sharon L. (2009). *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File), 88.

²²⁵ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 36.

Vision, a high purpose [and therefore Magnolia's father] shall not be ashamed of [him]."²²⁶ Even though Magnolia Flower warns him that his skin color would be a problem because he is "too white", he does not care and confronts Bentley. Unsurprisingly, Bentley is outraged at a thought of his daughter marrying some "yaller skunk."²²⁷ He reacts with violence and uncontrollable anger. Despite Bentley's fury, John refuses to leave and give Magnolia up, exhibiting both bravery and dignity. The struggle results in Bentley's decision to bind John, lock him up and hang him on the following day. He wishes for his daughter to find a man that "would not offend him either in spirit or **flesh** [...] he must be full of humility and **black**"²²⁸ (emphasis mine). John only meets the former of these requirements – he is an educated man, determined to stand up for himself and his love. His noble personality is, however, not enough because his skin color appears to be the only obstacle for Bentley to give his blessings to the couple. The predicament that John's lightness remains the key impediment to the lovers is supported by Bentley's statement that before he "hangs dis yaller pole-cat [he is] qwinter marry her to crazy Joe [...] Magnolia and Joe oughter have fine black chillen. Ha! Ha!"²²⁹ Bentley, a dark black African American himself, illustrates the worst form of an intraracial conflict within the community by deciding to prioritize his own racial prejudice over his daughter's happiness. He replicates the humiliation of his daughter's lover in a manner similar to a public lynching. Regarding this way of punishment, Christopher Waldrep points out that "whites' imagined right to "chastise" black people outside the law, a sentiment that formed a central component of lynching, had its origins in slavery"²³⁰ and that "white southerners saw their right to kill miscreant black people as a prime privilege of slavery."²³¹ By opting for this particular way of exerting power over John, Bentley imitates the slavery phenomenon of white masters lynching and whipping their black slaves in reverse.

As Blanche H. Gelfant points out when she summarizes the general tendencies in Hurston's short stories: "if outcomes are not necessarily happy, it is important in Hurston's

²²⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 36.

²²⁷ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 37.

²²⁸ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 35.

²²⁹ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 38.

²³⁰ Waldrep, Christopher (2006). *Lynching in America: A History in Documents*. (New York: New York University Press), 70.

²³¹ Waldrep, *Lynching in America: A History in Documents*, 61.

stories that innocence triumph over corruption,”²³² “Magnolia Flower” is no exception to her claim. Although Bentley imprisons both lovers separately, one of his servants sets Magnolia Flower free. Subsequently, she courageously steals John’s prison key from Bentley and they both flee, not to meet Swift Deer or Bentley ever again.

The story opens and closes with the frame narrative, paying attention to the River and to nature in general. Hurston confronts and criticizes the African-American community by talking about its flaws including intraracism through her usage of personification. Nature in the story acts as a unifying force that objectively watches over the characters, the River after finishing the story just “flowed calmly on, shimmering under the moon as it moved ceaselessly to the sea,”²³³ untouched by this minor human love-story. At the very end, Magnolia Flower and John come back some forty-seven years later, engaged in a following dialog:

“But, John, listen, did you ever hear a river make such a sound? Why it seems almost as if it were talking – that murmuring noise, you know.”
“Maybe, it’s welcoming us back. I always felt that it loved you and me somehow.”²³⁴

In this concluding dialog Hurston indirectly suggests that the nature, although predominantly objective and unmoved, supports love and solidarity over hate and bigotry after all.

8.2. “Now You Cookin’ With Gas” Analysis

This short story offers a completely different setting to the rural frontier Florida of “Magnolia Flower”. “Now You Cookin’ With Gas” belongs among a few stories that Hurston wrote that take place in an urban environment of the contemporary Harlem, New York City. She “attempted to capture, with her unmistakable sense of humor, the new urban sensibility and language of migrants to the city.”²³⁵

In the appendix to the story is a glossary called “Harlem Slang” (a blend of words slang and language,) which was put together by Hurston to explain the meanings of the slang

²³² Gelfant Blanche H. (2004). *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story*. (New York: Columbia University Press), 308.

²³³ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 39.

²³⁴ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 40.

²³⁵ Carpio, G., & Sollors, W. (2010). Five Harlem Short Stories by Zora Neale Hurston. *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 55(4), 557-560.

words used in the original manuscript of the story that might be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the white reader, unfamiliar with the language used by the African Americans living in Harlem. As Valerie Boyd remarks, the story is written “in the coded, sexually charged”²³⁶ language. The majority of those words serve to describe either racial, sexual or class phenomena, therefore, were left out in the edited version of the story. The glossary constitutes an important component, vital for understanding the intraracially-colored connotations that occur in the story. Hurston even included the following scale of words that were used to describe different degrees of one’s skin tone, which was closely linked to a person’s class status within African Americans:

1. High yaller
2. Yaller
3. High brown
4. Vaseline brown
5. Seal brown
6. Low brown
7. Dark brown²³⁷

The story told in a third-person form but heavily relying on dialogue, captures an excerpt from a typical day in the life of the narrator – Marvel – that basically represents a fitting image of life on the lower end of the social ladder in Harlem. “During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, Harlem also served as a microcosm of the African-American community at large.”²³⁸ In the story, Hurston presents how the deeply-rooted intraracial aspects projecting into everyday situations and conversations of black people influenced them in their demeanor and mutual interactions.

Marvel had changed his name to Jelly after spending some time in Harlem doing activities like “sugar-curing the ladies’ feelings, pimping, sweet-backing”²³⁹ because as he states “jam dont shake,”²⁴⁰ which is to demonstrate his firm position of a tough, self-conscious man he means to adopt in the local community. Jelly is described as a “seal-skin brown and

²³⁶ Boyd, Valerie. (2003). *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. (New York: Simon and Schuster), 352.

²³⁷ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins).

²³⁸ Jones, Sharon. (2002). *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West* (Westport: Greenwood Press), 57.

²³⁹ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 233.

²⁴⁰ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 233.

papa-tree-top-tall”²⁴¹ man, which means medium dark to dark level of blackness, number five according to Hurston’s scale. He is a pimp, which did not mean a man that controls women and takes a percentage of their earnings in return for security and obtaining clients as it does today. According to the digital version of the Green’s Dictionary of Slang in US Black English it meant a male prostitute²⁴² at that time. He is skinny, dressed up in a zoot suit, wearing his hair in waves and usually not up until late afternoon because the more time person spends sleeping, the less he needs to eat,²⁴³ which indicates that Jelly is also not financially secure. It is common for black men to remain unemployed because they are unable to get a job unlike black women, who are often employed as nurses. For example, Richard Wright has a short story about a married black man, whose wife works but gets ill, so he cross-dresses as a woman, performs the job and pretends that he is a woman, in order to get paid. (To add to his experience, a white man tries to make sexual advances on the cross-dressing black man who has no idea what a black woman would possibly do in a situation like that, so he just lets it happen. This is not the only example in black literature on the subject, almost all black writers talk about this phenomenon.)

He starts his daily routine with getting out of bed and cruising the streets of Harlem in search for an opportunity to make some money for food, drugs, alcohol and potentially women. In the story, his initial plan is to swindle one of his colleagues named Sweet Back and get some money out of him. Both men greet each other and when Sweet Back asks Jelly how he is doing, Jelly admits: “Oh, just like de bear – I aint nowhere. Like de bear’s brother, – I aint no further. Like de bear’s daughter – aint got a quarter.”²⁴⁴ After Sweet Back expresses fake surprise just for the sake of catching Jelly in a vulnerable position, Jelly turns the previous claim into a joke and starts bragging about how good he has it. Both men then start boasting and competing against each other, trying to outclass the other one. They seemingly talk about how much money they have, but women are in the center of their heated discussion.

Sweet Back mentions that he saw him “last night with dat beat chick scoffing a hot dog”²⁴⁵ in an effort to humiliate Jelly and to let him know that what he is saying is a lie. In

²⁴¹ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 233.

²⁴² pimp. 2019. In greensdictofslang.com. Retrieved June 8, 2019, from <https://greensdictofslang.com/search/basic?q=pimp>

²⁴³ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 234.

²⁴⁴ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 234.

²⁴⁵ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 235.

return, Jelly continues lying and brings up the importance of one's skin color (in this case woman's). He opposes by saying that "last night [he] was riding round in a Yellow Cab, with a yellow gal, drinking yellow likker and spending yellow money."²⁴⁶ The adjective "yellow" in this context is meant to firstly, indicate that the girl was of a light skin and therefore more prestigious than a dark-skinned one. Secondly, to emphasize that all he did last night was expensive, luxurious and valuable (the liquor, the cab, the mulatto girl) The discussion then proceeds with comments about intraracial perception of a light-skin as a symbol of wealth and its contribution to a black women's value.

Sweet Back then strikes back replying that "Dat broad I seen you with wasnt no pe-ola. She was one of them coal-scuttle blondes with hair just as close to her head as ninety-nine is to a hundred."²⁴⁷ In this claim, he refers to the girl as ugly-looking. He connects an aspect of beauty with one's skin tone, depicting the girl mockingly as "coal-scuttle blonde" with the emphasis on her hair. Dark-skinned girl's hair in its structure gave away that she was no mulatta, even though probably dyed blond to make her seem lighter, therefore worthier. The accusation that Jelly did not spend the night with a light skinned woman but a dark one instead insults him.

Jelly then makes it clear that he prefers light skinned girls exclusively by claiming that he "don't deal in no coal"²⁴⁸ Again, the choice of words being mildly insulting. He proceeds to express his taste in women based mainly on the color of their skin by saying that "Know what I tell 'em? If they's white, they's right! If they's yellow, they's mellow! If they's brown they can stick around. But if they come black, they better git way back!"²⁴⁹ This segment again illustrates that social status within African-American community was designed by the level of skin pigmentation. Similarly, Sweet Back answers by bragging that he: "knocks de pad with them cack-broads up on Sugar Hill, and fills 'em full of melody."²⁵⁰ By using the compound cack-broad he means "a woman who flaunts her wealth"²⁵¹ and also an intraracial aspect to it can be found in the location he mentions. Sugar Hill is an area, where mostly light-skinned,

²⁴⁶ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 236.

²⁴⁷ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 236.

²⁴⁸ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 236.

²⁴⁹ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 236.

²⁵⁰ Hurston, *The Complete Stories*, 236.

²⁵¹ cack-broad. 2019. In greensdictofslang.com. Retrieved June 8, 2019, from <https://greensdictofslang.com/search/basic?q=cack-broad>

wealthy blacks live, according to Russel et. al. when describing color as a dividing force in the black community:

The mulatto elite began to segregate into their own neighborhoods, and to this day, virtually every major urban center across the country has a section where predominantly light-skinned and wealthier African Americans reside. In Philadelphia, they live in areas unofficially called “lightly bright” and “banana block”. In Chicago, the Black bourgeoisie can be found in Chatham and East Hyde Park (where the Obamas have their home), and in New York, descendants of original light-skinned mulatto elite can still be found among the residents of certain sections of Harlem, including Sugar Hill – co called because the people who live there are said to lead such a “sweet” life [...]²⁵²

Right after their argument gets to the point, when they pretend to be on the verge of pulling a gun out their pocket, they both see an attractive domestic walking down the street in their direction. Both men want to manipulate her to either keep them company to make love or get her money, ideally both. Once again, they brag in front of the woman in order to fool her and take advantage of her, but she apparently knows their reputation and does not let the sweet talk have any effect on herself. Neither Jelly, nor Sweet Back is successful in maneuvering the domestic into their plan, contrarily, the girl manages to offend both, when she refuses spending money on them. She makes it clear that if she was to waste her time on them, they would need money to pay for her meal. Therefore, she undermined their economic interests. She completely destroyed the very meaning of their occupation up in Harlem and they could never accept what she had demanded. Finally, she proves the men the lies that they both – Jelly and Sweet Back – have told to each other, which is that their women of wealth treat them generously financially.

Hurston concludes the story by confronting the reader with a rather unusual perspective on South vs. North polarity from the point of view of a quality of life for African-Americans during the time of the Great Migration. The vision of the southern African-Americans, similar to the American Dream that after coming to Harlem, New York they will live a better life full of women, money and luxury, does not come true for Jelly, who is originally from the South. He instead just remembers “those full hot meals he had left back in Alabama to seek wealth and splendor in Harlem without working”²⁵³ and realizes that the life

²⁵² Russell, Kathy, Midge Wilson, Ph.D., Ronald Hall. (2013). *The Color Complex (Revised): The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group), 61.

²⁵³ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 240.

in North is sort of an idealized utopia, where “They would call you “Mister“ all right, just like he had been told that they would. But they kept their old clothes and wore them themselves.”²⁵⁴ Hurston confronts the reader with the bitter reality of his life in Harlem, where he desperately faces poverty and hunger every day. He reminisces of his previous life in the rural, in his memory plentiful South, coming to conclusion that Harlem is overrated.

²⁵⁴ Hurston, Zora N. (1996). *The Complete Stories*. (New York: HarperCollins), 241.

Conclusion

The scope of themes in Zora Neale Hurston's works of fiction is very extensive and her significance in the field of African-American literature, anthropologic studies, folklore and Harlem Renaissance is unexceptionable and praised by many. Her legacy does not revolve around literature but is far more complex. Using her literary works, she has established her own, fresh perspective for viewing black people with no fear to show their genuine lives as she had seen them through her anthropological experience, stripped from idealization, political ideologies or stereotypes as she did in writing *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Other times, she just let herself celebrate the black culture, romanticize, and provide the reader with an undeniable vital strength through the persistence of her powerful female characters as it was the case with Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The famous American literary critic Harold Bloom sums up his reflection of Zora by calling her a vitalist, finally assessing her as "outrageous, heroically larger than life, witty in herself and the cause of wit in others [who] belongs now to literary legend."²⁵⁵

The aim of this thesis was to examine Hurston's approach to one theme in particular – her treatment of intraracism within African-American community. Intraracism, sometimes spoken about as colorism symbolizes one of the more serious discords within the African-American community, firmly enrooted in their common history, collective consciousness and a perpetual reminder of the hardships of a slavery past they inevitably share as a race. The topic was purposely chosen for its timelessness and relevancy in the society of the present time. Hurston, an authentic writer, proved to be provided a raw, knowledgeable outlook on the theme.

The diploma thesis in the first and second chapter focused on the intraracial bigotry from a theoretical point of view. It defined the key terms essential for a full understanding of the phenomenon as well as contrasted the words bigotry, racism, prejudice and discrimination. It further established the difference between the intraracial and interracial bigotry. Moreover, this theoretical section of the thesis outlined the criteria for who was going

²⁵⁵ Bloom, Harold. (2009). "Introduction," in H. Bloom, *Bloom's Guides: Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (New York: Infobase Publishing), 11.

to be considered a mulatto in the following textual interpretation and analysis of Hurston's novels and selected short stories.

The third chapter of the thesis was dedicated to the underlying and probably the most important initiating factor to the intraracial problem – slavery. The historical background to the intraracial conflict was described, relying on two main sources that explore the topic – Stephen Talty's – *The Mulatto America* and Edward B. Reuter's - *The Mulatto in the United States*. The chapter addressed the beginnings of the institution of slavery in the United States with the emphasis to its distinct nature and practices that were implemented compared to other instances of enslaved cultures. In addition, a close attention was paid to the newly-formed hierarchies among the black slaves, who became divided to house slaves and field slaves. The potentially preferential treatment that was received from their white slave masters according to their skin color as well as the feelings caused by the favored position of the lighter-skinned slaves were also discussed.

The following chapter provides an insight into Zora Neale Hurston's personal life, family background, studies, and anthropological experience as the factors that possibly made her invested in the intraracial and giving the importance to her mixed-skin characters in her works. It also defined her approach to literature and described her style as a mixture of her ethnographic research and its reflection in her conception of fiction that she created through the lenses of science. This chapter, moreover, contained a brief outline of a critical acclaim by Hurston's contemporaries as well as an interpretation of how and why her writing was different. It contrasted Hurston's style and aim of her literature to Richard Wright as her main critic. In addition, it is addressing the purpose behind her utilization of the African American Vernacular English into her fiction.

The character of the mulatto in American Literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century was a subject of the last chapter of the theoretical part of the thesis. It deals with certain reoccurring characteristics, plot patterns and eventually similar fate of the light-skinned African-American characters all throughout American Fiction. The mulatto was often described in a prototypical and stereotypical way, frequently as a tragic figure, sometimes trying to pass as white, alienated from their darker-black counterparts. Examples of other authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Weddell Chestnutt, James Weldon

Johnson or Nella Larson were mentioned in that chapter to establish that Hurston was not the only African-American writer to employ them in her fiction.

In its main part, the thesis firstly analyzed Hurston's first published novel named *Jonah's Gourd Vine* that bears many autobiographical traits. Secondly, it focused on the most successful novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and lastly, it interpreted two selected short stories "Magnolia Flower" and "Now You Cookin' With Gas" that yet have not received much attention among literary critics.

The main protagonists in these works of fiction are, apart from "Now You Cookin' With Gas," of a mixed-race heritage. The thesis examined the mutual interactions between the light-skinned characters (Janie, Mrs. Turner, John Pearson, John from Magnolia Flower) and significant dark-skinned characters (Janie's husbands, John Pearson's family members, females interested in him, Bentley) and to what extent their perception of each other was influenced by their pigmentation. To draw conclusions that has been gathered from all the studied situations and characters' behavior, it may be observed that whether and how much the lighter black person's skin tone influences the quality of their life depends on the darker-skinned black persons' individual experience and motivations. In other words, whether the treatment the mulatto character receives is rather positive or negative, is strongly based on the people that the mulatto interacts with and is surrounded with. What matters significantly and is obviously visible with the examples of Ned Crittenden and Bentley is their previous direct contact with slavery. The characters, who were ex-slaves themselves, tended to show hatred and bigoted views on people of mixed-race and behave like their former masters. This applies mainly to male characters, for reasons like their incapability to protect African-American women from the white slavemaster described in more detail in chapters 6.2. (Ned) and 8.1. (Bentley).

Gender of the mulatto protagonist showed to be an ambiguous factor to the theme of the intraracial love and bigotry. Generally, being of a lighter skin tone associates with the aspect of beauty in African-American community as Hurston portrays it. Both Janie and John Pearson for instance receive many flattering comments from males and females and appear to have a better chance to improve their social status. In Janie's case this happens through marriage to Jody Starks. John Pearson, on the other hand, achieves his preacher career only with help of his educated and edified wife Lucy Potts. In both cases their light-skinned

appearance helps them to charm their husband or wife. However, in Janie's case, her light-skinned status does not entirely connect to power. In her marital affairs, the power still remains in the hands of the male (Killicks, Starks, Tea Cake), so the gender shows to be more important in these cases. With strangers, on the other hand, Janie appears more powerful e.g. in the scene when the other blacks at the plantation perceive her as superior on the basis of her light skin. In John Pearson's case, despite being a mulatto male, he could be described as the weaker one in the marriage. Morally and spiritually, the dark-skinned Lucy possesses an advantage over him, although ultimately, she decides to tolerate his disloyalty and destructive behavior towards the family.

In "Now You Cookin' With Gas" there is no light skinned character in the story explicitly, but the two black pimps – Sweet Back and Jelly overtly discuss their preference for light-skinned women and even make it clear that the darker the woman whom they have a sexual intercourse with, the more shame, less profit (as there are mulatto districts such as Sugar Hill, accommodated by rich, mulatto blacks) and overall less prestige they gain from it. In their case, having a light-skinned woman provides the ground for bragging.

To sum up, from the textual analyses' it can be observed that Zora Neale Hurston did not avoid showing flaws, problems and unflattering aspects that could be found in the African-American society as she knew it. Hurston does not idealize the black community, contrarily, to a large extent, she implements intraracism, racial bigotry and damaged perception caused by slavery that further developed into hierarchies based on one's skin tone into her fiction.

Resumé

Přetrvávající fenomén rasismu existující v rámci afroamerické komunity je bezpochyby jedním z problémů, se kterým se černošské etnikum ve Spojených státech amerických potýká a stává se také hlavním předmětem zájmu této diplomové práce. K analýze tohoto sociologicky zajímavého jevu, který se přirozeně stal nedílnou součástí literárních děl afroamerických autorů, odrážejících mimo jiné každodenní realitu černošského života v USA, posloužilo několik vybraných děl Zory Neale Hurston. Tato vlivná černošská spisovatelka, jakožto výrazná osobnost kulturního hnutí Harlemské renesance, formujícího černošskou identitu v průběhu dvacátého století v USA, svou literární tvorbou významně přispěla k rozkvětu a popularizaci černošské literatury. Její osobitá koncepce rasových problémů Afroameričanů dané doby, která je směsicí antropologické, osobní a literárně-umělecké perspektivy, se zřetelně promítá i do její beletrie.

Skrze rozbor chování mužských i ženských afroamerických protagonistů a protagonistek různých odstínů pleti, od viditelně světlejší až po jednoznačně tmavou, zkoumá práce způsoby, jakými se intraracismus projevuje v každodenním životě těchto postav. Zároveň také odhaluje, do jaké míry rozdílná intenzita pigmentace kůže ovlivňuje vzájemné preference jednotlivých postav v oblastech rodinných a milostných vztahů, případně pojetí estetična ve vztahu k vnějšímu vzhledu postav, ale i ve vztahu k pojetí sebe sama, ať už pozitivně, či negativně. V neposlední řadě pak tato práce pozoruje, jak takováto specifická vnější charakteristika, kterou odstín barvy pleti je, ovlivňuje společenský status a prestiž zkoumaných postav v kontextu černošské komunity.

Diplomová práce nejprve v několika úvodních kapitolách definuje zkoumanou problematiku a její zakotvení v teoretických pramenech a konceptech. Zprvu vymezuje terminologii nezbytnou k pochopení a popisu projevů intraracismu, se kterými pak dále pracuje v analýzách románů a povídek Zory Neale Hurston, jako jsou například: bigotnost, předsudek, diskriminace, intraracismus a interracismus. Dále pak vytyčuje hlavní subjekt zkoumání – explicitně jsou to postavy, které jsou míšenci, konkrétně jeden z jejich rodičů je černoš a druhý běloch, a tedy jsou vizuálně mixem fyzických znaků obou etnik (kromě odstínu pleti také charakteristická struktura vlasů, obličejové rysy, barva očí atd.) Daný fenomén je však zkoumán také implicitně, a to na základě dialogů různých postav, ne nutně

mulatů/mulatek samotných, ale i promluv ostatních postav, včetně jejich přímo i nepřímo bigotních vzorců chování a promluv. Dále tyto teoreticky zaměřené kapitoly předkládají stručný nástin historického pozadí a podmínek, které daly intrarasismu vzniknout, zvláště pak specifičnosti instituce otroctví na americké půdě. Otroctví tvoří základ dané problematiky ve zrodu hierarchií v afroamerické komunitě, založených na sytosti barvy pleti, rozdělením na „domácí“ a „venkovní“ otroky, rozdílným vztahem bělošského otrokáře ke svým černošským otrokům podle barvy pleti, pohlaví aj.

V kapitole číslo čtyři práce věnuje pozornost osobnosti spisovatelky Zory Neale Hurston a zejména jejímu příznačnému přístupu k rasové tematice, přičemž je rozebíráno několik aspektů. Zaprvé její osobní zainteresovanost spojená s vlivem rodiny a zázemí, zadruhé vliv studia antropologie, zkušeností z etnografických výzkumů a sběru folklóru a za třetí vliv osobností jako byl např. Franz Boas nebo Melville Herskovits na její tvůrčí literární projev, ve kterém se snaží skloubit vědecké poznatky s uměleckým vyjádřením. Toto uzavírá kapitola, snažící se zachytit kritický ohlas a reakce na způsob, jakým Hurston vykresluje vnitřní postupy, zvyky a pravidla jednání týkající se intrarasových vztahů uvnitř černošské komunity v jejich nedokonalostech, který byl zčásti vnímán jako kontroverzní a byl předmětem kritiky jejich současníků, zejména Richarda Wrighta.

Poslední kapitola teoretické části diplomové práce pojednává o znázornění postavy mulata/mulatky jako určitého archetypu v americké literární tradici devatenáctého a dvacátého století. Na příkladu postav z románu *Chaloupka strýčka Toma* je poukázáno na několik stereotypních momentů, které se v literatuře často opakují, především jev zvaný „passing“, kdy se ve většině případů postava smíšeného původu snaží infiltrovat a stát se členem bělošské většiny za účelem vyhnoutí se omezením spojeným s rasismem.

V praktické části diplomová práce analyzuje dva romány a vybrané povídky Zory Neale Hurston. Kapitola šest se zaměřuje na její románový debut se zřetelnými autobiografickými prvky *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, kde hraje hlavní úlohu postava Johna Pearsona, ambiciózního mulata. John, jako hlavní protagonista románu, v průběhu života čelí jak velice pozitivním, tak silně negativním reakcím na svou osobu právě kvůli své světlejší barvě pleti. Fakt, že je John mulat, s sebou nese výhody v podobě atraktivity a neutuchajícího zájmu ze strany žen, ale zároveň je tím narušen jeho vztah s nevlastním otcem Nedem, který k Johnovi chová zášť pramenící z Nedovy minulosti strávené v otroctví. Práce se zaměřuje na situace, které jsou

potenciálně intrarasově motivovány a pokouší se je interpretovat. Stejný princip je využit v následující kapitole, jejímž předmětem je rozbor nejslavnějšího románu, který Hurston napsala, s názvem *Její oči sledovaly Boha*. Hlavní postavou je Janie Crawford, taktéž Afroameričanka velmi světlé barvy pleti, jež vyniká hlavně svými dlouhými strukturou bělošskými vlasy. Ze zřejmého důvodu se její vlasy stávají uvnitř černošské komunity vysoce ceněným prvkem její osobnosti. Práce rozebírá, jakou důležitost má světlá kůže a bělošské rysy Janie na vybrané situace v jejím životě, do jaké míry určuje její sociální status a také postavení v komunitě. Kromě Janie je také v této části věnována pozornost další mulatce, kterou Hurston představila v roli vedlejší postavy, paní Turner. Ta svérázně artikuluje své rasově zbarvená politická přesvědčení a zároveň trpí poněkud snobským a pokřiveným chápáním krásy závislém na odstínu kůže člověka.

Na kapitoly věnované jednotlivým románům dále navazuje část diplomové práce, která zkoumá úlohu povídkové tvorby v kontextu spisovatelské kariéry Zory Neale Hurston. Práce v závěrečné části obsahuje poslední interpretační segment, jehož předmětem jsou dvě povídky – „Magnolia Flower“ a „Now You Cookin With Gas“. První z jmenovaných, podobně jako oba romány, představuje postavu smíšeného původu a její analýza se opět zaměřuje na výklad situací, ve kterých je rozdíl v barvě kůže důležitým hybatelem děje. Naproti tomu analýza povídky „Now You Cookin With Gas“, zasazené dějem do newyorského Harlemu, poskytuje do jisté míry jiný úhel pohledu na celou otázku bigotnosti a lásky uvnitř černošské komunity v dílech Zory Neale Hurston díky tomu, že v ní znatelně převažuje autorčina zkušenost z oblasti antropologie. To jí dodává na autentičnosti a zároveň prostřednictvím vášnivého dialogu obou Afroameričanů může sloužit jako ukázka nemilosrdné reality života Afroameričanů, kde právě původ a s tím související odstín barvy pleti, může být díky existenci intrarasismu rozhodujícím faktorem kvality života.

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