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**The Harlem Renaissance: an Analysis of Five Novels and
Their Place in African American Fiction**

Harlemská renesance: Analýza pěti románů a jejich význam v afroamerické
literatuře

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Poděkování

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Abstract

In my diploma thesis I will deal with the time period of Harlem Renaissance, a part of twentieth century American literature, which peak was in 1920s and 1930s. During this time black authors started to be read and enjoyed by a large white audience. Whites also began to be interested in the black culture for they listened to black jazz and blues. Until that time culture in the U.S. excluded music and literature of black people which had been considered bad, unacceptable and inappropriate. Blacks were considered subhumans and it was below the white man dignity to pay any attention to the black culture.

This diploma thesis will focus on analyzation of novels where Harlem Renaissance appears and which deal with the time after the Civil War when slavery was violated and black people were freed. In the novels by Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay and Rudolph Fisher I will search for the features of the Harlem Renaissance, the black culture and consequences of black people crossing the border to enter and join the white society.

Anotace

Ve své diplomové práci se zabývám harlemskou renesancí, což je část americké literatury, jež vyvrcholila ve 20. a 30. letech 20. století. Během této doby začali bílí čtenáři číst díla černošských autorů. Běloši se také celkově začali zajímat o černošskou kulturu, poslouchali hudbu, která byla původně černošská – jazz a blues. Do této doby bylo všechno, co mělo spojení s černochoy, považováno za špatné, nepřijatelné a nevhodné. Černoši byli považováni za méně než lidi a věnovat jakoukoli pozornost černošské kultuře bylo pod důstojnost bílého člověka.

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na analýzu románů, v nichž se harlemská renesance odráží a které se zabývají dobou po občanské válce, kdy bylo zrušeno otroctví a černoši byli osvobozeni. V těchto dílech od Charlese Chesnutta, Zory Neale Hurston, Nelly Larsen, Clauda McKaye a Rudolpha Fishera budu hledat rysy harlemské renesance a černošské kultury. Pokusím se zjistit, co způsobili černí lidé, když překročili hranici a připojili se k bílé společnosti.

Table of Contents

Preface	7
1.0 Introduction	8
1.1 Harlem Renaissance	8
1.2 The Jazz Age in the Literature, Music and Arts	9
1.3 The tragic mulatto	12
1.4 Authors	14
1.4.1 Rudolph Fisher	14
1.4.2 Zora Neale Hurston	15
1.4.3 Nella Larsen	16
1.4.4 Claude McKay	18
1.4.5 Charles Chestnut	19
2.0 <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Plot	21
2.3 Symbolism	21
2.3.1 Migration	21
2.3.2 Pear Tree	23
2.4 Marriage	24
2.5 Killing Her Love	33
2.6 Voice	34
2.7 Intra-racism	34
2.8 Feminism	36
2.9 Breaking Tradition	37
2.10 Religion	37
2.11 Nature	38
2.12 Slavery	39
2.13 Language	40
2.14 Conclusion	40
3.0 <i>Home to Harlem</i>	42
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2 Plot summary	42
3.3. Classes and Jobs	43
3.4 Family	44
3.5 Life in Harlem	44
3.6 God – Religion	45
3.7 Love	47
3.8 Book Title	49
4.0 <i>The Quarry</i>	50
4.1 Introduction	50
4.2 Adoption by a white family	50
4.3 Questions about Donald's origin	51
4.4 A Black Family	52
4.5 Education	53
4.6 Women in Donald's life	54
4.7 Harlem Renaissance	56
4.8 Language	58
4.9 Title of the Novel	58
4.10 Conclusion	59

5.0 <i>The Passing</i>	61
5.1 Plot Summary	61
5.2 The Characters Irene and Clare	61
5.3 Analysis	63
5.3.1 Passing	63
5.3.2 Marriage	64
5.3.3 Changes in the Relationship of Irene and Clare	65
5.3.4 Clare's Death - Conclusion	67
6.0 <i>The Walls of Jericho</i>	70
6.1 Introduction	70
6.2 Plot	70
6.3 Upper and Lower Class	71
6.3.1. Black Vocabulary	71
6.4 Agatha Cramp's Attitudes	72
6.5 Linda Young – an Independent Woman	74
6.6 Humor and Satire	75
6.7 Betrayal of a Black Man	75
6.8 Conclusion	76
7.0 Conclusion	78
8.0 Shrnutí	85
9.0 Bibliography	87

Preface

I first became interested in the topic of Harlem Renaissance when I attended the University of Passau on an Erasmus study. I took a course on American Literature and a course on the Harlem Renaissance. When I came back to České Budějovice, I found a supervisor that could help me with it but the library holdings of secondary literature in České Budějovice was practically not existant. Therefore I do not have enough secondary literature about the Harlem Renaissance but only a few. From this reason the interpretations of these novels which Mr. Koy had in his library, I mostly did my own interpretation with only some assistance of secondary literature.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was also known as the New Negro Movement. The name of “New Negro Movement” comes from Allain Locke’s *The New Negro*. This era concerns black American literature and African American life during the 1920s and 1930s. It was the first time when it was evaluated and enjoyed by a white audience, who not only were reading black fiction, but they were also interested in black music, dance and art. The whole African culture simply started to be discovered. Books by African and African-American authors sold very well in the 1920s and generally the interest in this culture increased.

Black authors and artists just wanted to write about their race and did not need any ideas of white Americans. They did not even copy the European style at all. They wrote original works and viewed the background which is summerized below. Blacks from the South brought the culture to Harlem. Not all plots of the novels take place in Harlem, but some of them handle the Southern cities, such as Eatonville, Florida and do not even mention the New York City and Harlem.

Some 75 years earlier, in 1845, Frederick Douglass wrote a work *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. This is a non-fiction of slave narrative and autobiographical. He did not know when his birthday was. He saw his mother just five times in his life, always very quickly when she illegally came to the plantation where he lived. He was not allowed to go to see her, not either when she was ill nor when it was her burial. Frederick Douglass did not know his father. All slaves had rude family names. Not the mother but the owner could name slave children. This work had a dedicated purpose which was to show Northern white people what slavery of blacks was really about.

The work *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* became a best seller all over the world. It is a profound moral novel against slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author, writes about slavery. The main thesis of the novel is that it is not possible to be both a Christian and own slaves. She describes the cruelty of slavery, dealing with innocent Christian black people, selling them, hunting of their families and the slaves’ terrible life in the hands of their ruthless owner although there are also kind slave owners, too.

A very known figure of Uncle Tom was a big Christian and also a good slave because he always did what he was supposed to. Tom always told other slaves to be

obedient and good and not to be against their master. There is a reference to the Bible where it is said you must obey your master. "Uncle Tom" has become a metaphor for blacks who must be obedient and listen to their owner. Tom had a family, a wife and three children, then he was warranted and never saw anyone of them again. He was murdered by his slave-master. Such masters usually were brutal cruel white persons that hurt their slaves whom they did not even consider human beings. However, they accounted themselves to be real Christians and attended church. Stanley Braithwaite describes that:

Controversy and moral appeal gave us *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, - the first conspicuous example of the Negro as a subject for literary treatment. Published in 1852, it dominated in mood and attitude the American literature of a whole generation [...] Here was sentimentalized sympathy for a down-trodden race, but one in which was projected a character, in Uncle Tom himself, which has been unequalled in its hold upon the popular imagination to this day.¹

The work *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a best seller all over the world. It is a profound moral novel against slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author, describes the cruelty of slavery, dealing with innocent black people, selling them, hunting of their families and the slaves' terrible life in hands of their ruthless owner.

1.2. The jazz age in literature, music and arts

The jazz age is described as the decade after the World War I, in the United States when there was a strong economy and to buy anything was expensive. Also writers like Francis Scott Fitzgerald published their works and earned a lot of money. Many people who fought in the war with ideals could not maintain those ideals in America then.

A theme for Fitzgerald was a great deal of money and things connected with it. All people tried to get fast money and business. A big shock was the crash of 1929 when six American banks and the biggest insurance company crashed in the stock market and economy crash.

Jazz music became very popular at that time. The jazz music was initially purely black music. Popular black dance were the Charleston and other kinds of "crazy"

¹ Braithwaite, William Stanley, "The Negro in American Literature" In: Locke, Alain, (ed.), *The New Negro*, Atheneum New York, 1974: 29

dances. Genteel Christian white people were completely against it but then the younger generation started to copy and imitate this black “business”. Mr. Rogers says that

jazz is a marvel of paradox: too fundamentally human, at least as modern humanity goes, to be typically racial, too international to be characteristically national, too much abroad in the world to have a special home. And yet jazz in spite of it all is one part American and three parts American Negro, and was originally the nobody’s child of the levee and the city slum [...] It follows that jazz is more at home in Harlem than in Paris, though from the look and sound of certain quarters of Paris one would hardly think so [...] But somebody had to have it first: that was the Negro.²

The author basically emphasizes that jazz comes from the black people culture originally. It counts to a special and incommutable sort of music that everybody can easily recognize. Up to this part in American history black people were usually treated as subhumans and their dance and music were regarded as barbaric. However, in the 1920’s this music suddenly became the standard of popularity. Then black music was danced by white masses people for the first time. Initially this music was not allowed to be played on radios though. In the radio people still could hear more classical music. There is an example of the jazz music:

SONG

Gwendolyn B. Bennett

I am weaving a song of waters,
Shaken from firm, brown limbs,
Or heads thrown back in irreverent mirth.
My song has the lush sweetness
Of moist, dark lips
Where hymns keep company
With old forgotten banjo songs.
Abandon tells you
That I sing the heart of a race
While sadness whispers
That I am the cry of a soul. . . .

A-shoutin’ in de ole camp-meetin’ place,
A-strummin’ o’ de ole banjo.
Singin’ in de moonlight,
Sobbin’ in de dark.
Singin’, sobbin’, strummin’ slow . . .
Singin’ slow; sobbin’ low.

² Rogers, J. A., “Jazz at Home”, In: Locke, Alain (ed.), *The New Negro*, Atheneum New York, 1974: 216

Strummin', strummin', strummin' slow. . . .

Words are bright bugles
That make the shining for my song,
And mothers hold brown babes
To dark, warm breasts
To make my singing sad.

A dancing girl with swaying hips
Sets mad the queen in a harlot'
Praying slave
Jazz band after
Breaking heart
To the time of laughter. . . .
Clinking chains and minstrelsy
Are welded fast with melody.
A praying slave
With a jazz band after . . .
Singin' slow, sobbin' low.
Sun-baked lips will kiss the earth.
Throats of bronze will burst with mirth.
Sing a little faster,
Sing a little faster!
Sing!³

A black man sings this songs. He tries to think in a positive way even though he feels sad. He remembers everything that white men have done to black men even though he does not say it directly.

In 1920's white people were also fond of blues music. This kind of music was about what blacks made for blacks. They sang about how badly they were treated by their partners or about how they have no more money. In the original texts and topics for blues the black people sang about what whites did to them and how masters treated them as slaves, there were talks about racism, slavery and justice but it changed from "this is what my master did to me" into "my wife did this to me (she left me)". White people did not want to be remembered of what they had done in the past and so all references to slavery were deleted and replaced by topics that were interesting for the white audience. Both blues and jazz were kinds of music that came originally from the black culture from the South. Jazz became a city phenomena and was commercialized but absolutely no talks about racism were expressed in the commercial music. Where conservative Christians lived, black jazz music was not allowed.

³ Bennett, Gwendolyn B., "Song", In: Locke, Alain (ed.), *The New Negro*, Atheneum New York, 1974: 225

There is a hit song by Louis Armstrong called “What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue” which is also refrain of the song. The meaning of the two colors is a double entendre. He wonders why he was born black and why he feels sad but the other meaning is that a black man was put out of the door of a white music club and punched in the eye and that now literally he was black and blue.

Work songs were also a kind of songs that were sang by a man on the fields or plantations. Such a man called out and the working men always answered with one word which they kept repeating after every calling out. It took turns, the call and the response, again and again.

Also the technological inventions went through a big boom – better and stronger cars, telephone etc. The big booming years, also called years of the big party included the classic look of an American girl. Before in 1920’s, they grew long hair to the shoulder length. But in the 1920’s they chopped it, started smoking, drinking alcohol and became a lot more free than they used to be. At that time there was a prohibition of drinking alcohol but it was illegally imported from Canada. When it was forbidden, people drank even more.

The jazz age is simply white people’s enjoying black culture, especially black music. Black jazz musicians were not only popular in America, they were spread all over the Europe, too.

1.3 The tragic mulatto

There is a motif of the literature from late nineteenth century and begin twentieth century called tragic mulatto. The word mulatto includes all shades of blacks. The thought of the tragic mulatto is the fact that any color is good, light or dark. Even with fair skin but black ancestry, the person is still black. When a man is half black and marries a white woman, it is wrong in other black people’s eyes. They would criticize him for trying to “escape” his own race. They enforce on what is acceptable in the society and what is not.

The idea of the Harlem Renaissance was to take out the “tragic” part of the tragic mulatto. It is talked about black and it is celebrated and chanted. The authors avoid writing about slavery and everything bad that had been committed on black people. All the tragedy and suffering is pushed down and instead comes an almost positive, funny works full of laughter. A tragedy changed to comedy for being read by

white readers. Mostly white women read these books and felt sorry and sympathized with blacks.

Langston Hughes was the most important poet of this time but he also wrote a novel *Not Without Laughter*. It does not belong to the most important works but Harlem Renaissance is reflected in it. In the story a black woman called Aunt Hager believes in a good future and education of her black grandson, Sandy. Aunt Hager said:

“I wants you to stay nice an’ make something out o’ yo’self. If Hager lives, she ain’t gonna see you go down. She’s gonna make a fine man out o’ you fo’ de glory o’ God an’ de black race. You gwine to ’mount to something in this world.”⁴

One of the most optimistic person’s in the novel was Sandy’s aunt Harriet. She enjoyed her life, traveled, became a singer and an actress. “Gee [...] my aunt Harrie can certainly sing and dance!”⁵ This woman lived her life the way she always wanted. Celebrating life is the idea of taking out the tragic mulatto.

The name of the novel not only is not tragic or sad, it challenges the reader think that life should be lived with fun and people should try to see future that is worth heading to. The double negative “not” and “without” means “with” laughter, it is good for people.

Not much intra-racism appears in the Harlem Renaissance literature. Classes have been playing a big role in the history of people. Slaves, people of the lowest classes of the society, were not considered having any rights. Women were being raped by their masters and when they had a child, it was only half black. These mulattoes were working in the houses of the masters, they were so called “house slaves”. They obtained better life in the house because they were eating better food, they could wear nicer clothes, were speaking with whites and so their language sounded more literally than the language which spoke slaves working on the fields. They were in the society of whites and could immitate their habits, actions and style. The house slaves were around the business that made class, i.e. money, wealth, clothes and language. The house slaves did not appear in the field slaves’ company and also never married them. Thanks to their lighter skin they had an opportunity to make a step ahead to better and easier work and better lives.

⁴ Hughes, Langston, *Not Without Laughter*, First Scribner Paperback Fiction Edition, 1995: 195

⁵ Hughes, Langston, *Not Without Laughter*, First Scribner Paperback Fiction Edition, 1995: 254

1.4 The authors

1.4.1 Rudolph Fisher

Rudolph John Chauncey Fisher was born in 1897 in Washington and was an American novelist and short story writer. His family moved to Rhode Island. Fisher studied English and biology at the Brown University and in 1920 he graduated Howard University Medical School. He already started writing while being at school.

Thanks to his work “The City of Refuge” he became an highly regarded member of the Harlem Renaissance. Later, in 1925 he joined a National Research Council fellowship and dedicated to writing medical articles. His all life he spent more or less in the medical branche. Langston Hughes said about him:

Besides being a good writer, he was an excellent singer, and had sung with Paul Robeson during their college days. But I guess Fisher was too brilliant and too talented to stay long on this earth.⁶

Not only great in the literature sphere, he also had talent for music. He died quite young, at the age of thirty seven, in Washington in 1934. He belonged to best talents of the literature of that time. According to Margaret Perry,

Fisher was a traditionalist in form [...] but he was also one in point of view, in his themes, and in the values he stressed through the major characters he created. One might also venture to say that Fisher often wrote in the mode of dramatic comedies, eschewing tragedy in any case even in the stories that end unhappily.⁷

One example of the dramatic comedies could be his novel *The Walls of Jericho*. He makes fun of a white old lady who never got married and the only thing that mattered to her was what other people think about her.

Among Rudolph’s short stories belongs e.g. “Blades of Steel”, “The Backslider” or “Fire by Night”. The Harlem background appears even in his children’s stories (“Ezekiel”) or detective stories. His novel *The Walls of Jericho* is considered “the first

⁶ Hughes, Langston, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1940: 240-241

⁷ Perry, Margaret, “A Fisher of Black Life: Short Stories by Rudolph Fisher,” *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, Victor A. Kramer (ed.), New York: AMS Press, 1987: 255-256

all-black detective story.”⁸ Rudolph Fisher was so important writer that a lot of people wrote about him but unfortunately our library does not have very many such works.

1.4.2 Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama although it was believed for a long time that she was originally born in Eatonville, Florida where her family later moved and where Zora was raised. She was an American writer and anthropologist. There were eleven children in the family. Zora’s father, John Hurston, was a Baptist preacher, farmer, carpenter and also a mayor of Eatonville from 1914-1916. Zora’s actual life sometimes reflects in her works, too. The town of Eatonville is one of the examples.

John Hurston’s father was a white man who never acknowledged his paternity, and he was nicknamed “dat yaller bastard”⁹ by his mother-in-law and others in the Notasulga society. John’s mother, a black woman, was seduced by this white man who left her.

Thanks to her grandfather, Zora was a mulatto. She was a very pretty and attractive woman, always looking younger than her real age was which she used a lot and in many places she was lying about her age. For example, at the age of thirty two, she pretended to be ten years younger.

Her mother, Lucy Hurston, worked as a teacher at school. She helped her daughter with preparing for school and enforced her children to have some goals in their lives. After her mother died, Zora’s father married again but Zora and the new step-mother did not get along with each other well which led to many fights and arguments between them. Because of her step mother, Hurston left home and for a few years she worked in kitchens and did some little paid jobs.

At about the age of twenty six she finally graduated her high school and started to study the all black Howard University in Washington D.C. where she also began writing her first works. Robert Hemenway said:

⁸ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 50

⁹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *Dust Tracks in the Road*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991: 8ff

The scientific attraction became so strong that she was led into seriously planning a career as a professional anthropologist, and it continued to affect her writing even after she had rejected such a possibility.¹⁰

Her interest in anthropology also brought her to Columbus University where Franz Boas, an important German-American anthropologist, taught cultural anthropology. In the bibliographical essay, Pamela Bordelon says:

Papa Franz imbued Hurston with his ideas about cultural relativism, a theory that lifted anthropology from the racial constraints of nineteenth-century evolution theory and placed equal on all cultures.¹¹

For some time she also lived in New York where she worked as a secretary of a novelist but thanks to the life there she was very keen on Harlem and decided to write about it in her books. Later, she obtained an opportunity to go to the South and she began collecting stories of black folklore. Zora was interested in black people who could not read or write because they were not “spoiled” by whites. The educated blacks read books and could get information about a white man world but those, who did not go to schools, only interchanged information orally, continued in the traditions of their ancestry and no white business interfered in their lives. Harold Bloom commented that

Hurston is thought to be the first black American to have collected and published Afro-American folklore, and both of her collections have become much used sources for myths and legends of black culture.¹²

Hurston traveled to the South because of her anthropological studies. Besides the interest in the Southern life and folklore, she concerned with the states in the South America like Jamaica or Haiti. She died in Florida in 1960.

Her most famous novel became *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She also wrote another novels which were popular like *Moses* or *Man of the Mountain*. Very famous is her anthropology study, *Mules and Men* or her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*.

¹⁰ Hemenway, Robert, “Zora Neale Hurston and the Eatonville Anthropology,” *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, Arna Bontemps (ed.), New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972: 212-213

¹¹ Bordelon, Pamela, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Biographical Essay” *Go Gator and Muddy the Water*, New York, Norton, 1999: 10

¹² Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 78

Her adventures from these countries she described in her book *Tell my Horses* that was a collection of black culture stories.

1.4.3 Nella Larsen

Nella Larsen was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1891. Her father was an African-West Indian, Peter Walker and her mother, Marie Hanson, came from Denmark. Her father died when she was a small child and her mother remarried to a Danish man and Nella was brought up in an absolute white family and background. Her last name she received from her step father, Peter Larsen. Robert Butler said about her that “[...] because Larsen’s life, like her best fiction, is so shadowy and ambiguous, it is probably impossible to write a single “definitive” biography about her.”¹³ She attended the Fisk University, then also a school in New York to become a nurse. She was working as a nurse but after she quit in 1921, she became a librarian. At that time she married a physicist, Dr. Elmer S. Imes with whom she got divorced after thirteen years of their marriage. She used a few names and pseudonyms while she was publishing her works. Mary Washington pointed out that

unlike the women in her novels, Larsen did not die from her marginality. She lived 70 years, was an active part of the high-stepping Harlem Renaissance [...] she was an unconventional woman by 1920’s standards: she wore her dresses short, smoked cigarettes, rejected religion and lived in defiance of the rules that most black women of her education and means were bound by.¹⁴

Larsen belonged to women who supported the new mode and style of living coming. To the conventional traditions this could seem to be rebelling. Nella Larsen was also accused of plagiarism after publishing her short story “Sanctuary”. Despite proving her innocent of the charge, she stopped writing and returned to her job in New York as a nurse where she stayed for the rest of her life. She died in Brooklyn, New York in 1964.

For her first novel, *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen gained the Harmon Foundation bronze medal for literature “and after the publication of her second novel, *Passing*, she

¹³ Butler, Robert, In: Hutchinson, George, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*, 2007 *African American Review*: 579

¹⁴ Washington, Mary Helen, “Nella Larsen: Mystery Woman of the Harlem Renaissance,” *Ms.* 9, No. 6, December 1980: 50

received the first Guggenheim Fellowship ever given to a black American woman.”¹⁵ A few times she also traveled to Europe, e.g. Mallorca.

1.4.4 Claude McKay

Claude McKay was born in Jamaica in 1890 to farmers Thomas Francis McKay and Hannah Ann Elizabeth Edwards. He was a writer and poet who emigrated to the United States in 1912. First he studied agriculture in Kansas but after that he came to Harlem in 1914 and was landed as an important poet there. McKay says in one of his books:

Much as all my sympathy was with the Negro group and the idea of the Negro renaissance, I [Claude McKay] doubted if going back to Harlem would be an advantage. I had done my best Harlem stuff when I was abroad, seeing it from a long perspective. I thought it might be better to leave Harlem to the artists who were on the spot, to give them their chance to produce something better than *Home to Harlem*. I thought I might as well go back to Africa.¹⁶

He spent some time of his life in Europe and also in Africa. McKay also traveled to Russia. He was married to Eulalia Imelda Edwards and their marriage did not last a long time. They had a daughter together but he never met her. Harold Bloom commented that “while in Harlem he frequently wrote under the pseudonym Eli Edwards, a name derived from that of his wife [...]”¹⁷. He died in Chicago, Illinois in 1948.

He first published poetry in Jamaica. In the magazine *Liberator*, he published his most famous poem “If we must die”, which Winston Churchill quoted in a speech in Washington, D. C. during the World War II. McKay wrote one more poetry collection *Harlem Shadows* and a collection of short stories *Gingertown*. Claude McKay also moved to London where he was interested in reading Marx’s works and socialism and he worked for the magazine *Worker’s Dreadnought*. McKay’s works *Trial by Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in America (Sudom Lincha)* and *The Negroes in America (Negry v Amerike)* were translated into Russian because he traveled “to the USSR where

¹⁵ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 94

¹⁶ McKay, Claude, *A Long Way from Home*, 1937; New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, rpt. 1970: 321

he was warmly welcomed by the Communist leaders and addressed the Third Communist International.”¹⁸ Although he had an opportunity, he never wanted to be part of the Communist party. Claude McKay also lived in France and Morocco. In 1928 he wrote his most successful novel “*Home to Harlem* which became the most popular novel ever written by a black author”¹⁹. Among his other novels belong *Banjo* and *Banana Bottom*.

1.4.5 Charles W. Chesnutt

Charles W. Chesnutt was an American essayist, novelist, short story writer and lawyer. He was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1858. His grandfather was a white man who owned slaves. More likely there were more Chesnutt’s white ancestry because his features were more white than black and in the society he could easily “pass”. After the Civil War his family moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina where his parents had a grocery store which went bankrupt because of the bad economy after the war.

Chesnutt went to the Freedmen's Bureau school and after that he worked as a teacher. Later, in 1878, he married Susan Perry who was also a teacher in Fayetteville. They raised four children. Chesnutt kept studying on his own. He was engaged in languages (he studied French, German, Latin and Greek). The Chesnutts moved to the North, to New York City because they wanted to escape from the poor South and after a few months they moved to Cleveland. He hoped to start his career as an writer there. Chesnutt also learned stenography and ran a very profitable stenography business. After studying in Cleveland, he also became a lawyer.

He was the pioneer of dedicating his work to the displaying of a black man’s life in the literature and was honored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for it. Charles Chesnutt died in Cleveland in 1932.

His stories were published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. One of his most famous short story books is called *The Conjure Man* and *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*. He also wrote an autobiography of Frederick Douglass. Among his novels belong e.g. *The House Behind the Cedars*, *The Marrow of Tradition*

¹⁷ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994 108

¹⁸ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 108

¹⁹ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 109

or *The Colonel's Dream*. Some of his works have been filmed. *The Conjure Woman* and *The House Behind the Cedars*.

2.0 Zora Neale Hurston - *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

2.1 Introduction

This novel is regarded today as the best novel to come out of the Harlem Renaissance and is a story of the pursuit of love, of making mistakes, sweeping offs but also foundations and experience. “*Their Eyes Were Watching God* focuses on a middle-aged woman’s quest for fulfillment in an oppressive society.”²⁰

2.2 Plot

The book begins as Janie Crawford narrates the story of her life to her friend Phoebe. The main character Janie has had three relationships which could roughly correspond with the multiple marriages and divorces of Zora Neale Hurston herself. Her grandmother wanted Janie to have a good and secure life and so Janie married for the first time to an older farmer Logan Killicks. She left him for another man, Joe Starks, whom she married and lived with in Eatonville. After his death she met a younger man, Tea Cake and married for the third time. Each marriage was different and she was evolving till she becomes the strong and independent woman who narrates the story. Robert Bone says in his work:

The novel was written in Haiti in just seven weeks, under the emotional pressure of a recent love affair [...] Ordinarily the prognosis for such a novel would be dismal enough. One might expect immediacy and intensity, but not distance, or control, or universality. Yet oddly, or perhaps not so oddly, it is Miss Hurston’s best novel, and possibly the best novel of the period, excepting *Native Son*.²¹

Hurston traveled in the South because of her anthropological studies and this novel became an absolutely great piece of work that is also read by high school students in the United States. In a lot of books of the Harlem Renaissance the authors talk about sex or describe it. However, Hurston used some great metaphors for symbolically expressing sexual desire which will be described later

2.3 Symbolism

2.3.1 Migration

²⁰ Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Black American Prose Writers Of the Harlem Renaissance*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1994: 79

Throughout the story Janie moved a few times and in her life there were changes that she made from the rural life to the urban one and then back again to rural life. She moved from a farm where she lived with her first husband to the town with her second husband. In reality most black people migrated from the plantations to the towns or cities trying to find a better place to live. Bryn O' Callaghan describes this migration in his work saying:

The country's total black population was now about twenty-four million and twelve million lived outside the South, the most of them in big northern industrial cities. A mass migration had taken place. More than 4.5 million southern blacks had caught buses and trains to the North and to California. The big attraction for the migrants was well-paid jobs in the factories of cities like Chicago, Pittsburgh and Detroit [...] taking the road north or west promised an escape not just from poverty, but from the miseries and humiliations of segregation which were a part of every southern black's daily life.²²

They were not all successful and some found out that in a city, to earn a living is difficult and so some of them returned back to the farms in the South. The majority of blacks however stayed up North. After Janie's second marriage, she moved back on a farm with her third husband, Tea Cake. Each husband represented a move of the black community. When Janie left her first husband it was a symbol for the movement of the black community to the cities following the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War blacks did not have the freedom to move to the cities. This was similar to Janie's situation because she was married and did not have the freedom to move where she would like to much the same as blacks did not have freedom to move prior to the Civil War. Janie solved this problem by going against the rules of her culture and left her husband to run away with another man.

Janie and her new husband moved to the city of Eatonville, Florida. This move symbolizes the black community's move to the cities. Janie's move to the city was largely successful. The reason she and her husband could be successful is that the city they moved to was an all-black city therefore they did not have to compete with the white people for jobs and positions within the city. When blacks moved to the cities following the Civil War some of them were not always welcomed and it made it hard for them to be successful in the cities. Janie and Jody did not have this problem since

²¹ Bone, Robert, *The Negro Novel in America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958: 127-128

²² O' Callaghan, Bryn, *An Illustrated History of the USA*, Longman Group UK Limited, 1990: 112

Eatonville was an only black community. Jody was able to move in the town, become the mayor and establish a successful business because there were no white people to compete with.

Janie's third marriage brought her back to the country similar to the return of black people to the country from the city. There they could provide for themselves by working the land and therefore they felt safer. Janie made the decision to leave her life in the city and to work in the fields with Tea Cake voluntarily. This could be seen as a comparison to the black community's willingness to move from the city back to the country.

2.3.2 Pear tree

The pear tree is a romantic moment in the novel and also the moment when Janie discovered her sexuality as a woman. It means she lost her childish innocence and became a woman.

That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom.²³

Her conscious life began at this moment because now she realized and started to feel the difference between a man and a woman. The pear tree is a "blossoming pear tree"²⁴ which is symbolism for her own blossoming into a woman. The "visiting bee"²⁵ is pollinating the blossom to help the fruit to be able to grow which represented the woman's fertility. Janie is trying to find herself.

That was the end of her childhood. [...] "Yeah, Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away".²⁶

Her grandmother could not see that Janie was a young girl longing for love and a loving man. She decided Janie must marry a reliable black man who owned land and went to church. Janie was completely against it. She could hardly imagine becoming a

²³ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 14

²⁴ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 14

²⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 15

²⁶ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 16, 17

wife from only a reasonable or logical thinking. What she wanted was passion, love and her young heart longed for more romance than her older husband offered.

2.4 Marriage

Janie was fourteen years old when she got married to Logan Killicks. People often married young at this time because of the short life expectancy. She did not know anything about life. She did not know what to expect. She could not see liberation in her family. Her grandmother lived in slavery and she taught Janie to seek the prize she never had: security instead of chasing her romantic dreams and wishes. Janie did not know what to expect and so she followed what her grandma was telling her. Logan Killicks was not too wealthy or with “status” but an ordinary Christian, and not so poor, but not wealthy either.

The Christian Church played an important role in black people’s life especially in the South. The Church of course believed in marriage as a natural part of life. The Bible is the foundation of the rules for the church and is believed by the Church to be the actual words of God. In the 1930s the black community read the Bible and believed that women should be subservient to their husbands, concerned with having children and taking care of their family. It also taught that women should be silent and let their husbands speak for them. Janie’s attitudes and actions towards marriage represented an opposite view of this standard belief in Southern culture. When Janie married her first husband Logan Killicks she had just realized her new sexuality as a woman. She had ideas about marriage which are different from her grandmother.

Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection [...] He [God] done spared me to see de day. Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life.²⁷

Janie wanted to discover love, sex, and romance and she felt like this would be impossible with Logan Killicks because in Janie’s words Logan Killicks “look like some ole skull-head in de grave yard.”²⁸ He did not awake the desires in her that she discovered when watching the bees pollinating the blossoms. Her grandmother tried to tell her that the desires of her body are not as important as security. Her grandmother

²⁷ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 20

²⁸ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 18

believed that it is much more respectable to marry for security than for love as she told Janie “so you don’t want to marry off decent like, do yuh? You just wants to hug and kiss and feel around with first one man and then another, huh?”²⁹ She assured her that after marriage it change and that she will come to love her husband.

Logan was a good and ideal choice for the kind of marriage Janie’s grandmother sought for her to have. He had enough money so he could to offer Janie a life outside of the poverty that so many blacks experienced at this time. Logan could also represent a kind of “freedom”. This idea of the protected and safe life is very important for her grandmother because she had experienced enough to know that love is a luxury that most blacks could not afford. Logan was a man raised on a farm. He looked for opportunities and bought a farm himself. Logan wanted to have a wife but did not know how to treat her. There was no space for romance on his farm, he only had work. He was a good man who never touched alcohol and went to church. He never had a girl. His only influence came from the surroundings where he came from.

Logan Killicks was a country boy that made money through farm work though he could not read or write. He saw this fourteen year-old gorgeous girl and he wanted her. He convinced her grandmother to allow him to marry her. He only cared for her appearance. Nevertheless, their marriage was arranged. During their marriage Janie was impatiently waiting for love to come, as her grandma told her. Yet this pragmatic relationship did not fulfill her expectations about how a married couple should live. Janie did not finally reject him only because he was old and unattractive but because he wanted to make her his farm mule. Her imagination of equality was that she and her husband would be on the same level. In reality Janie did not mind working behind a mule and plowing like her husband worked. However, she did mind not being on an equal level in their romantic desires for each other. She told her grandmother this saying, “But Nanny, Ah wants to want him sometimes. Ah don’t want him to do all de wantin’.”³⁰ Janie finally decided that the security her husband could offer her is not worth losing the love and desire she was looking for and decided to leave him using the excuse of being a mule behind a plow to justify her action.

Janie was a young girl longing for a man who would love her. She dreamed about a happy life in marriage and a loving husband. She wanted and needed deeper feelings, passion and love. She simply wanted to be happy. She did not feel anything

²⁹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 18

³⁰ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 31

nice with Logan. Her romantic images of the man of her own do not look like her marriage with Logan. In her eyes he was ugly, he did not talk nicely to her and she was very distanced from him.

The second relationship represented escape from being a mule and instead her being treated like a queen by her new man, Jody Starks. He was a new creature to her. Janie did not know anyone else beside Logan. After seeing her the first time, he was wondering why such a beautiful young lady is working on a field. It was the absolute opposite from Logan Killick's opinion and thoughts.

'You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you.'³¹

Janie was completely impressed by him. Janie saw now that there were also other men besides Logan and decided to leave him. The beginnings of the relationship with Joe Starks seemed to be great for her. Jody behaved nicely and complimented her for her looks. There were romantic men in her surroundings but they were not reliable. He embodied power. This was an important break in her life. She was fascinated by him. For Janie he represented the physical desires and the love she has been longing for. He talked about traveling and what they will do together. This represented not so much material interests for Janie but the partnership in which they do things that they could enjoy together. Different from the life she had now where Killicks expected her to be a "typical" wife whose job was to cook, clean and look after her husband, Janie liked the idea of the change Jody would bring to her life.

From the industrial North, Jody was an urban black man, where business rather than farming dominated. Compared to Logan Killicks, he was educated, had class and was cultivated. He was a very ambitious, smart, noble and literate man. Above all Joe Starks acknowledged Janie as a beautiful woman. Joe wore suits and ties and was very exciting for her because she did not know anybody like him. She lived in the South where she could not see too many gentlemen in suits who could talk in a nice way and who were gallant like Joe was to her. Jody was such a nice-looking and speaking man and she desired him in a way which she did not desire Logan.

³¹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 39

After they got married, Janie and Jody moved to Eatonville, Florida. Hurston purposely uses the town of Eatonville because she has a personal connection to this town. Just as Janie moved to Eatonville, Hurston herself also moved to Eatonville with her family when she was a baby. In contrast to Janie, Zora did not remember her life in Alabama. There was also resemblance between Joe and Hurston's own father John. Both were mayors in Eatonville and although Zora's father was a preacher, he had many women and he was interesting for them because of his mulatto look. Joe seemed to be a good-looking man in a suit which was attractive for other women. Today there is a museum in the house where her family lived.

The central locality of most of Hurston's stories and first two novels is Eatonville, Florida. In her first book of folklore entitled *Mules and Men* Hurston collected tales of the people who inhabited this all-black central Florida town. The residents never traveled far from Eatonville and did not know much of Florida beyond Jacksonville, which was about four hours away by bus. The township of Eatonville was and still is an all-black, incorporated town established by Samuel Eaton of Hartford, Connecticut for freed slaves; its relative isolation allowed for the maintenance of the oral tradition of these tales that reveal rural black Americans' world outlook since it was the town Hurston grew up in, she knew some of the inhabitants.³²

Zora Neale Hurston sometimes likes to insert autobiographical items in her works. This gives her writing an even more realistic feeling. Jody Starks became the mayor of Eatonville and his position started to rise and as a result Janie's position started to rise as well. From the outside they looked like a perfect couple and men envied Jody for his young, beautiful and obedient wife. In comparison with her first husband, Janie thought that Jody was a good match for her. She initially stayed silent, kept back and did not oppose him at all. Even when she did not agree with him, she initially did not say a word against him. Over time Janie began to realize that this marriage was not the perfect match she imagined it would be. She did not feel like she was on the same level as her husband because she was required to remain silent and she was once again in a subservient position. When she first agreed to marry Jody they talked of plans to travel and things to do together. These things were important for Janie, however, she soon realizes that this is not the way it will be. Jody was a dominating man who wanted to have control of everything including his wife. He was

not allowing her to be free. For example, Janie wanted to participate in the front porch discussions. However, Jody always thought that she should only be concerned with her duties. When a customer came to buy groceries, Jody says:

'I god, Janie,' [...] 'why don't you go on and see whut Mrs. Bogle want? Whut you waitin' on?' Janie wanted to hear the rest of the play-acting and how it ended, but she got up sullenly and went inside.³³

Black men usually did not like women who were more educated and intelligent than them. Jody felt threatened when Janie participated in the front porch discussions so he wanted her to in the store and help the customers. He felt this was a suitable job for her. Janie expected her life with Jody to be fun and exciting. However, Jody wanted to be seen as the king of Eatonville. He took his leadership position seriously. This can be seen when he talks about the people of the town saying:

'Ah had tuh laugh at de people out dere in de woods dis mornin', Janie. You can't help but laugh at de capers they cuts. But all the same, Ah wish mah people would git mo' business in 'em and not spend so much time on foolishness.' 'Everybody can't be lak you, Jody. Somebody is bound tuh want tuh laugh and play.' 'Who don't love tuh laugh and play?' 'You make out like you don't, anyhow.'³⁴

Janie wanted something more from her marriage than to be the obedient wife. She wanted to laugh, play and love in the freeway Jody had promised her, however, her reality was different which was a disappointment.

For people in Eatonville Jody declared himself a kind of "god" much in the same way as slave owners in the past thought themselves to be gods. He bought a mule for a few dollars to show people his good heart and he said he wanted the animal to finally find a rest for the first time in its life. The citizens of Eatonville admired this a lot. It raised their opinion of Jody. Here Jody could be seen as a symbol of the powerful white man. The mule represented the slave. Jody acted like Abraham Lincoln and out of his good heart freed this animal or slave who worked his whole life for others. This event could be compared to Abraham Lincoln's emancipation of slaves. Everyone in the town was talking about this story. They loved Jody for what he had done, much the same as

³² Koy, Christopher, "Zora Neale Hurston's Literacy Roots in Ethnographic Research" In: *Antropologické symposium*, Plzeň, 2000: 66

³³ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 93

the Black people loved Abraham Lincoln for what he had done for the Black community. There is black humor in this mule's burial:

“Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something”³⁵

The people recognize Jody as a powerful man in this speech. Janie was not allowed to go to the burial. Jody did not want Janie to be herself. Janie saw him as a mayor which was a big step up but she still knew and felt that Jody was not the one for her. He tried to shape her according to society's ideas of the woman she should be. According to paternalistic society dominating the black community, a woman should be silent especially in public even if her husband spoke against her. Janie opposed this rule and publically countered his dominating male ego. Their argument started about tobacco. Jody started to berate her as stupid in front of the local store crowd. Janie finally released her aggression that she had kept hidden for a long time. She talked against him, about how he was and about the bad aspects of his personality. Janie showed her power as a woman and since her husband embodied dominant masculine power, he did not want Janie to recognize herself for the strong woman she really was. She was a woman that should be weak but Janie was the opposite, which she made clear when she publically humiliates Jody saying, “When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life.”³⁶ With her speech “Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible.”³⁷ She brought Jody down and the last straw for him was when she spoke out against him. He lost his manhood and man is no man without manhood. Janie, his own wife, burnt his “man” and his “hood”. Basically she said that when he put his pants down, there was nothing impressive which he could be proud of as a man. Joe was no longer capable of having sex. He lost his power and was impotent. Not only Janie said this to her husband but more drastic was that she said it in the public. Men on the porch enjoyed this very much because Jody was regarded as their “boss”. His looks were very important to him and his wife discredited him. People now laughed at Joe. The entire town gossiped against

³⁴ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 84

³⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 78

³⁶ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 106

³⁷ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 107

him so he was humiliated. The way Hurston's wrote this and the choice of her words here were fantastic.

Janie expressed herself more and more. She had a lot of money in Eatonville and lived among rich people there. She knew now that life with Jody was not exactly what she desired. Janie was not an obedient wife anymore either. She not only stood up and confronted Jody when she was insulted or disagreed with him, she also talked among people which made Jody angry because he could not hold his control over her anymore. When she expresses herself, the speech made her stronger and more certain of herself. Jody tried to shape her into the image of the woman that he considered to be perfect. Jody also made Janie hide her hair which was another way to control her.

As soon as Jody died, Janie became emancipated and wore her hair openly in a long braid again. Her hair loose and down was the symbol of her freedom. It was the symbol with which she said that it was her time now: no more wearing her hair bound up because of her husband, no more holding her tongue, and hiding her thoughts and soul. "She tore the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair."³⁸ Janie letting her hair down as soon as Jody died was a symbol of her new independence which she received as a result of his death. It was not appropriate for a woman of her aristocratic status to walk around the town, she had to behave like an upper-class lady. Now, after Jody's death, men could look at her as a woman who no longer belongs to a man. English higher class women were also "covered up" and also accompanied by man or male relatives in the 19th century. A similar rule was accepted in the rural society of wealthier blacks. Janie broke it with showing her hair that she wore untied.

After Jody's death, her newfound independence made her happy and she initially had no desire to become tied down by another man. Now that she was free nobody could domineer over her. She had money, a big house and a good name in town. Janie was full of independence and strength. She became mature during her relationship with Jody with whom she lived from the age of fifteen to her thirty-fifth year.

Essentially to Jody Starks Janie was only a trophy wife. She was a beautiful woman and every man admired her. Jody did not love her as much as he loved the attention he received from other people because he had such a young beautiful lady like Janie.

³⁸ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 117

She still looked very young and was a great looking woman, now she was rich but has no children. Janie, as well as Hurston, lied about her age, she pretended to be ten or twelve years younger. A lot of men tried to get her attention but she refused everybody. All men in Eatonville wanted her especially because of her beauty and wealth. Janie was aware of black men though because she was clever enough to know that they wanted her business and money. Thus she ignored all of them.

She met Tea Cake, a charming, sweet and tender man who was younger than her. He was completely different from all the other men who tried to win Janie. Tea Cake gave her choices and asks about her opinions. He let her think and decide about things her way, too. He did not tell her initially what he could give her but rather he asked her for a drink. Tea Cake did not even tell her that she was beautiful. All the other men who came to town and tried to win Janie only talk about the fact that she needed a husband to take care of her and run her business for her. Every man wanted Janie for she seemed to be a perfect match because of her beauty and wealth. However, she was now suspicious and saw relationships in a more mature way.

Janie also felt that Tea Cake was completely different from her former two husbands. “Janie and “Tea Cake,” her husband, share resources, work, decisions, dangers, and not merely the marriage bed.”³⁹ He esteemed her, they talked a lot, and she was finally allowed to sit on the front porch where they played chess together as equals. Janie was longing for something different than her life in Eatonville. Tea Cake seemed to be the man who could help her and accompany her on finding her way. “Jody classed me off. Ah didn’t. Naw. Pheoby, Tea Cake ain’t draggin’ me off nowhere Ah don’t want tuh go. Jody wouldn’t ’low me tuh.”⁴⁰ Tea Cake also represented the love she had been searching for. He taught and showed her ways to understand her inner desires. This made her feel confident and wanted. This was a relationship where both were appreciated and loved by their partner. She saw this as an opportunity to have a nice satisfying life.

To other jealous people in town they did not seem to be a good couple. She was a rich woman that met people in higher positions and classes and he was just a poor young man without the education that Joe Stark had. There was a lot of gossip about them. In Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake, she acted outside of the traditional rules of

³⁹ Walker, S. Jay, “Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,: Black Novel of Sexism” *Modern Fiction Studies* 20, No.4, Winter 1974-75: 520-521

⁴⁰ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 150

society, just as she had done when she married Jody. Jody brought her from a farm to upper-class society. Tea Cake and Janie seemed to be an absolutely unsuitable couple. A rich and high-class woman and a poor “newcomer” to town, above that he was younger than Janie. To the black community it represented a complete disaster and shame.

It was after the picnic that the town began to notice things and got mad. Tea Cake and Mrs. Mayor Starks! All the men that she could get, and fooling with somebody like Tea Cake! Another thing, Joe Starks hadn't been dead but nice months and here she goes sashaying off to a picnic in pink linen.⁴¹

Janie did not listen to the protests. She fell in love with him and they planned their future together. This marriage did not make her feel tied down initially. This was everything she ever wanted, to have a man with whom she was in love with. She behaved like a young girl again, she wanted to marry him and leave Eatonville.

Janie and Tea Cake got married in Jacksonville and seemed to be the happiest husband and wife at first but after a few days Janie found out that Tea Cake disappeared. He left for a few days without warning and took some of her money. She still loved him and was ready to forgive him for anything. Janie was happy and satisfied, even though she had to leave her home and everything in Eatonville and move again. Tea Cake was Janie's true love. Janie learned that even true love was not perfect. She found him with another girl at a plantation one day. It hurt her feelings when she saw them together because she was jealous. She also started to doubt Tea Cake a little.

Janie learned what it felt like to be jealous. A little chunky girl took to picking a play out of Tea Cake in the fields and in the quarters [...] a little seed of fear was growing into a tree. Maybe someday Tea Cake would weaken. Maybe he had already given secret encouragement and this was Nunkie's way of bragging about it.⁴²

Janie's fears were correct and she discovered Tea Cake with Nunkie. However, it was not her but Tea Cake who got angry. Tea Cake's perfection fell even further and he punched her and Janie got a black eye. She was a very pretty woman but she now looked exotic with the black eye. A black eye was usually not possible to see on black

⁴¹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 147

⁴² Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007:182

people but because Janie was a very light-skinned black woman, people could notice the black eye. Men came around to see her eye. They thought that it looked beautiful, attractive and erotic because normally only a white girl had a black eye. This scene shows that while Tea Cake disappointed and hurt Janie, she still loved him.

They fought on. ‘You done hurt mah heart, now you come wid uh lie tuh bruise mah ears! Turn go mah hands!’ Janie seethed. But Tea Cake never let go. They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; [...]⁴³

In the flood Tea Cake saved Janie’s life. He killed a dog attacking her. After the hurricane there were a lot of dead people. Tea Cakes helped with burying them but he was disgusted with it because he saw that white people were being put into coffins while blacks’ bodies were just in big hollows covered with quicklime. When Tea Cake was burying the dead the people could not tell the difference between white and black bodies because they have been damaged by the storm. It is ironic that biologically people’s bodies are the same it is only people who create the differences between white and black.

2.5 Killing Her Love

Tea Cake was the love of her life and although he was not perfect, he ended up giving his life for hers. Tea Cake started to feel sick because the dog that bit him had rabies and now Tea Cake was infected too. The paradox is that he saved Janie but this salvation was the beginning of his own death. He did not know about his diagnosis and started to be paranoid and went crazy. He accused Janie of nonsensical things and then Janie found a pistol in his bed. His psychosis became worse and worse. Janie got a rifle to scare him but he wanted to shoot her so in self-defence Janie had to pull the trigger. Even though she loved him more than anything else, she had to protect herself. There was the irony seen in that fact that Janie shot the best man she ever had. Janie looked for love with her first two husbands but when she finally found it with the third one, she had to kill him.

At the trial she was found innocent of committing a murder by white people who are at the trial. The contrast between white and black people here shows that whites made her innocent but blacks tried to avoid any contact with her. It was also noteworthy

insofar that Janie did not speak actively in her own defense when accused, but remained silent.

2.6 Voice

Mary Helen Washington commented that “women did not have to speak when men thought they should they would choose when and where they wish to speak because while many women had found their voices, they also knew when it was better not to use it.”⁴⁴ Another opinion says: “Where Janie yearns, Zora was probably driven; where Janie submits, Zora would undoubtedly have rebelled.”⁴⁵

Thanks to Tea Cake Janie succeeded in finding her “voice”. In the novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* looking for one’s voice is a main motif. It can be seen, e.g. in the moment when Janie was with Jody and Logan. With them she never had her own say and stayed voiceless. She could not even express the way she felt. She only had to be an obedient wife.

Janie looked for the “horizon” and wanted to find her own voice. She met three different types of men and each of them gave and took something from her. She wanted liberation and thought she would find it in a marriage which was initially also the thought of her grandmother. Paradoxically she found out that first she must find herself to be able to reach the right liberation and freedom.

2.7 Intra-racism

One gossiping woman disapproved of Janie marrying a darker man and was racist against darker-skinned black people. Janie responded: “Us can’t do it. We’s e uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks. How come you so against black?”⁴⁶

This was an example of intra-racism statements against Tea Cake’s skin because it was darker. Mrs. Turner, a light skinned black woman like Janie, talked to Janie against “dark Niggers”:

Janie was considered a beautiful woman. She was a mulatto with light skin and white features, for example her hair was longer and straighter than darker skinned blacks. Mrs. Turner encouraged her to use these white features to her advantage. She

⁴³ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 185

⁴⁴ Washington, Mary Helen, “Forward” In Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, New York, Harper & Row, 1990: xi

⁴⁵ Sherley Anne Williams, “Foreword“ in Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978: x

thought Janie should stop hanging around with dark blacks and start to associate with more white people. Mrs. Turner believed that it was possible for light skinned black people to use their white features to their advantage and advance their position in society. White people were more accepting of light skinned black people because they looked less black than darker skinned blacks.

“Look at me! Ah ain’t got no flat nose and liver lips. Ah’m uh featured woman. Ag hot white folks’ features in my face. [...] ‘[a historical black politician Booker T. Washington] didn’t do nothin’ but hold us back – talkin’ ‘bout work when de race ain’t never done nothin’ else. He wuz uh enemy hut us, dat’s whut. He wuz uh white folks’ nigger.’”⁴⁷

Mrs. Turner never went to “nigger stores”, only to white ones. Also, she did not go to visit a black doctor, she always preferred whites. She discriminated against all dark black people. She tried to be white by doing the same thing that white people do. Zora Neale Hurston exposed how light-skinned blacks could be racist too. There was a notion that the darker people were more primitive and the lighter people were considered being clever, more intelligent and beautiful.

Mrs. Turner admired Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) and was against W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963). These two important men criticized one another and were angry with each other. Booker T. Washington was born a slave and was still a child when the Civil War ended, he was around ten or twelve years old. He succeeded in teaching himself how to read and write and also became a teacher. He begged rich white men from the North to give him money in order to train black people to do the manual jobs like mechanics, plumbers, farmers, etc.

The Negro Renaissance dates from about 1895 when two men, Paul Laurence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington, began to attract the world’s attention. [...] Washington showed that by a new kind of education the Negro could attain to an economic condition that enables him to preserve his identity, free his soul and make himself an important factor in American life.⁴⁸

His aim was to be friendly with the white people in the South because it was very important to him that both races get along with each other. He did not want the

⁴⁶ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 189

⁴⁷ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 190

⁴⁸ Locke, Allaine (ed.), *The New Negro*, Atheneum New York, 1974: 22

equality between a black and a white man. Booker T. Washington's dream was to educate black people to practical skills so they could feed their wives and children. He wanted to help black families to be able to survive when they were taught the basic skills. He believed equality and higher education would come later.

W.E.B. Du Bois, on the contrary, was born a free man after the Civil War. His parents were rich and they could afford a very good education for their son. W.E.B. Du Bois was the first black man who graduated with a Ph.D. degree from Harvard. He traveled, studied in Berlin and was a very intellectual and intelligent man. He was a political activist. His and Booker T. Washington's opinions differed in that fact that Du Bois wanted black people to have equal rights as whites. Black people were completely the same as white people and so blacks should not do only inferior and low-class jobs, they should also be professional and have the lucrative jobs such as doctors and lawyers.

2.8 Feminism

This novel was written as a feministic one for people to show that even a black girl, who the reader knows since she was fourteen years old, had her rights and place in society. She went through many stages of life which made her stronger and less dependent and more experienced. Every time she had to lose something to gain or discover something new.

Janie can be seen as a pioneer in the town for women's movement for equality to men. The women criticized her when she came back to town wearing overalls like a man. "What she doin' coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on?"⁴⁹ However they had to admit that she looked rather good in them and still exerted femininity. After the talk with Pheoby, Pheoby said Janie made her want to have a new life too. Zora Neale Hurston has a message for the audience and gives it to the readers through Phoeby. "I done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons."⁵⁰ Other people only live by conventions not from knowledge.

Janie's struggle for independence can be seen throughout the novel. This struggle can be seen as a form of women's struggle for equality with men. Up until this

⁴⁹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 2

⁵⁰ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 257

time women had always been subservient to men and that was the natural order of social behavior.

When women were married, it was their duty to their husbands to bear children for them in order to continue the family name. It was also their duty to society because they were expected to bring up new generations who would ensure the continuation of the nation. Janie again went against society's boundaries and despite the fact that she had been married three times she never had any children. During this time period it was expected and typical for women to have several children especially in rural areas where children were needed to help out with the farm work. It was still unusual for married women living in cities not to have any children although they did not need as many for working.

2.9 Breaking tradition

During this time period it was unimaginable for a woman to leave or divorce her husband. It would be shameful, scandalous, as well as a disgrace to her family. Janie had her own opinions about society and its rules and did not care what people think about her. She decided to break against tradition and leave her first husband in order to marry another man. When her second husband died, Janie broke tradition again and came out of mourning quicker than most people find acceptable to start a new relationship with a much younger man which was also seen as inappropriate behavior. Janie ignored this and went her own way and married her third husband, Tea Cake.

She followed her heart, had dreamed her dream and she felt satisfied even though Eatonville people were jealous and did not like her but it did not matter to her at all. Men sitting on the porch would not mind having Janie lynched for being herself and acting differently.

2.10 Religion

At the time of Janie's life the church was a center point for black people's lives. The church installed the rules for proper behavior among the black community and any "proper" member of society would never think to question them. Her grandmother was a devote Christian which is evident by her many references to God and prayer.

"One mornin' soon, now, de angel wid de sword is gointuh stop by here. De day and de hour is hid from me, but it won't be long. Ah ast de Lawd when you was uh infant in man arms to let me stay here till you go

grown [...] Mah daily prayer now is tuh letdese golden moment rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life.”⁵¹

Grandmother wanted a proper life for Janie and therefore wanted her to marry and live according to the church’s rules. Tea Cake was an example of a bad man because he was criticized for not going to church regularly. The pastor blamed him for Janie not attending church regularly anymore.

“De Pastor claim Tea Cake don’t ’low her hut come tuh church only once a while ‘cause he want dat change tuh buy gas wid. Just draggin’ de woman away from church. But anyhow, she’s yo’ bosom friend, so you better go see ’bout her. Drop uh lil hint here and dere and if Tea Cake is tryin’ tuh rob her she kin see and know [...]”⁵²

God always played an important role in southern black people’s lives. Black people were always very religious and God is connected not only with nature but also with the existence of people themselves. The name of God even appears in the name of the novel.

They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.⁵³

The reason Hurston compared their watching the hurricane to their watching God is because the hurricane could be seen as being sent from God. The Bible often makes reference to storms being sent either to test the strength and faith of the people or to punish them for bad actions. The people were watching God and waiting for his decision to either let them live or die. They waited for hope of better days or with fear of what next they could expect in the future.

2.11 Nature

The hurricane forms the title whereby strong wind develops while some people living in shanties wait for the storm to come. There was a pear tree that represented the positive and pleasant part of nature in opposition to the furious weather. Nature is

⁵¹ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 20

⁵² Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 149

⁵³ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 213

powerful, nobody can stop weather. People doubted if God cared for them when he allowed that hurricane. People doubted about their whole life and world. They kept solving their everyday problems which turned out to be unimportant when there was a threat of losing their lives and they had to face the undefeatable force of nature. No one could stop Janie from pursuing love, she did not allow it. It was powerful and nothing restrained Janie from pursuing her life as the most important matter. The title of the novel could be also named “Janie in pursuit of love”.

2.12 Slavery

Janie’s grandmother was thinking differently than Janie because she experienced slavery and knew a lot about a miserable life in poverty, she had to work hard. Janie’s grandmother knew why she wanted Janie to live in a safe and reliable marriage and be protected. Her grandmother and mother were being raped by their masters. As slaves there were treated really bad and their owners considered them their property.

Janie’s grandmother, remembering how in slavery she was used “for a work-ox and a brood sow,” and remembering her daughter’s shame, seeks Janie’s security above all else.⁵⁴

The master was allowed to come anytime and his slave had to be at his will whenever. Grandmother says: “But pretty soon he [the master] let on he forgot somethin’ and run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for the last time.”⁵⁵ His wife knew about it and grandmother’s child was half white.

“It was de cool of de evenin’ when Mistis come walin’ in mah door. She throwed de door wide open and stood dere lookin’ at me outa her eyes and her face... “Nigger, whut’s yo’ baby doin’ wid gray eyes and yaller hair?”⁵⁶

Grandmother had no choice because she was a slave, she was forced to have sex. “Ah don’t know nothin’ but what An’m told to do, ’cause Ah ain’t nothin’ but uh nigger and uh slave.”⁵⁷ There were no rights for black slaves. Her grandmother had been a slave and she could not say anything. She was treated

⁵⁴ Brown, Sterling A., “‘Luck Is a Fortune,’” *Nation*, 16 October 1937: 409-410

⁵⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 22-23

⁵⁶ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 23

⁵⁷ Hurston, Zora Neale, *They Eyes Were Watching God*, Virago Press, 2007: 24

only as property, not as a human being. No matter what the master did to her, she (as well as other slaves) had to bear it and be silent. Hurston's mother was not a slave but her grandparents were. She never met them. Hurston wanted her characters to be connected with the slave generation and so she skipped Janie's mother generation and wrote about the grandmother who was born a slave and grandchild who did not experience slavery. Janie's nominal mother was the grandmother who raised her. The slave generation did not believe in love and romance but this is what Janie wanted.

2.13 Language

Zora Neale Hurston uses a special language in this book. Her African American vernacular goes through the dialogues in the whole novel. The narrator uses formal language by contrast to characters who speak with the rural slang. Usage of this dialect, which is usually performed with different phonetical spelling or misused grammar, puts the readers nearer to the lives of the characters and opens the door into the black man's world. The narrative technique is seen in the whole novel that is essentially told as a story to Pheoby. A person telling the story to another person is better than a straight narrator because Hurston could hide her criticism in the characters. The narration and not only the dialog has black English in it.

2.14 Conclusion

Janie's character was proof that women are able to take care of themselves and are strong enough to eventually live on their own. At first Janie needed help acquiring her independence. She needed Jody to help her break free from Logan, but in the end when she came back to Eatonville she was a strong woman who was prepared to stand on her own.

This novel showed us how to become satisfied with our own life. Her first husband had some property and could give Janie some security which her grandmother felt was necessary, however, this only left Janie unsatisfied. The second husband was clever and reputable but Janie lived in his "shadow". With Tea Cake, Janie worked on a field but she was satisfied and happy because thanks to him her romantic dreams and thoughts came true. She showed others that money and reputation were not everything in life. Janie broke away the traditional rules of society and could realize her own

dreams and ideas and make them a reality. Zora Neale Hurston did not write this novel only from a feminist view on the world, she also wrote it from the human side.

3.0 Claude McKay - *Home to Harlem*

3.1 Introduction

Home to Harlem was the first best seller written by a black person. Silvia Xavier says that “[...] the book became a best seller on its release and launched the already noted poet as a writer of prose [...]”⁵⁸ In order for this novel to become a best seller it was necessary for not only black people to buy the novel but white people as well. One reason that white people bought this novel was because it does not directly deal with slavery or post-war racism and discrimination, but rather concerns relationships, bars, music, and the realities of life as it was during this time period in Harlem. The way McKay chooses to not directly write about slavery is similar to the commercialization of jazz music at this time in order to appeal to white audience. Blacks knew that whites did not want to be reminded of what they had done during slavery so Blacks changed the music to omit slavery as a topic and McKay does the same thing within this book.

3.2 Plot summary

This novel is a story about Jake Brown, a man who came back home to America from the World War I. He did not like the way black soldiers were treated. Michael Maiwald says that “Jake [...] serves in France [...] and deserts because of discrimination within the American army.”⁵⁹ They did not even consider them being real soldiers.

Jake was a young good-looking African American who was successful with women. He had seen enough from the world and looked forward to going home to Harlem. “He didn’t care about the dirty old boat, anyhow. It was taking him back home—that was all he cared about [...]”⁶⁰ Returning to Harlem after two years he wondered that he also could have lived in other places at all. He thought that he was happy while he was traveling but the closer he was to getting home, the stronger his feeling was that nowhere else could make him happier and more satisfied than Harlem.

Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street,
with their chocolate-brown and walnut-brown girls, were calling him.

⁵⁸ Xavier, Silvia, “Crosstown Jakes in 1920s Manhattan: Racial Formations in John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* and Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem*”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008: 730

⁵⁹ Maiwald, Michael, “Race, Capitalism, and the Third-Sex Ideal: Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* and *The Legacy of Edward Carpenter*”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002: 833

⁶⁰ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 3

Take me home to Harlem, Mister Ship! Take me home to the brown gals waiting for the brown boys that done show their mettle over there. Take me home, Mister Ship. Put your beak right into that water and jest move along.⁶¹

McKay connects here “him” and “me” and changes the narrator here for powerful effect. Jake chanted the place where black people assemble. He remembered everything that was typical for life there. All the cabarets, clubs, bars, one-night girls, drinking and night life, Harlem was a mixture of everything. Only in Harlem could he be himself again. He did not have to pretend or keep down his nature. In Harlem he met his friends, worked at the railroad and enjoyed the Harlem clubs and cabarets but in the end he and his love Felice felt Harlem to live in Chicago.

3.3 Classes and Jobs

Characters from this novel were usually people from the lower working class that do not have well-paid jobs, they did manual work as cooks or waiters at the railroad, longshoremen or workers on ships. Their jobs did not satisfy them, they only worked because they had to earn some money to live. They were not very educated except for Ray. This friend of Jake was a clever, modest and educated man who read a lot of classical books. John Lowney commented that Ray was a “[...] younger Haitian intellectual who had fled from the United States military occupation of his country.”⁶² Ray was a real opposite of Harlem and did not fit into this dirty place. He realized that this is not his life. He was even a virgin. Ray was a pessimistic man and envied Jake’s free-minded attitude. Jake tried to enjoy his life, find an interesting thing and go for it. There is also a moment though when Jake was jealous of Ray’s education and knowledge and wanted to be him. It was no accident that McKay included an educated character such as Ray in his novel. Ray can be seen as a comparison to Booker T. Washington's ideas of educating blacks with practical labor skills rather than book knowledge. Ray's character showed the practicality of this idea because while Ray was highly educated he could not use this education to improve his life. Ray realized this and when Jake says “If I had your education I wouldn't be slinging no hash on the white man's chu-chu.”⁶³ Ray responded that “I don't know what I'll do with my little

⁶¹ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 8, 9

⁶² Lowney, John, “Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*”, *African American Review*, Fall 2000: 414

⁶³ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 274

education.”⁶⁴ Ray knew that even though he has an education it would do him no good as Jake thought and that he would continue to have low paying manual labor jobs. This is evident when “The next afternoon the freighter left with Ray signed on as a mess boy.”⁶⁵ Ray told Jake that he was happier because he did not have higher education. Ray says “the more I learn the less I understand and love life. All the learning in this world can't answer this little question, Why are we living?”⁶⁶ Ray understood that the more he knew the more unhappy he was because he realized the injustices of having an education which he could not use to get a better job in the white man's world. Ray represented the future blacks who were just as intelligent as whites, however, they had not been given a chance to prove themselves. McKay was criticized by some people for writing in a realistic way and showing blacks as poor uneducated brutal people living in low class Harlem, however, McKay used this realistic style of writing to emphasise the way blacks were restricted to this type of life. He did not write to depict blacks as inferior or to support negative stereotypes but rather to show the reality of blacks' lives because of the suppression by white people.

3.4 Family

In the novel instead of families or children, couples live together, spend time together but they do not want to be bound by any engagement. The one child who appeared in the novel was placed there to show that Harlem during this time was no place for families and children. He is an eleven-year-old boy who worked in a bar and whose mother, Madame Laura, belonged to the bar. Ray, an only educated person, found the presence of the boy strange saying, “something about the presence of the little boy there and his being the woman's son disgusted him.”⁶⁷ This little innocent boy represented the contrast of childhood innocence versus the demoralized world of Harlem where he grows up. Ray clearly saw this contrast and it disturbed him.

3.5 Life in Harlem

Sometimes white men came to enjoy the atmosphere of Harlem. Even though blacks used to be considered subhuman by whites, white men found mulattresses or black girls attractive and exotic. They were tired of their common everyday lives and

⁶⁴ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 274

⁶⁵ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 275

⁶⁶ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 274

⁶⁷ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 193

came to the “Black Belt” to experience something different. These men enjoyed spending some time with the “chocolate” girls.

White men did not always come to Harlem to enjoy the atmosphere. Sometimes undercover police would come into the night clubs pretending to enjoy themselves. “They had posed as good fellows, regular guys, looking for a good time only in the “Black Belt” [...], they had convinced the wary boss of the Baltimore that they were fine fellows.”⁶⁸ The white men then showed their true selves and raided the place. This could be seen as a metaphor that while whites were pretending that equality between blacks and whites existed after the Civil War, the reality was that whites still wanted to control and suppress the blacks. It was evident that whites still felt superior to blacks at this time when the judge spoke to two girls taken in from the raid saying, “it is a pity he had no power to order them whipped. For whipping was the only punishment he considered suitable for white women who dishonored their race by associating with colored persons.”⁶⁹

All of Harlem is also full of music. In all the cabarets there were singers and usually girls entertaining customers. Jazz, blues or ragtime became very popular amusement. This kind of music was spreading more and more, not only blacks were listening to it but also it became very popular with white people.

At the piano a girl curiously made up in mauve was rendering the greatest ragtime song of the day. Broadway was wild about it and Harlem was crazy. All America jazzed to it, and it was already world-famous as it was already being jazzed perhaps in Paris and Cairo, Shanghai, Honolulu and Java.⁷⁰

White people seemed to have no remorseful feelings of the low living standards of blacks which was due to white oppression. White people enjoyed the music and occasionally the pleasures of black prostitutes. They took what they wanted from black culture, for example jazz music and incorporated it into their own clubs even though they felt superior to the blacks.

3.6 God - Religion

⁶⁸ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 109

⁶⁹ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 110

⁷⁰ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 107

God also appears in this novel. Black people were usually religious, however at the time of the Harlem Renaissance literature black characters began to question God because sometimes they think God forgot them and lost love for them because they are black.

[waiter] “I ain’t no time for no nigger that done calls me ‘bastard-begotten’ and means it.” [Ray]”Christ was one, too, and we all worship him.”[...] My parents were Catholic, but I ain’t nothing. God is white and has no more time for niggers [...]”⁷¹

Blacks were beginning to question religion because while the Bible states that all people were equal, it was clear the blacks and whites were not treated equally. The Harlem Renaissance began many years after the slaves were emancipated, however, there was still stark racism. White people still felt themselves better than blacks. God was always portrayed as white so blacks began doubt his love for them.

Religion also appeared in the novel when two boys who are members of the Y.M.C.A. and neighbors of Rosalind and Jerco. When Rosalind became sick and had to lie in bed, they brought her the Bible and wanted to pray with her. Rosalind refused the prayer and “her refusal shocked Ma Lawton, who believed in God's word.”⁷² This scene represented the changing attitudes towards religion. The younger people began to question their faith because they could not see anything good coming to them from God. All they saw around them was injustices so why should they continue to believe in the same God as the white men. They still needed hope and something to believe in that was more powerful than man. Felice represented an alternative belief and turned to ancient African voodoo. Felice believed that she and Jake had bad luck when they got into a fight with Zeddy. She believed that the bad luck was because she did not have her leather necklace, which her grandmother gave to her when she was born. Felice says,

“Ah, daddy, ef I’d had man luck with me, we nevah woulda gotten into a fight at that cabaret.”[...] “I ain’t thinking, honey. I knows it. I’ll nevah fohgit it again and it’ll always give us good luck.”⁷³

It is an important symbol of voodooism and Felice believed in its power because she took a risk and went back to pick it up in her ex-boyfriend's flat even though it was

⁷¹ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 176

⁷² McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 256

dangerous because he was violent. She believed in its luck and that it will bring her and Jake happiness. This belief was in direct contrast with the Bible.

3.7 Love

Harlem Renaissance thematically revealed love. There are more angles that love was watched from. The true love was between Jerco and Rosaline who were Jake's neighbors. They lived in a flat together and loved each other. When Rosaline got ill, Jerco did everything for her. He even brought her beer because it was her only wish, although he knew that it did her harm. He was afraid of losing her and wanted to help her. When he had no more money, he did not even want to sell her things and clothes because he hoped that she would get better soon and would wear them again. He only sold his own things to buy her medicine or bring a doctor to see her. When Rosaline died, Jerco could not bear losing the most important thing in his life. She was the best woman he had ever met and Jerco loved her more than his own life because when he chose between living without his love or death, he committed suicide.

The many relationships that Jake had were not long term. His way of living was to enjoy life and he did not even give his real address to the girls who he had spent a night with. For a while he lived with Rose but she was not really his love, "Jake did not care. He did not love her, had never felt any deep desire for her. He had gone to live with her simply because she had asked him when he was in a fever mood for a steady mate."⁷⁴ He only used her and liked the feeling that she took care of him. Rose still brought home her customers, in the bars she kept flirting with other men and Jake did not mind it. She wished that he were rougher to her. She was erotically charged when her boyfriend beat her. He never hit her or beat her up like the other black men were doing to their women. In the brutal way of behaving Rose saw the passion and once they got into a fight, Jake gave her a few slaps which Rose liked very much and finally felt that Jake was a real man and no coward. Jake regretted it then and tried to excuse himself in of God.

[Rose] "but he did slap the dalights outa me. When I comed to I wanted to kiss his feet, but he was gone" [...]. "Didn't hurt enough. Honey, it's the first time I ever felt his real strength. A hefty-looking one like him,

⁷³ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 340

⁷⁴ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 114

always acting so nice and proper. I almost thought he was getting sissy.
But he's a ma-an all right [...]"⁷⁵

It could seem strange that Rose wanted Jake to hit her, however, this scene is used to illustrate the connection between violence, love, and being a real man. For Rose who had lived her entire life in violent surroundings she believed that violence was a part of being a real man. She wanted a man who she felt was strong and not weak. W.E.B. Du Bois and Charles Chesnutt were against this sort of primitivism. Du Bois commented that "[...] *Home to Harlem* for the most part nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath."⁷⁶

Gin-head Susy and Jake's friend Zeddy also had a relationship. Susy was a black uneducated girl who was not very pretty. She looked after Zeddy well so he did not have a reason why he should not stay at her place. She did not want to let him go to Harlem because she was jealous of other girls that could seduce him there. Alain Borst commented that "she prohibits her Boyfriend Zeddy, who is "living sweet" off her money, from going to Harlem for entertainment."⁷⁷ Zeddy was laughed at because he stays at Susy's. People around him knew it and that made Zeddy the target of their jokes. To show his friends he is no "skirt-man", which they called him, he brought a random girl to the cabaret.

"[...] Here's you dom, buddy," said Jake. "Doom, mah granny," retorted Zeddy. "Ef that theah black ole cow come fooling near me tonight, I'll show her who's wearing the pants."⁷⁸

The language Zeddy uses here shows that he is a part of the lower class. It also depicts the attitude of men toward women at this time. Men felt that they had to be in control in the relationship. It was not a woman's place to criticize a man or tell him what he should and should not do.

Jake's big love was Felice. The world with Felice seemed to him much better and prettier. He rejoiced at little things such as spring and dandelions. Jake's love for Felice also demonstrates the actual cruel and rough life in Harlem. For example when there was a fight between two men for her. Jake fell in love with Felice and she left her

⁷⁵ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 117

⁷⁶ Du Bois, W.E.B., "Two Novels", *Crisis* 35, No. 6, June 1928: 202

⁷⁷ Borst, Allan G., "Signifyin(g) Afro-Orientalism: The Jazz Addict Subculture" In *Nigger Heaven and Home to Harlem*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009: 691

⁷⁸ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 95

boyfriend to move in with Jake. Jake did not care for any other women. He observed a fight of two women with some audience around but the only thing he thought about was Felice and their plans for the future. Jake almost fought for her when he saw Zeddy holding her wrist and seized her.

3.8 Book Title

McKay named the book *Home to Harlem* because the main character Jake was abroad for some time (because of the World War I) and now he could not wait to go back home. He felt it is his home and a place where he belonged to even though he knew that Harlem was not the perfect place. On the ship taking him home, he was excited about the idea of coming home again.

“O Lawdy, Lawdy! I wants to live to a hundred and finish mah days in New York.“ “Harlem! Harlem! Little thicker, little darker and noisier and smellier, but Harlem just the same. [...] O Lawdy! Harlem bigger, Harlem better [...] and sweeter.”⁷⁹

First Jake was keen on going to Harlem but then he met Ray who showed him other ways of living. “His experiences in the labor movement are reflected in McKay's novels especially in *Home to Harlem* and *Harlem Glory*.”⁸⁰ He thought he could make a better living so he left Harlem and went to work on the railroad. Then he returned to Harlem, but eventually decided to leave with his love Felice. One of the reasons was the argument with Zeddy. After this Jake and Felice packed their things and left for Chicago to start a new life. Paradoxically, at the beginning his biggest wish was to go to Harlem and at the end of the story he left it voluntarily. This symbolizes that it does not matter where in the world black people go; life is basically the same for them everywhere.

⁷⁹ McKay, Claude, *Home to Harlem*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 25, 26

⁸⁰ Carl Cowl, “Preface” In McKay, *Harlem Glory*, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1990: 5

4.0 Charles Chestnut - *The Quarry*

4.1 Introduction

The novel *The Quarry* was completed in 1928 but not published during Chesnutt's lifetime. It was first published in 1999. It was believed that it was not appropriate to be released to the public by the publishing houses in 1928.

4.2 Adoption by a white family

This novel traces the life of Donald Glover. The story started with the adoption of Donald Glover as a baby by a white childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Seaton. The couple received Donald from the Columbus City Hospital with the help of the superintendent in charge Dr. Freeman who says, "but we'll first have to look up his pedigree and see whether he's the kind of child you want"⁸¹. The parents thought that this was not necessary because Donald had the appearance of a white child. The Seatons were well circumstanced as Mr. Seaton was "the inventor, patentee and manufacturer of the Seaton carbureter, an automobile appliance which was destined, with the increasing development of the automobile industry [...]"⁸²

It seemed to be the perfect situation for both the parents and the child. The parents had plenty of money and they were able to ensure a prosperous and rich future for the infant as evidenced by their new residence.

The Seatons took up their residence in a suburban neighborhood on the West Side, in an eight-room house on Ethel Avenue, a pleasant, shaded side street, off Lorain Avenue. They added a sleeping porch and a sun room, and were able to live comfortably, with a room for a servant and plenty of space for the baby to play in.⁸³

They were able to support the child and became very devoted parents. They were keen on having a child who was growing fast and seemed to have a talent for music. However, no one was told that Donald had been adopted. Ellen Herman pointed out that "[modern] adoption has relied on the paradoxical theory that differences are

⁸¹ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 9

⁸² Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 12

⁸³ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 13

managed best by denying their existence.”⁸⁴ Mrs. Seaton tried to deny the fact that she could not have children because it was a very sensitive matter to her. Donald’s future appeared to be set as an offspring of wealthy parents who could open doors for him into many different worlds. “his future seemed as certain as that of the child of any respectable and rising American family well could be.”⁸⁵ For a while it seemed like an ideal family life and no one thought about the question of the child’s origins which was previously raised by the hospital superintendent.

4.3 Questions about Donald's Origin

After some time, as Donald started to grow there started to be rumors about Donald’s origin in the Cleveland Bridge Club. Mrs. Seaton was proud of her pretty and curly-haired child but a member of the Club notices that “the child looks almost like a little coon”⁸⁶. At first, the parents did not consider the origin of the infant being of any importance but all of a sudden his ancestry was somehow very important now that there was a question about whether the child was black or not. They thought about Dr. Freeman’s comment about the child’s pedigree and decided to make an appointment with him. After Dr. Freeman’s appointment they found out that Donald was born to an Irish woman Maggie O’Reilly who had a “light mulatto“ father. It was considered that if a person had even one drop of black blood in them they were entirely black. The Seatons therefore thought that it was not proper for them to keep the child. This was an example of the underlying racism of the times. Dr. Freeman had a personal interest in Donald being brought up in this white family from a scientific point of view. Mark Jerng wrote that “Chesnutt [...] uses adoption to engage with racial anxieties having to do with the deliberate transmission and reproduction of race to another person.”⁸⁷ Mark Jerng thought it would be a good experiment to see how a black child raised by a white family would develop.

While looking for Donald’s biological father, Mr. Seaton, as a white man, felt that through his son he was closer to blacks, he even let Donald have his hair cut by a black barber. However, they did not want to have Donald around anymore and even

⁸⁴ Herman, Ellen, “The Difference Difference Makes: Justine Wise Polier and Religious Matching in Twentieth-Century Adoption.” *Religion and American Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000: 57

⁸⁵ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 15

⁸⁶ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 17

⁸⁷ Jerng, Mark C., “The Character of Race: Adoption and Individuation in William Faulkner’s *Light in August* and Charles Chesnutt’s *The Quarry*”, *Arizona Quarterly* 64.4, Winter 2008: 89

though they kept saying they were very fond of the bright and intelligent child, they would like to see him with a black family and among his own people. They asked Mr. Brown, a black senator, for help in finding the child a new home. Mr. Brown commented on the Seatons decision saying,

“Yes, they adopted him because they thought he was white, and now they know he isn’t they want to throw him out. I don’t care a damn about them. It’s the baby I’m interested in. They are white people and can take care of themselves. He is a ‘nigger’, and God will have to look after him.”⁸⁸

It is obvious by this comment that blacks at this time took a second place in society. The Seatons were more interested in what white people would think of them if they had a black child rather than being concerned with the child or with being closer to their adopted child. Judith Bryant Wittenberg commented that race means that it is a “linguistic and social construct rather than a biological given.”⁸⁹ This statement is evidenced within the novel because it is not something that was biologically wrong with the child that made the Seatons not want him it was society’s opinion. They were more concerned about their image in society rather than the welfare of the innocent child.

4.4 A Black Family

A black family, named Mr. and Mrs. Glover, were willing to take Donald. They did not care about his origin at all in contrary to the white family.

“The child”, she declared, “was a human being. Every human being was entitled to lawful birth, and the fact that he had been robbed of his birthright, if such were the case, ought to make society all the more keen to see that this disadvantage was offset by education and training.”⁹⁰

Mrs. Glover's comments represented idealistic ideologies which would not be fully realized until many years later. At this time all human beings were not considered equal and it was not thought that blacks were entitled to the same rights as whites. Mrs. Glover further demonstrated her ideological thoughts because she did not think it was

⁸⁸ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 42

⁸⁹ Wittenberg, Judith Bryant, “Race in Light in August: Word Symbolism and Obverse Reflections” In Philip Weinstein and Warwick Wadlington (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995:146

⁹⁰ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 45

important who the child's ancestors were. It was the person's will and diligence to rise to become a respected and honored person which were important. Donald as a man would follow this same thinking. These types of thoughts presented in this novel were the types of thoughts which would continue and fuel the Civil Rights Movement. "Mrs. Glover was a dreamer. Like [...] Joan of Arc she had prophetic visions."⁹¹ She believed in Negroes and in their future equality to whites. She liked to read and collect books written by mulatto authors and even expressed herself in her letters addressed to the writers. Thanks to his mother's love and devotion Donald and Mrs. Glover had a very good relationship.

4.5 Education

Donald began his education with the lessons he learned from his mother. Mrs. Glover never said a bad word against white people and she also taught Donald that being black is not bad or demeaning and that he should be proud of his own race, no matter what the race is even though the political and social background was telling them the opposite. At the age of six, Donald attended a Negro public school. It was the first time in the South that there were public schools called Negro schools. These negro public schools were inferior to the white ones. Donald turned out to be a very clever boy and his intelligence soon went beyond the limits of the school. He was talented for studying languages which were not taught in the high school. However, the collection of the school library offered authors like Kant, Schopenhauer, Goethe, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau etc. who increased his love and passion for philosophy which he himself contributed to at a later age. Society did not allow black people to go to the public library but thanks to his father, Donald was able to borrow books to further broaden his knowledge and literacy.

He never at any time in his life, after he became old enough to think, believed anything simply because someone else said it. Anything not obvious he had to verify.⁹²

This way of thinking demonstrated the effect these authors had on Donald. Donald was a thinker who not only read or listened but analyzed what he read and heard. It was important that Donald was allowed to read these types of books and it was an

⁹¹ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 60

⁹² Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 70

example that a higher education can influence one's thoughts. Donald read puritan literature, more or less, and was thus less typical an African-American in this territory. The devotion and true love Mrs. Glover had for her son were shown in her decision to start working so that her son can afford to study at a university. Donald loved her as his own mother even when he was told he had been adopted. Not only was she a real mother to him, but she provided him with the best care possible when she helped make it possible for him to study at a university. Donald's doctoral thesis was called *An Essay on the Imagination*. It was a philosophical work which was published and was very popular. Donald used this work to contribute to the philosophical field. After finishing his studies he became employed at Dr. Jefferson's. He needed to travel to Europe because of his project for the West African schools.

4.6 Women in Donald's life

A few women appeared in Donald's life, first of whom was a "darker brown young woman,"⁹³ Mamie Wilson. They met in the church choir and he had an attraction to her. This girl was far more experienced in the sexual part of life, while Donald had only theoretical information from his books. Mamie seduced him and wanted him to marry her secretly because she told him she was pregnant. A girl that proposed to a man to marry her was not normal in society. However, Mamie, as well as other girls, was very keen on Donald because he was handsome. The girls wanted to keep him. Mamie wanted Donald and was utterly in control. They did not have any romantic and deeper feelings for each other but Mamie saw him as a good way to start living in a higher class life.

From his wide but desultory reading he was mentally familiar with the sexual side of life as portrayed in books, but emotionally and physically it was to him unexplored territory.⁹⁴

Mamie extended his practical knowledge of the sexual side of life. Mamie taught him things which he could not learn from books. Donald got another opportunity by virtue of Mr. Seaton's second offer to help him to start living the life of a rich man, in comfort and luxury. He refused all of Mr. Seaton's help and decided to make his own way in life. Donald's refusal of help from Mr. Seaton can be seen as the black man

⁹³ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 71

⁹⁴ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 73

becoming independent of white man's control. Donald knew that if he accepted financial support from Mr. Seaton he would be in his debt and possibly control. However, Donald did not want to be committed in this way. He wanted to make his own way in the world. This is an example of black man's independence. During his studies at Athena University he met a pretty black young woman Bertha Lawrence. They were seen in the street together as Donald was accompanying her. They kept being watched by other passers-by and a policeman stopped them and announced that they were under arrest for walking next to each other in public although there was no legal law against it.

“You’re charged with disorderly conduct,” returned the sergeant, “an offense against the peace and dignity of the state, against an ordinance of the city, and against the unwritten law of the South [...] You’re a disgrace to your race.”⁹⁵

Donald demanded his rights but he was not listened to by any means. This shows an insight into the lives of black people in the South. This type of behavior could not be found in the law books because as the police officer states these were unwritten rules of the South. They were not written down anywhere but people raised in the South during this time period knew that certain behaviors were not acceptable in Southern society. The Civil War may have declared freedom and equality for blacks, however, in reality this was not the way society operated. The race issue was also seen during the court trial where in the courtroom there were separate benches for whites and blacks. While being cross-questioned, Donald was considered to be white until he confessed. “I’m not a white man. I’m a Negro.” “You’re damn’ white for a nigger.”⁹⁶

This announcement by Donald changed the way he was treated. As a white man, he could not be held, however, a black man could be arrested for no reason. As a bad coincidence he was carrying a razor in his pocket which caused him to be fined or go to jail now that he was considered to be a Negro. Thanks to Professor Dean he was released with glory. “Donald was looked upon as a hero who had suffered for principle’s sake, [...]”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 107

⁹⁶ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 118

⁹⁷ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 119

Donald made a choice based on principle to remain true to his family roots and announce that he was black. This was not the easy choice, however, he thought it was the correct choice.

At that time there were also strict rules about interracial relationships, “Next to intermarriage, which was also a penal offense, the most unforgivable social crime was for white and black to eat together”⁹⁸ There was segregation all around, even when black and white people wanted to spend some time together, the society did not allow it especially in Southern society.

In Donald’s life, another woman, Amelia Parker, a white, blond and blue-eyed girl was a complete opposite to black women. She was attracted to Donald who was a handsome man who never suffered from a lack of admiring women. In their relationship they penetrate both black and white worlds. She took him to the theater to see operas and concerts and once they went to church. In return she wanted him to take her to Harlem and Harlem cafés. Donald warned her against the life of the bottom classes but Amelia, a sociology and ethnology student, was interested in all stages of life. Donald and Amelia “took a taxi to a place on Lenox Avenue in Harlem [...] with a jazz orchestra, small tables, a good dancing floor and a very mixed audience.”⁹⁹ Amelia did not fit into the Harlem lifestyle. She was interested in learning and seeing how low class black people lived. However, she was not interested in living in the same manner as blacks.

4.7 Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age are represented here with the description of Harlem and its cabarets, night clubs and bars with many dark dancers and drinkers inside and with the sound of the jazz orchestra. Compared to other cabarets, the ones of the black folks seemed to be vivid and impulsive, where music and rhythm circulated through the black veins with natural temperament.

Amelia had visited night clubs before, once with Donald, but the racial element lent this one an exotic flavor even more interesting than that of a Russian or Hungarian cabaret.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 55

⁹⁹ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 130

¹⁰⁰ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 131

Amelia was another girl who proposed to him and whom he refused. Although they knew about the other's life and race, Donald was convinced that their relationship was anything more than a "personal affair"¹⁰¹ and would not last long as "a social matter"¹⁰². In the future it would end up as a marriage tragedy due to their race difference and actual circumstances.

While Donald was in New York he met his former roommate Abraham Lincoln Dixon who built his profession as an orator giving speeches to the black population. Chesnutt played with names here because Dixon was a southern name which symbolized a slave-master and Lincoln was the one who freed slaves. Lincoln compared to Donald did not possess any fixed moral principles and would always make a profit from any race.

"Between you and I and the gate-post, it's not our race, anyway; we're more white than black. I'm a Negro for revenue only. I could pass for white, but it pays better to be a big negro than just one of the common or garden variety of white men. You get more credit for what you accomplish and less criticism for your failures."¹⁰³

Dixon was a mulatto and had a brown powder to darken his complexion when needed. He always leaned toward the race which performed a better profit for him. Once a person is discovered to have black origins they are immediately treated different by society. They were no longer privileged as whites no matter how much white they have in them. On the boat to London he met Bertha Lawrence again, realized how important she was to his life and proposed to her. There were rumors about Bertha having been in the jail which might have destroyed her chances for a good marriage but Donald knew all the details and that was why he did not pay attention to them. After his arrival in London, he moved in with the Bascomb family, a wealthy people from a high class and with good manners. They took very good care of him, and provided him the best comfort he could afford. Blanche Bascomb, a sister of Mr. Bascomb, fell in love with Donald who enjoyed her company as well. Blanche was British but partly black. However, he had not received a definite answer from Bertha which made his decision more complicated.

¹⁰¹ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 133

¹⁰² Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 133

¹⁰³ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 161

[...] the most important obstacle was Bertha Lawrence. Were it not for her, assuming he could dispose of the other objections, he could find it easy to love a rich and affectionate wife. True, Lady Blanche was some years older than he, but the compensating advantages were so great that the difference of a few years was negligible.”¹⁰⁴

The letter received from Ms. Lawrence made up his mind and he left for France to see Bertha. Before leaving the empty house, he wrote a cordial note for Blanche where he expressed his excuses. He was more interested in Bertha because she was sincere in her feelings for him and because she did not pursue him or want to use him as other women before had.

4.8 Language

Chesnutt used different language to that of other books from the Harlem Renaissance. One reason for this is that Donald was not an example of a typical black man. He was brought up in the North and around people who did not have any connections with the bottom class in Harlem. People that he was surrounded with are educated. The only time that the informal black dialect was used is when Bertha was in jail. Here she was surrounded by people from the lower classes and they use language such as, “suh, yo’ honah, dat ’pens on how good or how po’ business is [...]”¹⁰⁵

Chesnutt also tried to establish the idea that one’s personality and ideas are shaped by the people in the surroundings so even though Chesnutt believed he was black for the first part of his life he did not necessarily speak as most blacks do at this time because he was not surrounded by this type of language.

4.9 Title of the Novel

The title of the novel *The Quarry*, represented Donald himself. As a small child, he was chased by the families who wanted to adopt him. Later, Donald often found himself as a prey hunted by predatory women who wanted him black or white according to the circumstances. Regardless of people’s racial prejudices, the environment he lived in, relationships he had and life situations which could change his future, he always remained the same Donald Glover who had his opinions, principles and attitudes that were not changing but only becoming more sophisticated and experienced. Although he had a doctorate, a good name in society and was recognized because of his picture in a

¹⁰⁴ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 247

magazine, he still remained “only” Donald Glover. Donald had an appearance of a white man and could easily fool people by telling them he was white but he was never ashamed for the surrounding where he was brought up.

4.10 Conclusion

The message of the novel is the outcome of Donald who is white being raised by a black family. Even though he was white his attitudes and opinions about himself and society were shaped by his family and the surroundings in which he grew up in not by the white blood that flowed through his veins. He met Mr. Seaton again in London and found out his real origin. Mr. Brown says in the novel that:

“Race consciousness is a complex thing; it is not entirely a matter of blood. Nature made Donald white; man has made him, in sympathy, in outlook upon life, a Negro. Why spoil a good Negro by telling him this fairy tale, which, however, alluring, maybe no more true than the other? There was one slip-up in a perfect system. There may well have been another.”¹⁰⁶

He was not black at all but his roots were with his black family even though his blood could be traced back to a wealthy, noble and honorable Sicilian family where his mother, an opera singer, came from and to one of the best American families where his father came from. He acquired intellect from his biological father and a love for classical music from his biological mother. His attitudes towards society and life, however, were shaped by his adoptive parents. A person's views does not depend on if a person is born black or white. It depends on the family that raises the person and the surroundings that shapes them. It is natural for families to transfer their ways of thinking to their children. Prejudices come from society and families, they are not something that people are biologically born with. This was the reason Chesnutt chose to use the image of a white man as a black man. In this way Chesnutt attempts to answer the question: What makes a person who they are? It is not their blood it is the surroundings and the people who raise a person who have the most influence on a person. A great example of this influence is Donald Glover who says,

¹⁰⁵ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 115

¹⁰⁶ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 263-264

“I have been very happy, and all that I am or hope to be I owe to the good people who brought me up as their child, and I should feel that I was doing an unworthy thing should I abandon them and their people. [...] The roots have struck too deep to be easily eradicated.”¹⁰⁷

Donald discovered his real origin, however, he felt his roots were with the people by whom he was raised with and who were dedicated to him as their real child. He had been considered black all his life and he also felt black even after Mr. Seaton’s news that his parents were white. Donald was not ashamed of being black and at the end of the novel he even married a black woman.

¹⁰⁷ Chestnut, Charles W., *The Quarry*, Princeton University Press, 1999: 278

5.1. Nella Larsen - *The Passing*

5.1 Plot Summary

The novel is divided into three parts: Encounter, Re-Encounter and Finale. Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry have known each other since they were children and grew up in Chicago. Clare lived with her father, Mr. Bob Kendry. They were quite poor, for Mr. Kendry worked as a janitor. After Clare's father died, Clare moved in with her two aunts who were white.

The novel started with Irene receiving a letter from Clare and that reminds her of when they were small girls. After many years Irene coincidentally ran into Clare at Hotel Drayton. They got back in touch and later Irene and one more friend from their childhood, Gertrude Martin, visited Clare and were witnesses to her husband's racist outburst. He had no idea that his wife was black. Mr. Bellew could not recognize that Irene was black either but he found out when he met her on the street with her black friend Felice.

Irene felt confused about Clare. She was good company when but on the other hand she did not know if she wanted to call her again or if she was in a mood to see Clare ever again. After she invited her to her house, she later did not know why she did it. When Clare visited Irene's family, Irene even suspected her husband Brian and Clare were having an affair. Irene considered telling Mr. Jack Bellew, Clare's racist white husband that his wife was black but she could not do it. It was certain that Mr. Bellew would divorce Clare or maybe even kill her. In the end the story did wind up tragically with Clare's death. At a party of a black community where Clare, Irene and Brian took part, Mr. Bellew appeared and had an incident with Clare because now he was assured of her being a "Negro". Redfield's housekeeper Zulena told him. While having the argument with her husband, she stood at the window and Irene was next to her. The story is left open for the reader's imagination because it is not said if it was an accident that Clare fell out of the window or if Irene pushed her.

5.2 The Characters Irene and Clare

Clare was a beautiful woman, a very light-skinned African American because her father's mother was black and his father a white man. Jessica Labbé noted that "according to society's watchdog Irene, Clare is always a little "too" much because she

pushes everything a little farther than she perhaps “should.”¹⁰⁸ In some ways she seemed to act like a child. She was stubborn and wanted everything right away.

Clare clapped her hands. “Rene, suppose I come too [to a ball]! It sounds terribly interesting and amusing. And I don’t see why I shouldn’t.”[...] She lifted a hand in protest. “[Irene] I shall be too busy to look after you. You’ll be bored stiff.” “[Clare] I won’t, I won’t“ [...] But Clare – she had remained almost what she had always been, an attractive, somewhat lonely child – selfish, willful, and disturbing.¹⁰⁹

Clare married a middle class white man who was a racist. She “passed” as white so that she could marry her racist husband. With Jack, her husband, she traveled around Europe. They had a daughter called Margery together. Clare had to behave white and act according to the white rules but she missed her black people, her community and her origins. Catherine Rottenberg says that “Clare is also consistently associated with theatrics, excess, and danger.”¹¹⁰ She could not show her feelings and needs because of her husband. She was eventually sick of him because as the following passage shows she could not be her true self with him.

Her [Clare’s] life as a white woman is hollow and self-destructive; it represents a pact with self-loathing, a project in self-erasure. Her true self is so unknown to the white man she has married and with whom she has had a child that she lives daily with his racist and hideously ironic nickname for her, “Nig”. To tell him why the appellation is particularly offensive would be to lose the position of “freedom” she has created for herself. To acquiesce in the system of self-degradation that she has bought into.¹¹¹

Irene was the main character of the story. She was a dark white African American she was married and had two sons, Junior and Ted. She married a very dark black doctor. In the house, they even have a black servant because her husband’s income allowed them to afford one. She “passed” for white but only when she needed to

¹⁰⁸ Labbé, Jessica, “Death by Misadventure”: *Teaching Transgression in/through Larsen’s Passing*, College Literature, 2010: 126-127

¹⁰⁹ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 70-71

¹¹⁰ Rottenberg, Catherine, “Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire”, *Criticism*, Wayne State University Press, Fall 2003: 448

¹¹¹ Ammons, Elizabeth, “Jumping out the Window: Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and the End of an Era,” *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, Nex York: Oxford University Press, 1991: 190-191

and not all the time. Ordinarily she did not hide her origin. She was a responsible person, had a content family and lived a quite satisfied, good and calm life.

Irene and Clare were different as mothers, as wives and women as well. Clare's opinion is that "being a mother is the cruelest thing in the world."¹¹² On the other hand, Irene was a loving and devoted mother who would do anything for her sons. Clare convinced Jack Bellew of her whiteness once and could never take it back. It was not safe for her daughter either. Mr. Bellew would never forgive her for deceiving him. He would also never accept the fact that his own child, the following generation of his family, could have black blood. That was the reason why Clare did not want to have any more children. She lived in fear for the whole time she was pregnant because she did not know if her child would have any black features or be white-looking. She was not willing to run the risk again. She was afraid of having a dark-skinned child. Having dark children would reveal African American ancestry. There was an autobiographical element in this part of the novel. Nella Larsen and her sister had different skin colors. One was very light and could easily pass for white, the other was dark black and that forbade her from showing herself in public unnoticed by other white people, e.g. she could not go shopping. The skin color kind of set the way of their lives. The light skinned sister life therefore was easier.

5.3 Analysis

5.3.1 Passing

Passing was possible only for light skinned black people because they could "switch" their race. Josh Toth says in his work that "the motivating theme and title of Nella Larsen's 1929 novel, "passing" typically refers to a "black" person's successful attempt to pass as "white"¹¹³ Nobody could recognize that they were originally black since the color of their skin was fair and their features were more of a white than a black person. They were only partially black, but it was enough when they only had a few drops of black blood in their veins. These "passers" were Clare, Irene or their friend Gertrude. Irene "passed" only occasionally, when the situation requires it or when she needs to while Clare decided to "become" white when she got married. "[Irene] It's

¹¹² Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 68

¹¹³ Toth, Josh, "Deauthenticating Community: The Passing Intrusion of Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing*", *MELUS*, 2008: 57

easy for a Negro to 'pass' for white. But I don't think it would be so simple for a white person to 'pass' for coloured."¹¹⁴

There was not even a reason for white people to "pass" on the black side. The passing made sense only for black people trying to hide their nature and pretend to be someone else other than who they really were. According to Candice Jenkins words

a black person who looked white might be able to conceal the elusive black something from a community of white eyes trained only to look for physical markers, and who see even those markers only according to their desire or whim.¹¹⁵

The "passers", with almost no black features were not suspicious and so white people did not pay attention or did not even think about a connection of "passers" and the black race.

5.3.2 Marriage

Clare Kendry was lying to her husband the whole time they were married because she never told him that she was a black woman. Only for fun, her husband sometimes called her "Nig" because at the beginning of their relationship she was wholly white but in the course of time she got a little darker. Joking about his wife pigmentation Mr. Bellew shows himself to be a racist, a real hater of black people. In front of her husband, Clare even pretended that she did not like black people. She gave up associating with her race because of him. Mr. Bellew never even considered the idea that a black person would ever belong to his family. "So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?" [...] "You got me wrong there, Mrs. Redfield. Nothing like that at all. I don't dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig [...]"¹¹⁶ Blacks were what Clare's husband hated the most in the world. He had no idea that he voluntarily had married one of them.

Every time Clare's husband was not home she went to Irene's house. Clare loved being around her friend and her family and going to all the African American community parties with them although it was very dangerous for her to appear at a place of black people. Yet she was risking it every time. Clare was glad to get rid of Jack Bellew for a while. She stayed married not because of the love she had for her husband

¹¹⁴ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 78

¹¹⁵ Jenkins, Candice M., "Decoding Essentialism: Cultural Authenticity and the Black Bourgeoisie in Nella Larsen's *Passing*", *MELUS*, 2005: 144

¹¹⁶ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 40

but for her daughter and the easier life they had as white people. “She’s [Margery] all that holds me back. But if Jack finds out, if our marriage is broken, that lets me out. Doesn’t it?”¹¹⁷

Clare realized that because of her husband she cannot do anything that she wanted to. She even considered the idea of killing him. “I could kill him! I expect I shall, some day.”¹¹⁸ With her white husband she was in white society but although she wanted to push her feelings down, she longed for the company of black people as well as black culture. After meeting Irene, she realized her feelings and started meeting her “own” people again. Irene was something like a “gate” thanks to that Clare could enter the black community. It was part of her nature that she had to hide at home and in front of the “white” world. Clare needed the black community, too.

On the contrary to Clare and Gertrude, Irene lived in Harlem and her husband was a dark black doctor. Gertrude’s husband was white but he knew about Gertrude’s origin and did not mind her race. Mr. Bellew, Clare’s husband was never supposed to know that his wife was not white. Clare knew he was furious about blacks. “Irene was glad that he [Brian] was being nice to Clare, and glad that Clare was having the opportunity to discover that some coloured men were superior to some white men.”¹¹⁹

Jack Bellew was not a very rich man. He belonged to the middle class and was a primitive, vulgar, bad man. Clare’s husband was seen as a vicious white man who was even violated in their marriage. In contrast to him, Brian Redfield was a very dark-skinned black man, he was a doctor. Mr. Redfield was a cultivated, educated man with a university degree. Clare’s and Irene’s marriages were different. Clare’s had been based on lies since the very beginning of their relationship. She was never able to tell her partner who she really was since she would lose him forever. The other example of marriage is seen by her as a satisfied couple with a nice family and well financially secured.

Irene and Clare compared their lives and status. Clare thought about Irene “staying” black, having a nice family, loving her sons. Irene and Brian were in the upper class, had a nice home and of course since both were blacks Irene did not have to keep secrets about her race from her husband. “Her [Clare’s] effort to speak moderately was obvious, but not successful. “How could you know? How could you? You’re free.

¹¹⁷ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 106

¹¹⁸ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 71

¹¹⁹ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 75

You're happy. And," with faint derision, "safe".¹²⁰ Clare envied Irene for what she had and what Clare could not have since she had lied to her husband and chose the life of a "passed black woman". She kept comparing what she had in her life and what Irene had.

5.3.3 Changes in the Relationship of Irene and Clare

Irene started to notice things going on between her husband and her charming beautiful friend Clare. There were signs that assured Irene of them having an affair. Anthony Dawahare noted that "after this realization, Irene wants to restore the security of her middle-class home and marriage [...] She hopes that Clare's fear of discovery or divorce from her wealthy white husband will constrain her."¹²¹ Brian did not admit that Clare was beautiful but paid attention to her, invited her to a party when Irene refused or drove her home from a party and not his wife. "Clare went [...] on a few occasions when Irene hadn't been able or inclined to go out, she had gone alone with Brian to some bridge party or benefit dance."¹²²

She had to think about it all the time. She could not sleep. She felt terrible. Beyond that it was Christmas, a time of peace, love, good mood, family and people nice behaving to each other. Irene's state of mind did not come up to that.

[...] she redoubled her efforts to drive out of her mind the distressing thoughts of faiths broken and trusts betrayed which every mental vision of Clare, of Brian, brought with them [...] There were the boys. There was John Bellew [...] She wanted to feel nothing, to think nothing;¹²³

Irene felt confused and considered whether she could get her life back on the "old track". From the friend Clare she became the enemy Clare who Irene tried to separate from her and her family life. She was glad for every moment when Clare was not around. She would do anything to get rid of her and erase her from her life. Until she met Clare, her life was peaceful, without any problems.

[...] she was very tired of Clare Kendry. She wanted to be free of her, [...] If something would only happen, something that would remove Clare.

¹²⁰ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 67

¹²¹ Dawahare, Anthony, "The Gold Standard of Racial Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Spring 2006: 37

¹²² Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 80

¹²³ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 96-97

Anything. She didn't care what. Not even if it were that Clare's Margery were ill, or dying. Not even if Bellew should discover-¹²⁴

Irene took into account everything that her husband and she had gone through and she did not want to leave him. She knew that Clare was going to leave for Europe soon and was ready to suffer till she leaves. "Better, far better, to share him than to lose him completely. Oh, she could close her eyes, if need be. She could bear it. She could bear anything."¹²⁵

First Irene made a plan to tell Mr. Bellew about his wife's real skin color. "But she shrank away from the idea of telling that man, Clare Kendry's white husband, anything that would lead him to suspect that his wife was a Negro."¹²⁶ After meeting him on the street where she walked with her friend, she changed her mind and wanted to warn Clare because Jack Bellew was possibly starting to have suspicions. Irene knew that if the truth were told to Mr. Bellew it would certainly mean divorce and could mean death to Clare.

5.3.4 Clare's Death - Conclusion

At Felice's party there were only black people as guests. The atmosphere was nice and friendly, so everybody enjoyed their drinks and chatting. Eventually it became a place where there was a fight between Clare and Jack Bellew, who appeared at the door to find out who his wife really was. "So you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!" His voice was a snarl and a moan, an expression of rage and of pain.¹²⁷

He screamed at Clare, was angry with her, disappointed and frustrated. In a second, the image of his perfect "white" family was destroyed, for Clare had destroyed everything. On the contrary to that, Clare seemed to be calmed and relieved. She even smiled lightly and was satisfied that after years of keeping the truth from Jack it finally came to the surface. She knew that it was the end of their marriage. The next thing that happened was never clearly explained. The first second Clare was there and a few moments later she lay dead outside.

Gone. That soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness

¹²⁴ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 97-98

¹²⁵ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 108

¹²⁶ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 98

¹²⁷ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997:111

that had been Clare Kendry.... Gone! The mocking daring, the gallantry of her pose, the ringing bells of her laughter.¹²⁸

There were three possibilities of what had happened. Clare either committed suicide by jumping out of the window or Irene pushed her and killed her or Clare's husband got rid of his wife this way. Stephen Knadler says that "[...] Larsen leaves the novel's ending indeterminate: She never [...] makes clear whether Clare commits suicide or whether Irene pushes her out of the [...] window in a fit of jealousy."¹²⁹ If Clare committed suicide, alcohol might have played a role in it. She was at a party and was drinking heavily like everybody else. Clare already knew that what she could expect was being hunted by her husband who wanted revenge for what she had done to him. Hostility toward her husband could be a reason too. On the other hand, she could get divorced from him. Clare might have been killed by her husband but this was not probable because the black society at the party would not have called police if this was the case. If Mr. Bellew did this to Clare, they would handle it with him themselves with no witnesses like police. He was the intruder at the party, he spoiled the atmosphere and above all – he was the one who called them Niggers. Irene also had a motive to kill her and she probably did. Clare tried to interfere in her life, maybe steal her husband and it all could have an effect on her nice family. Irene was jealous of Clare. She was afraid of losing her present life which could be destroyed. Clare was already standing at the window. It was a great opportunity to get rid of her and this fear. Above all, the black society would protect her, they would never say that Irene was the one who pushed Clare out of the window.

Even after returning back across the color line into the Black community, Clare Kendry finds no peace, rest, loyalty – or any real security. Clare's racial origins are revealed to her white racist husband at a party held at the Freeland's' apartment. The "freeland" is free in one respect. Clare is finally "let out" of her marriage by the discovery.¹³⁰

Irene did not know what she felt. She was surprised, shocked, shaken and could not believe what had just happened. "What if Clare was not dead?"¹³¹ One of Irene's

¹²⁸ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 111

¹²⁹ Knadler, Stephen, "Domestic Violence in the Harlem Renaissance: Remarking the Record in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Toni Morrison's *Jazz*", *African American Review*, 2004: 111

¹³⁰ Little, Jonathan, "Nella Larsen's *Passing*: Irony and the Critics," *African American Review* 26, 1992: 174-175

¹³¹ Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 112

mixed thoughts was if Clare is really dead or if she survived the fall. “Irene wasn’t sorry. She was amazed, incredulous almost [...] She had thought of nothing in that sudden moment of action.”¹³² These types of thoughts lead the reader to believe that the murderer was probably Irene, however, Nela Larsen left the end of the book mysterious. The reader does not know for sure if what had happened was an accident or if Irene killed Clare. Irene’s nature would never have allowed a person to be put to death but in Clare’s case she might have committed murder in order to preserve her family life because Clare was the one who stepped in between Irene and her husband.

She only cared for, in that moment, unnecessary details such as if Brian was cold and if she should bring him his coat. The participants of the party agreed that it happened by accident. It meant the end for the relationship of Irene and Clare but there was another chance to build up the relationship between the husband and the wife.

¹³² Larsen, Nella, *The Passing*, Penguin Books, 1997: 111-112

6.0 Rudolph Fisher - The Walls of Jericho

6.1 Introduction

The name of the book comes from a story in the Bible. There is a story of Joshua, an Israelite, who wanted to occupy the town of Jericho. His spies found a helper who gave them information. They saved only the woman who cooperated with them and her family. The Israelite's God advised Joshua to walk around the walls of the town for a week and blow on the rams' horns and then the walls would fall down. The seventh day after Joshua began this the walls fell down and the town was destroyed by the Israelites. Bernard Bell commented that

The Walls of Jericho is a satirical treatment of prejudice and self-delusion. Structured around a remote, incongruous analogy between the Biblical legend of Joshua and the legendary Joshua Jones, a black furniture mover, the novel reveals Fisher's ironic view of the walls people build around their neighborhoods and themselves.¹³³

The "Joshua" in this novel could be Fred Merrit to Ms. Cramp. He could be the spy that came to her street and she thought he wanted to do some harm there. After she found out he was black, she started considering him as the enemy. The other blacks lived in Harlem, the fortress area, and its walls were imaginary ones where the blacks were controlled and under the white man's review. In the Bible, the Israelites are analogous to blacks in this story.

6.2 Plot

The novel is about Fred Merrit, who wanted to move to the border of Harlem, a white "part" of the city. On Court Avenue he bought a house where he was not welcome. His neighbor, Ms. Agatha Cramp regarded him as a nice and cultivated man while they were talking at the G.I.A. ball but after she found out that he was a black man, she worried about him calling on her or moving to the street where she lived. Another part of the story was black people's lives. Jinx, Bubber and Shine alias Joshua Jones were movers hired by Merrit. Shine fell in love with Linda, Ms. Cramp's maid. At the end of the story, Mr. Merrit's house was burnt as a sign that he was not supposed to move onto

¹³³ Bell, Bernard W., *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, 138

that street. He suspected Agatha Cramp but finally it came to light that Mr. Patmore, a “bootlegger”, who was an illegal alcohol seller, was the one who committed the arson.

6.3 Upper and Lower Class

Harlem was a place of all kinds of black people. There were dark ones, chestnut ones but it was also possible to find “the conventional shades to the warmth of rose-and-olive”¹³⁴. Harlem was a place where there was a little bit of every sort of color tone of black people. The lower-classed people, such as Jinx, Bubber or Linda, did common jobs. They moved furniture and she worked as a housekeeper. Black people were often hired by whites to work for them.

Mr. Fred Merrit belonged to the upper-class society because he was a mulatto. His hair was fair and he pretended to be white, which was called “passing”. He had a lucrative job, for he worked as a lawyer. “The Court Avenue was a luxurious place to live. It was the “most exclusive of the residential streets adjacent to Negro Harlem”.”¹³⁵

The G.I.A. ball took place in Manhattan. Although this was in the neighborhood of Harlem, it was the richest part of New York City. It was not only the elite society who attended but Linda and Shine also took part in it. The lower and the upper class could meet there.

6.3.1. Black Vocabulary

Some special words are used in the novel. The author uses a lot of African American vernacular expressions, such as “jig”, “boogy”, “dinky”, “jasper”, etc. The whites they called the “fays”.

If the reader does not know what a *dicty*, the *dozens*, a *rent party*, the *camel walk*, and other artifacts of black culture are, he will be enlightened by reading the stories in which they are explicitly defined.

¹³⁶

The white people and also Linda spoke in proper English with correct grammar but the reader can easily recognize the difference in the speech of a lower-class black

¹³⁴ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 78

¹³⁵ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 35

¹³⁶ Deutsch, Leonard J., “ ‘The Streets of Harlem’: The Short Stories of Rudolph Fisher”, *Phylon* 40, 1979: 159-160

man and an upper-class man. Fisher phonetically describes the language of blacks. Reading the text aloud is easier. Fisher put a Harlesemese-English dictionary at the end of the book, as in the following example:

Turning' y' head this way and d' other way and sorter pullin' 'way from this bird even though y' keep on dancin' [...] I jes' feel kinda sorry for 'im f' bein' such a sap [...] "Chile, I'm go'n' need a maid right heyh. I done told Mr. Merrit already [...] Y'see we been livin' in a 'partment all along and 'twasn' but six rooms [...]"¹³⁷

6.4 Agatha Cramp's attitudes

Ms. Cramp was a rich person belonging to the upper white class who owned a house on Court Avenue. She never found love or got married because she was never sure if men loved her or her property. As a wealthy woman she could afford to keep a maid and was very satisfied with her maid Linda's work.

[...] I had no idea what really marvelous servants they make. After having Linda I wouldn't think of having any other kind of maid. I've had Irish and French and German, but none of them were so good as Linda.¹³⁸

Ms. Agatha Cramp considered black people not as persons equal to her, or people similar to her but rather as a means that could help, facilitate, make or produce advantageous business for whites. Even stories written by a white man about Negroes she considered inappropriate, simple and unsophisticated.

The only Negroes Miss Cramp had ever spoken to were porters, waiters, and house-servants of acquaintances. These were the only ones of whose existence she had been even remotely aware of. Negroes to her had been rather ugly but serviceable fixtures, devices that happened to be alive, dull instruments of drudgery, so observed, so accepted, so used, and so forgotten.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 154,174

¹³⁸ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 135

¹³⁹ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 61

In Agatha Cramp's opinion the environment influenced the appearance of people. In her mind if the blacks moved to the North, they would turn white in a few centuries. She found evolution very truthful and important.

[Ms. Cramp] "It *is* hard to appreciate, isn't it? It makes one wonder, really. Mrs. Byle is almost as fair as I am, while – well, look at the girl down there. Absolutely black. Yet both – " "Are Negresses." [Ms. Cramp] "... These people have been out of their native element only three or four hundred years, and just see what it has done to their complexions! It's hard to believe that just three hundred years in our country has brought about such a great variety in the color of the black race."¹⁴⁰

Mr. Cramp was a little hypocritical. She seemed to care for blacks and she enhanced them, for she was quite fascinated by them. Once she found out about Fred Merrit's origin, she changed her point of view immediately. It was alright that her maid was black but she could not stand that her home-owning neighbor was a black man, too. Claude McKay comments on the position of a black man by saying that "white folks can never be broke like niggers [...] it's like this: Life is like a loaf of bread and niggers nevah did have much more'n the crumbs what the white folks fived them [...]"¹⁴¹ A maid meant a secondary and subordinate position but a neighbor meant a position on the same level as hers which she could not accept. She felt terrible and frustrated that she offered him to be in touch with her. She was the kind of person who found it very important what people thought about her and she thought she would even move out from the embarrassment.

"[...] one of them was the man that has bought a house almost next *door* to me here on Court Avenue – and [...] he intends to *live* in it! [...] I thought he was white. He looked like it. He's blonder than I am."¹⁴²

Agatha also spoke about blacks like they were animals. "You have heard that remark of somebody's, no doubt, that most Negroes are just three jumps ahead of the

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 112-113

¹⁴¹ McKay, Claude, *Harlem Glory*, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1990: 36

¹⁴² Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 171

monkeys?”¹⁴³ Mrs. Cramp does not even consider blacks as humans, she compares them to “something” that is only a little more intelligent than animals.

6.5 Linda Young – an Independent Woman

Linda represented an example of a strong and self-confident woman, in some cases a stubborn one, too. She was a young, fair-skinned and beautiful black woman. She worked as a housekeeper and maid which was quite common for a black woman at this time.

[Ms. Cramp] “Linda, you’re quite different from most – er – colored people, aren’t you? [...] You’re so light, you know.” Linda’s lips twitched. “Why I’m not so awfully light, Miss Cramp. And plenty folks lighter than I am are far from being pretty [...] ”But your hair now – it isn’t kinky... But your skin, my dear. You might pass for a Sicilian or an Armenian.”¹⁴⁴

This comment displays Cramps’ attitude towards blacks because she thinks Linda would be seen as a better person if she could pass as white.

Linda’s aims and targets stood much higher. It was not usual for black women to exhibit their nature but Linda was not satisfied with what she was doing. The important thing she saw in life she saw education, knowledge and being able to earn some better money than a maid’s salary. These opinions and attitudes separated her from other black women. She was ambitious. Being a servant was a way for her to save money for school to be able to learn type writing which was her dream.

[...] Do you think –” An old ambition raised its head – “Do you think maybe I could go to night school sometimes and learn to run a typewriter? [...] I don’t want to be a K.M. all my life. [...] [Mrs. Fuller] “Our girls ain’t got no ambition, no ambition ‘tall, ‘ceptin’ to go on the stage or dance in a cabaret [...]”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 135

¹⁴⁴ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 62-63

¹⁴⁵ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 176

Linda may be characterized as an early form of a feministic character in this novel. She was an independent woman with her own mind and goals and taking opportunities that helped her to reach what she wanted to gain.

6.6 Humor and Satire

Throughout the story there were a couple of men Jinx and Bubber whose looks were even funny. They were total opposites in physiques. Bubber was a short and big man. The fact that he was also missing his upper front tooth contributed to his funny look. Jinx was thin and tall. Usually he walked round-shouldered and his skin was freckled. Not only did they differ in their appearance but also in their nature. For a while they were best friends but in the next second they could argue about anything and never make a compromise. They kept bickering and heckling. Only for fun, they sometimes fought, too.

A funny moment came when they moved a piano to the third floor. The author describes that it is “two hundred and twenty pounds of hardness in this case, wrestling daily with pianos;”¹⁴⁶ They were doing the moving job but they paid great attention to it and tried to look like important and needy people. “A piano is a malicious thing. It loves to slip out of your grip [...]”¹⁴⁷ The author describes in a funny way how they were moving a piano upstairs and it slipped and hit their toes. Walter White comments on the author that:

[...] Dr. Fisher has caught the real humor of the Negro and the result is the first light novel of Negro life [...] Also Dr. Fisher steers successfully from lugubrious tragedy [...] Its [*The Walls of Jericho*] language, its humor, its psychology are true to the type it depicts. As a first novel or as any other one it is an excellent achievement.¹⁴⁸

The author describes the relationships between blacks and whites and blacks and among other blacks with hyperbole. He does not sound tragic or melancholic and throughout the novel there are humorous elements.

6.7 Betrayal of a Black Man

¹⁴⁶ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 22

¹⁴⁷ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 23

¹⁴⁸ White, Walter F., “A Fine Novel of Negro Life”, *New York World*, 5 August 1928, p.7M

Moving in the new house accompanied problems. It could be Mr. Merrit's provocation to purchase a house in the "white zone" of the city. He regarded himself as white. He looked white, he acted white and he had a profession like a white man. He had money and also wanted to live like a white man. Yet, Fred's house was set on fire. The prime suspicion Mr. Merrit put on Agatha Cramp. She was the one who was angry with him because he lied to her, discredited her in the society and turned out to be a traitor to her. In reality the guilty person was a black man.

"There is so much hatred between races," sighed Miss Cramp. "Still, it is all that can be expected. Now Negroes, for instance are most extremely deceitful [...] this man Merrit, who owned the house that burnt up – he was always practicing some sort of deceit [...] He posed as a white man when he purchased that house – otherwise he'd never have gotten it."¹⁴⁹

There was disappointment on both sides. On Merrit's side because he did not want to know that someone from his own race would commit arson to his house. On the other hand there was a disappointment on the black community's side because they saw Fred as a passer who gave up on his own race.

6.8 Conclusion

Not only the plot of the story is a comedy but also the way this black author makes fun of an old naïve white lady is humorous. Mrs. Cramp was inexperienced in sexual relationships. She did not know much about men and yet she tried to sound like a professional in judging inter-racial issues. *The Walls of Jericho* avoids all the tragedy. Mrs. Cramp seemed unaware of the fact that white man had sex with slaves and their children were mulattoes. Instead of this inter-racial relationships she associated the lighter skin of some blacks as a bi-product of living in a cooler climate of North America rather than hot climate in Africa. She associated the darker blacks as coming to America recently. These blacks were the last ones kidnapped from Africa and sent to America. The light skinned blacks had been in the United States for a long time. This idea of being in America longer as a result of this light skin was a new history of African American people. Within the story of this novel this idea serves as comic relief.

The walls of Jericho were metaphorical walls between blacks and whites, they needed to be torn down so that people could enter to the "other part". It needed to be

broken through the frontier because on the other side were people were waiting curious to learn about the world that was hiding behind the wall.

In the imaginary fight between the black versus white man, neither wins. All people have to take life the way it arranges itself and even though some people try to go against it, so that like Mrs. Cramp, they cannot influence it.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher, Rudolph, *The Walls of Jericho*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks The University of Michigan Press 1994: 285-286

7.0 Conclusion

In my diploma thesis I dealt with the theme of the Harlem Renaissance, an important point for the black authors and black culture received a certain place in the white people's attention. Its peak was in the 1920s and 1930s. Harlem Renaissance is shown in several novels which plots concern the place of Harlem, the situation of blacks in the society of that time, the relationships between black and white people but also the relationships among the black community.

The novels written in the period of the Harlem Renaissance include motives of pursuit of love in different races and classes. For example, Donald Glover in *The Quarry* fell in love and got married with a black woman but was himself a white man. Clare Kendry, a character of *Passing* was a light-skinned black woman who was married a white man. A big theme for the Harlem Renaissance were multiracial background, its difficulties are often written with a comic understanding of it, for example as in *The Walls of Jericho*. There are issues of passing and interracial marriages and both tragic and comic aspects of these issues. When a white races is mixed (e.g. European and American whites) no one can recognize it because they are still white. However, when two different races mix together, a black and a white man, then there is a certainly different look. Such multi-ethnic children are noticed in public for their features and skin-color.

An interesting life was the Frederick Douglass's one. He knew that his father was a white man but was not sure if his mother was a hundred percent African woman. It was sure that he was at least half white, possibly more white than black. Douglass's first wife was black and after she died he got married with a white woman. She was German and Douglass was older than her. He defended these decisions to marry women from different races with saying that the white half of him married the white woman and the black half married the black one. Another important work prior the Harlem Renaissance was Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a best seller translated in many world languages. The author was a white woman who described the cruel ways which white masters used to treat their black slaves.

This study interpreted the life of people living in the South of the United States after the Civil War and Harlem in New York City in the North of America. After the Civil War slaves were given freedom. Ideas about this differed in the opinions of two important persons of this time. Booker T. Washington was a slave when he was a small

boy and his dream was the freedom and place in society for black people with giving them basic skills. He wanted them to be taught how to do the plumber's, mechanic's or a farmer's job so they would be able to feed their families and survive on low salaries. On the other side there was W.E.B. Du Bois, who was born into an upper-middle class family after the Civil War ended and his imagination of the black man's position in the society was different. Du Bois was convinced that black people could work as doctors, lawyers and other important and distinguished positions as well as white people.

To compare the novels I have analyzed, there are both similarities in all novels and unique ideas appearing only in one novel *The Quarry*. All of the authors deal in their novels with the life among the black society. There are relationships among members of the family, neighbors, citizens of a town and couples.

The family was an important element in a black's life. Marriage and having children is connected to the religion and so it was a very important step in their lives. In almost all novels there are married couples raising children except for the novel *Home to Harlem*. The style of living in the Harlem's pubs and clubs did not correspond with the side of life where people grow up, settle down and become responsible. Another extreme appears in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the main character, Janie, got married for three times which was unacceptable and against all rules in the community. There is a character in *The Walls of Jericho*, Miss Cramp, an older white lady, whom the author makes fun of. She has property, is a rich woman but has no experience in the sexual relationships with men. She was too picky when she was younger and suspected all her suitors of being interested not in her but her wealth. That was the reason why she never got married. In the novel *Passing* there are two aspects of marriage. Irene's marriage where there were no lies, she was honest to her husband, felt equal with him and had a happy family. In contrast to this marriage was the Clare's one. She had to hide the fact that she was black from her white racist husband. She had made that decision before married him and knew that racism was going to be experienced for the rest of her life. Clare could not tell her husband about her desires (to join black community again), but on the contrast she had to act white and even laugh his racist jokes about black people. Their marriage was full of lies and pretending. In order not to bear a dark-skinned child, Clare refused to have any more children. They only had a daughter.

God and religion play a big role in all of the analyzed novels except for *The Quarry*. A great reason of it is that especially black people have always been very

religious and superstitious and that is why the church is a big deal in the plots. The God is even today very important to them and has an influence not only on the black community. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* there is the hurricane and people waiting for next God's decision. In the novel *The Walls of Jericho* the biblical town is even in the title. Joshua was a biblical character and he lead Israelites. This was a metaphor to Joshua in the novel and black people who represented the Israelites.

The idea of feminism could be definitely seen in Zora Neale Hurston's novel in the main character Janie, who broke almost every tradition that black people had. She was married three times but had never children, had her own attitudes and did not follow the church or black community rules. Jane looked for the voice. She had to find herself in order to understand and learn other matters. Another thought of feminism is in the Fisher's novel *The Walls of Jericho*, where Linda represents a strong woman differing with her ideals from other black women. Unlike the rest of them, she wanted to get education and her future plans did not involve working as a maid until the rest of her life. She was an ambitious woman. The position of the woman in Larsen's *Passing* does not interpret feminism because in the society in the North the woman's place was different from the typical black woman living in the poor South. Women in the North had more freedom and could express themselves more. Beside their husbands, they were more equal and did not have to struggle

The novels *Home to Harlem*, *The Walls of Jericho* and *Passing* take place in Harlem. *Home to Harlem* shows the part of the Harlem where there are cabarets, pubs and where the low-class blacks meet. It reflects the low-paid jobs they did such as working in a train. Also in *The Walls of Jericho* there are parts showing the low and poor Harlem, the two furniture movers, their fights and bars but on the other hand there also appears Court Avenue, a rich street, where also well-off white people live, on the border with Manhattan. *The Quarry* as the only novel takes place in the North and does not mention any surroundings of Harlem. In the fore, there are rich families, an owner of an factory, good education, university campus and traveling to distance places over the ocean. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the only novel that takes places in the South and shows the typical black people's lives that have rules according to which everybody must behave, otherwise they are disrespectful persons.

To draw the reader deeper in the stories, the authors use the African American vernacular language. It appears in all novels. In the reported speeches of the blacks, there almost everytime appears the black people's expressions. The narrator always uses

proper formal English and also white people's dialogues are in the formal language. The only exception is Linda in *The Walls of Jericho* who is a black woman but she speaks proper English. In the novel *The Quarry* formal standard American English language is used because Donald moves among educated people, white people and upper class people. The only time the author uses the African American vernacular is in the prison scene where they use this kind of language. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows the language as a part of the southern black life. People use the informal language throughout the whole novel and it fits into the places in the South as well as it does show the real life in Harlem in other novels.

In the novel *Passing* there are light-skinned blacks "passing" white. Passing concerned only those blacks who had white features. They confused other people about their origin. Their light skin allowed them to join the society of white people without being noticed or being banished from the society. Some of them passed only sometimes when the situation required it but one of the characters, Clare Kendry, passed once and could not step back because of her racist white husband. Fred Merrit, the character of *The Walls of Jericho*, passes as well. He moved to the border of Harlem and Manhattan where he was going to live next to white neighbors. Passing was worth for blacks to pretend that they were white, however, in the novel *The Quarry*, the main character did "reverse passing". He knew that he was a white man and he decided that he would pass for black. Donald was raised by black step-parents and he was told that he was born a black man. It turned out that it was not true, however, that he had Italian ancestry, but he did not consider himself being white and he even married a black woman. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Home to Harlem* the passing is not an important issue and the authors do not mention it.

In the Larsen's novel *Passing* one of the main characters, Clare, died. The reader was never told who committed the crime, however, Clare fell out of the window. Three possible ways how it happened could have been taken into account. Either it was Irene who killed Clare or her husband Jack Bellew or Clare committed suicide. Also in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Janie's two husbands, Joe and Tea Cake die. Joe's death is metaphorically considered being the consequence of what Janie had done to him – she took his manhood from him. Tea Cake, her true finally found love she had to shoot with a rifle in defense. Also, Janie's grandmother died in the novel. It meant for Janie that she had no other person who would tell her what to do and push Janie doing what she did not want to.

Love appeared in many points of view. Love and a loving man is the biggest theme in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because this is what Janie wanted the most and what she kept looking for. She went through three different relationships but the real love she found with her third husband. There was also the grandmother who loved Janie and wanted the best for her. In *The Quarry* of Donald was an adopted child but his step mother accepted him her own son and her maternal love was a support for Donald anywhere he went. Maternal love is shown also in the novel *Passing* where Irene represents a devoted mother who loved her two sons. Joshua and Linda, as a couple symbolized love in the novel *The Walls of Jericho*. In McKay's *Home to Harlem* there are relationships between men and women not always include love. Sometimes the couple moves in with each other without having and deeper feelings. Maybe it belongs to the Harlem low society full of cabarets, prostitutes and alcohol. However, love between Jake and Felice is true.

Racism is part of each of the analyzed novels. In Larsen's *Passing* the representer of racism is Mr. Bellew, a white man who hated blacks, however, he had no idea that his wife was one, too. Donald, in *The Quarry*, was a victim of the bureaucracy. His first adoptive parents took him thinking he was a white boy, but gossips in the surroundings convinced them that he was too dark to be a white baby and they got rid of him. In *The Walls of Jericho* Mrs. Cramp is the one who turned out to be a racist. First she did not. She had a black maid and she seemed to be interested in black's lives. However, once she found out that her neighbor was supposed to be black, she completely changed her mind and even wanted to move out of the house. In the Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* there is an issue of intra-racism. Racism within a race is here shown in the talks of a light-skinned black, Mrs. Turner, speaking against dark-skinned blacks and she refers to Booker T. Washington and his critics. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois were two important men completely differing in their opinions.

The position of black people in the novels differs. It depended on the class that they belonged to. In *Passing* a black man is a doctor in contrast to a white man who was not as well educated and belonged to a lower class than the black doctor. Larsen wanted to point out that it did not matter what race the man is part of, intelligence does not choose the skin color. Clare gave up all her black life for her husband and sacrificed everything to the idea of having a white life. Even when he was a middle class man, she chose him over any black who could be from upper class. The class in society was not

important to her. She cared more for appearing in white society than the black one. *There Eyes Were Watching God* is an example of both, lower and upper class blacks. Janie got a possibility to try both. Her first husband worked on his farm, he had hard work on fields, depended on the harvest and considered his mule (which to some seemed only to be an animal) very important. He had no school education. To the low classes also belonged the men who spent their lives sitting on the front porch all day watching the street and waiting for some excitement that would disturb their monotone lives. Janie's second husband was an educated and intellectual man from North, he was particular about wearing suits and looking good in the society. He became a mayor of the town Eatonville. Jane, thanks to her first two husband . She experienced how it was to live as a auxiliary force on a field next to a low-classed husband and a wife of a mayor which put her into the aristocratic society in the town where people were cultivated, had manners and talked in an intelligent way. In *Walls of Jericho* there are both classes represented. The movers Jinx and Bubber come from the lower class, they do a manual job where they do not have to use much intelligence. They enjoy coming to bars and clubs where they drink and fight which shows the low niveau of Harlem. On the other hand, another black man, Fred Merrit, works as a lawyer, he bought a house in the neighborhood of white people and he lived quite a good life. Mostly the blacks from the low classes took their life the way it was but there was also an exception, a maid who desired to go to school and do better jobs than cleaning a house and serve someone. She wanted to change her position and get into some better society. *Home to Harlem* shows the low class black people who enjoy drinking in the bars at nights and having free relationships. Education was connected with the class to which the characters belonged In *The Quarry* Donald is and educated man, he graduated from a university with a Ph.D. degree. There are doctors, a senator and an owner of a factory in his surroundings and they influence him.

There are also some aspects of violence in the novels. An exemplery relationship of violence have Clare and Jack in *Passing*. It was "common" that a black man hurt his wife, a black woman, however, here it is a white man being violent to his wife. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Janie was hit by her husband Tea Cake and got a black eye which was enjoyed by other men who found it very attractive on her. Also in *Home to Harlem* some of the relationships deal with violence. Zeddy is an aggressive man who has no problem hitting a woman. On the other hand there is Jake who is against violence. However, one of his girlfriends is disappointed by Jake. She expected that he would

show her more being a man by showing her the masculine power and use it as well. She wanted Jake to be more “man” – the dominant and hard man that she was used to meet in the Harlem cabarets.

In *Home to Harlem* Felice has a necklace which is an example of voodooism in the Harlem Renaissance novels. It was the only novel that showed the superstitious part of the black culture. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the Natives are superstitious as well because while watching the hurricane they wonder what wrong they had done that the God punishes them. They also wait for what is going to be next.

The humor is a part of *The Walls of Jericho*. Not in all novels necessarily humor is but Fisher made fun of whites and hid it within this work.

After the Civil War the Harlem Renaissance was an important step for the black authors and black culture itself to be spread among white people.

8.0 Shrnutí

Ve své diplomové práci jsem se zabývala tématem harlemské renesance, což byl důležitý mezník pro černošské autory a jejich kulturu, neboť se dostali do podvědomí bělošské společnosti. Ve 20. a 30. letech 20. století prožívala harlemská renesance vrchol. V románech napsaných o této době je ukázána část města New York City, Harlem, kde se některé romány odehrávají. Dále je zde nastíněna situace černochoů ve společnosti, vztahy mezi bělochy a černochoy, ale také vztahy ve společnosti černochoů.

Frederick Douglas a Harriet Beecher Stowe jsou dva autoři, kteří psali o černošských „hrdinech“ ještě před touto dobou. Douglasovo dílo se jmenuje *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave*, což je autobiografie. Douglas nevěděl, kdy se narodil, a svou matku viděl jen několikrát za život, pokaždé jen na krátkou dobu a nebylo mu ani dovoleno jít na její pohřeb. Neznal svého otce, jen věděl, že byl běloch. U své matky si nemohl být jistý, jestli ona byla 100% Afričanka. Sám Douglas se oženil dvakrát, jednou s černoškou a podruhé s běloškou. Svá rozhodnutí hájil tím, že černá půlka v něm se oženila s černou ženou a bílá půlka s bílou ženou. Harriet Stowe byla běloška, která napsala knihu *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, jež se stala bestsellerem. Tento román byl dokonce přeložen i do češtiny pod názvem *Chaloupka strýčka Toma*. Strýček Tom se stal metaforou pro černochoy, kteří musí poslouchat svého pána. Byl to křesťan, který nabádal ostatní otroky, aby se nebouřili a byli poslušní. Autorka v tomto románě popsala drastické chování nelítostných otrokářů – otroky ani nepovažovali za lidi a podle toho s nimi také zacházeli. Prodávali je a pronásledovali jejich rodiny. Přesto se pokládali za pravé křesťany a chodili do kostela.

V románech, které jsem analyzovala, vždy hraje důležitou roli církev, protože černoši vždy byli nábožensky založení lidé. Věřili v Boha a chodili do kostela, což platí dosud. Jazyk, kterým jsou tyto romány napsané, se snaží přiblížit okolí a lidi, a proto autoři psali dialogy v afroamerickém dialektu, se špatnou gramatikou. Nicméně postavy románů, které jsou bílé, mluví spisovnou angličtinou. V několika románech se také objevuje feminismus, Janie v *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, je výborným příkladem. Ona v té době překročila všechna pravidla, která platila v černošské společnosti. Byla třikrát vdaná, neměla děti, a přestože byla žena, snažila se prosadit ve společnosti. Rasismus je dalším prvkem - patří sem i tzv. *intra-racism* neboli rasismus uvnitř jedné rasy, kdy černoši se světlou pletí se chovali rasisticky vůči černochoům s tmavou pletí. Důležitý zde byl také tzv. *passing*, což bylo možné jen pro černochoy se světlou kůží,

kteří se díky svým rysům a barvě mohli vydávat za bělochy, pohybovat se v jejich společnosti, aniž by vzbudili podezření. Postavení černochoů v nižších a vyšších vrstvách společnosti se zde také ukazuje, stejně jako důležitost rodiny a manželství. Některé romány se odehrávají na severu a v Harlemu, nebo na jihu Spojených států.

Harlemská renesance obsahuje motivy lásky, po které hrdinové touží. Důležitým tématem pro toto období je tzv. *tragic mulatto*, tragický míšenec. Úmyslem harlemské renesance bylo vymazat slovo tragický a pozdvihnout to, že jakýkoliv odstín tmavé pleti je dobrý. Slovo „tragický“ se v některých případech změnilo na „komický“. Proto součástí některých těchto románů je také humor, např. *The Walls of Jericho*.

V této době také běloši začali poslouchat jazz a blues, což je původem černošský styl hudby. V blues černoši zpívali pro jiné černochoy o tom, jak jim bílí lidé ublížili a jak s nimi zacházeli během otrokářství. To ale běloši nechtěli slyšet, a tak blues toto téma později vynechávalo.

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