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Tragické osudy mulatek v novelách černošských autorek 19. století; Hanny Crafts, Harriet Wilson, Julie Collins a Frances Harper

"Tragic Mulattoes" in Black Women´s Novels from the 19th Century: Hannah Crafts, Harriet Wilson, Julia Collins and Frances Harper

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma Tragické osudy mulatek v novelách černošských autorek 19. století; Hanny Crafts, Harriet Wilson, Julie Collins a Frances Harper vypracovala samostatně s použitím pramenů uvedených v bibliografii.

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Abstract

This diploma thesis focuses on the analysis of the conditions of lighter-skin black women of mixed ancestry, both free and enslaved, before and after emancipation, as related in four novels written by the 19th century African-American novelists: Hannah Crafts, Harriet E. Wilson, Julia C. Collins and Frances E. W. Harper. The work especially deals with the main motifs appearing in their novels, such as the interracial relationships, variations of racism toward mulattos, the problematics of "passing" for white and the issue of "racial uplift". The analyses of the novels themselves are preceded by a survey of the authors´ lives since they drew inspiration from their own personal experience. This is followed by a brief conclusive comparison of their novels.

Anotace

Náplní této diplomové práce bude analýza životních podmínek mulatských žen, ať už svobodných nebo zotročených, a to v období nejenom před ale i po emancipaci. Jejich osudy budou sledovány na základě rozboru čtyř novel pocházejících z 19. století, jejichž autorkami jsou Afro-Američanky Hannah Crafts, Harriet E. Wilson, Julia C. Collins a Frances E. W. Harper. Práce se soustředí především na hlavní motivy jejich knih, jako jsou mezirasové vztahy, různé projevy rasové nenávisti vůči míšenkám, problematika útěků skrze vydávání se za bílé a záležitost poválečného vzdělávání Afro-Američanů. Samotnému zkoumání novel bude předcházet seznámení se s životem autorek, které čerpaly inspiraci z vlastních životních zkušeností. Práce je zakončena stručným porovnáním vybraných novel.

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Preface

I have chosen a topic which most people are not familiar with. At first, I was impressed by the powerful writing style of the African-American novelist and the Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison and wished to deal with her novels, which are, however, rather difficult to interpret with originality since so many students write on her works. Instead, I was offered to analyze four novels also written by African-American women writers, Hannah Crafts, Harriet E. Wilson, Julia C. Collins and Frances E. W. Harper, all belonging to the first generation of black women writers. I focused especially on the theme of the "Tragic Mulatto", a literary character which often appeared not only in the African-American literature but in the writings of white authors as well. The aim of the work was to introduce the authors, who partly based their novels on their own experiences, and the pivotal motifs which they dealt with in their novels. It was very interesting to look into the real problematics of living at the crossroads of color line and to follow the difficulties which blacks or mulattos had to face to in the antebellum as well as postbellum period.

While completing this work, I mainly focused on analyzing the primary and secondary literature. The work consists of the introduction which is followed by four chapters dealing with the particular novels and, finally, is concluded by the brief conclusive comparison.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Theme of the Tragic Mulatto

The whole world can be comparable to one big pot full of a mixture of people of different races. Even though there has always existed the racial prejudices in every culture, it has been impossible (and from today´s point of view of course absurd) to segregate the races from each other entirely. Therefore, there is no surprise that the particular races began to mix together through interracial relationships. Thus the term *mulatto* was coined. The term actually refers to the word mule, which is a hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey, and indicates the people of mixed race (in the context of the American South, especially the people of white and black ancestry).

The interracial relationship between white men and black women was not that rare as it could seem, however, it was regarded “a clandestine thing never to be brought out in public” (Talty 2003: 62). The whites generally thought that these unions were against nature since the blacks were considered an unequal race. Nevertheless, the white Southerners often seduced or even raped black females (especially when their own wives were pregnant or “obstreperous”) in order to satisfy their sexual lust. It was often asserted by whites that most of these affairs were instigated by the black women themselves because through total submission to their white masters they actually gained various advantages. Sometimes they may have profited, though they actually had no other choice than to meet

their masters´ demands and thus become their concubines. In his book *Mulatto America*, Stephan Talty mentions for example what W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in *Darkwater* (1920):

> … he wrote that he would forgive the South for many painful things – slavery, the Civil War, its "hot blood," and its myths – but he would never forgive, "neither in this world or the world to come, its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust. (Talty 2003: 63)

These unions often resulted in the birth of mulattos. Even though the "white" blood also circulated in their veins, they were, on the basis of the so-called one-drop rule which was applied in the South in the 19th century, automatically considered being black. Samira Kawash summarizes this rule as follows: "one is white if *all* one´s ancestors are white; one is black if *any* of one´s ancestors are black" (Kawash 1997: 132). Moreover, if the child´s mother was a slave her child subsequently inherited her status, becoming a slave as well, which meant that they were immediately rid of all human rights and could be treated only as some kind of commodity. White men were also afraid that the child (their actual descendant) might resemble them too closely which often led them to sell their own child from its mother. However, Talty also emphasizes that, on the other hand, "there is, in fact, evidence that in a substantial amount of cases the men were converted to a new view of black humanity." (Talty 2003: 63)

In many southern law records, we can find such cases when for example white wealthy men fell entirely in love with their female slaves that they

freed them together with their mulatto children or left fortunes to mixed children. Sometimes they also educated them or even moved with the whole “family” to the North where they could find the peaceful place for their new common life. This only proves that there truly existed very loving relationships between the two different races.

To live in the South as a black slave was not easy. The black color is generally considered filthy in oppose to the white color which represents the symbol of cleanliness and purity. However, these “pure” whites committed one of the biggest evils ever created; they enslaved the human beings and profited from their hardship. Blacks had no human rights, were exposed to the hard work and often suffered from cruel racial violence. They were generally despised of and considered being the beasts. Some very light-skinned mulattos, though, had a great advantage to conceal their blackness and avoid the racism through “passing” for white.

The term, “passing” for white, is a very specific phrase fundamentally used in the American context. It literally means “the dissembling of one race (usually black) as another (usually white)” (Bennett 1998: 1). Those mulattos whose complexion was fair enough simply impersonated the whites and thus got the chance to escape to the North. They disguised themselves and hid their true racial identity under the false appearance. Due to such deception, they actually moved from the accursed caste to the “higher” society. “Passing” for white really brought them some kind

of benefit, however, it also meant to suppress their real ancestry entirely and to hope not to be revealed.

Miscegenation, balancing on the border of two different races and "passing" for white also became the main motifs which the writers dealt with in the early African American fiction. The so-called "tragic mulatto" was a stock character in the American literature from the beginning of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. Most often it was represented by a mixed-race woman (an actual literary stereotype) who is torn between two worlds, one black and the other one white. Then the essence of their tragic fate usually flows from the uncertainty whether they fit amongst whites or blacks. They face the decision whether they should reveal their true ancestry or to keep it in secret. These protagonists either know that they are mulattos from the very beginning and try to pass for white to escape the horrible reality or they learn this fact after a long time living in the presumption that they are white. They suddenly must endure the hardships of slavery and cope with the racial prejudices.

As the term "tragic mulatto" implies, these characters are doomed to the bad end in the novels. However, it is not always true that they end up in a tragic way. Sometimes the tragedy of their lives consists "only" in the fact that they, as the very vulnerable human beings, are exposed to the evil of enslavement in each of its appearance. Nevertheless, due to their inner strength, determination and personal persistence they win the place in the world and their stories have the happy-endings.

Since the 19th century literature was read especially by women, all stories must have contained some strong, sentimental aspects to be attractive for women readership. That is one of the reasons why, for example, Charles Dickens gained such a huge success because he wrote about children facing difficult, poor reality and thus deeply touched the readers´ inner feelings. The African-American novelists also chose this strategy of including the sentimental motifs (e.g. Hannah Crafts copied whole paragraphs from Dickens´s novels (Robbins 2004: 74). Their main aim was to write a novel which would awake the sympathy in whites and help to convince them that slavery was very nasty institution and should be banned.

The tragic mulatto character firstly appeared in Lydia Maria Child´s short story "The Quadroons" (1842). She was a white woman author who was then followed by African-American writers such as William W. Brown (*Clotel; or the President´s Daughter*), Frank J. Webb (*The Garies and Their Friends*), Harriet E. Wilson (*Our Nig*), Hannah Crafts (*The Bondwoman´s Narrative*) and many others. Their novels mainly concentrate on black-white sexual relationships, the mulatto theme and passing. However, tragic mulatto theme is not found only in the African-American fiction but it also appeared in the literature written by white novelists, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom´s Cabin*), William Dean Howells (*An Imperative Day*) or Mark Twain (*Pudd´nhead Wilson*).

1.2 Biographies

A brief acquaintance is necessary with the four authors whose novels will be analyzed in this thesis; Hannah Crafts, Harriet E. Wilson, Frances E. W. Harper and Julia C. Collins. Except of Julia C. Collins, they all based their novels somewhat on their own personal experience as racially-mixed African American women. Their novels may be regarded as testimonies of the era they lived in. There is not much known about the authors though. The Professors like Henry Louis Gates, Jr. or William L. Andrews went through the painstaking research looking for the information in the federal censuses, comparing the data and trying to learn as much as possible about them. Despite their persistent search for the identities of the authors, our knowledge of the events of their lives is still very fragmentary.

1.2.1 Authentication of Hannah Crafts

When Henry Louis Gates, Jr. gained the manuscript of *The Bondwoman´s Narrative,* he immediately conducted research of the handwritten manuscript´s authenticity and established the racial identity of the author because providing that she turned out to be black, then the slave narrative he held in his hands would be the first novel written by a black woman and definitely the first novel by a woman slave.

While authenticating the author, Gates came out from the assumption that slave narratives “tend to depict all – or almost all – of their characters by

their real names" (Gates 2002: xxxv). However, this tendency is not always valid, as in the case of Harriet Jacobs´s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), the most famous slave narrative by a woman. Therefore he compiled a list of all the characters appearing in Hannah Crafts´s manuscript. He explained his purpose by claiming:

> …, if I found at least one actual person named among her characters, then it would be clear that Crafts based her novel on some aspect of her own experience; that the novel was, to some extent, autobiographical; and that she, quite probably, knew the institution of slavery personally and may even have been a slave herself. (Gates 2002: xxxvii – xxxviii)

On the basis of his previous experience with researching the identity of Harriet E. Wilson in the 1980s, Gates started to explore census indexes and records. He was aware of a variety of problems connected with it, such as human error, poor spelling, phonetic spelling, false data about people´s birth dates or birth places as well as their ethnic identity or level of literacy. Moreover, he also added that slaves could never be sure of their own birth dates. (Gates 2002: xxxvi – xxxvii)

Gates matched some names in the text (Cosgrove, Henry, and Vincent families) with the names in census. Even though he could not be sure, he declared that the characters´ names did not seem to be arbitrary.

> The fact that surnames of these characters matched real people who lived so closely together in one section of Virginia suggested that it was at least possible that Hannah Crafts had named her characters after people she had known in Virginia as a slave. (Gates 2002: xli)

As his research continued, he gradually found four candidates for the author Hannah Crafts. At the end of the novel, Gates noticed that Crafts

reportedly lived in a free colored community in New Jersey where he focused his attention. In the U.S. federal census between 1860 and 1880, no woman named Hannah Crafts could be found. However, he detected several women named Hannah Craft in the 1860 census index. All of them were white and none had lived in the South. Nevertheless, he found out that one of them lived in New Jersey in 1860. Gates was excited:

> I eagerly searched for her in the census records. She was living in the town of Hillsborough, in Somerset County. She was thirty-four years of age and was married to Richard Craft. Both were white. This Hannah Craft was not living in New Jersey before 1860. And her entry listed no birthplace, the sole entry on this page of the census in which this information was lacking. I could not help but wonder if this Hannah Craft could be passing for white, … (Gates 2002: lviii)

On Nina Kollars´s (Gates´s research assistant) advice, he started to look for Hannah Vincent. She was a slave of Vincent´s in Virginia and it was quite usual to list the slaves in the census under the name of the slave owner. Gates really found one Hannah Ann Vincent living in Burlington, New Jersey in 1850. She was twenty-two-year-old mulatto whose birthplace was unknown (Gates 2002: lxi). However, he did not find any Hannah Vincent in the 1860 New Jersey census. Then he turned to the 1870 and 1880 federal census records from New Jersey and traced forty-six-year-old mulatto Hannah Vincent (the Methodist Sunday school teacher) living in 1870 in the household of Thomas Vincent who was black. Both were reportedly born in Pennsylvania. Gates presumed that these two Hannahs were the same person and Thomas Vincent was her brother. Nevertheless, in the 1880 census, there Hannah was listed as

Thomas´s still forty-eight-year-old! wife, both identified as having been born in New Jersey (Gates 2002: lxiii). Gates says:

> Unless the 1850 Hannah Vincent had married a man also named Vincent, this Methodist Sunday school teacher was a different person from her 1850 namesake. (Gates 2002: lxiii)

Conclusive evidence which proves that Hannah Vincent was the author of *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* is still missing but she at least remains a candidate as the author of this semi-autobiographical novel. On the basis of this inconclusiveness, William Andrews claims that the novel by Julia C. Collins is the first authenticated novel, a work of fiction rather than autobiography.

1.2.2 The Biography of Harriet E. Wilson

Until the discovery of Hannah Crafts´s novel, *The Bondwoman´s Narrative,* Harriet E. Wilson was considered to be the first African American woman novelist. Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reconstructed Wilson´s life on the basis of federal censuses and other documents which he had at his disposal. The biographical information on Harriet E. Wilson is still very sketchy.

Harriet E. Wilson was long thought to be white until the death certificate of her son, George Mason Wilson, appeared. She wrote her novel, *"Our Nig"*, in order to earn money and thereby to become self-sufficient and to be able to take care of her only son. His early death established his mother´s racial identity in legal documents and brought her to the broader

notice. She was a black woman who published an autobiographical novel in English. (Gates 1983: xiii)

Harriet E. Wilson´s maiden name was Harriet Adams. Her birthday and date of death are unknown. She was most probably born in 1827 or 1828 in New Hampshire as a free black. When she was six Harriet was left at the Haywards´ who are supposed to be the Bellmonts´ family in her novel (Foreman 2001: 442). She left them at the age of eighteen. Around the year 1850, she lived with a white family of Samuel Boyles in Milford, New Hampshire. In 1851, Harriet Adams married Thomas Wilson and one year later, she gave birth to their apparently only child, George Mason Wilson in Goffstown, New Hampshire. According to one of the letters appended to *"Our Nig"*, she had already been abandoned by her husband. Gates found in the 1855 *Boston City Directory* a Harriet Wilson living at 7 Robinson Alley. She was listed as a widow. In the same directory, this time from the 1856, he discovered two Harriet Wilsons. One is listed as a widow living at 4 Webster Avenue, the other as a dressmaker living or working at 19 Joy Street. Gates states:

> These "Harriet Wilsons" may, or may not, be the same person. In each successive *Boston City Directory*, … , only one Harriet Wilson appeared between 1857 and 1863: the widow who remained at Webster Avenue. (Gates 1983: xvi – xvii)

Thomas Wilson´s abandonment of his wife apparently became the catalyst for her to write a novel about her own experiences and thus sustain herself and reclaim her son whom she had to place under others people´s care because of her physical and economic situation.

1.2.3 The Biography of Julia C. Collins

Julia C. Collins is another author in a row of African American women writers we know only a little about. There remain a lot unanswered questions regarding her life. William L. Andrews states in the Introduction to Collins´s novel *The Curse of Caste* the following:

> Everything we know about Julia Collins dates from April 1864, when she was first mentioned in the *Christian Recorder,* to November 1865, when she died of "consumption" (tuberculosis). (Andrews, Kachun 2006: xx)

We do not know when and where she was born; whether she was born free or enslaved, in the North or in the South; whether she was light skinned or dark; we do not know her maiden name, but Collins was her married name. On the basis of the *Recorder´*s announcement about her death on December 16, 1865, she was married to a Stephen C. Collins, with whom she had at least two children (the exact number is uncertain), but their names, ages and sexes remain unknown. (Andrews, Kachun 2006: xvi, xx)

In 1864 she resided in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. She worked as a teacher which is attested by both Enoch Gilchrist´s letter printed in the *Recorder* manifesting that "the black children´s "term of public school," which had closed in late March, would be reopened on April 11 by Mrs. Julia C. Collins" (Andrews, Kachun 2006: xxi) and by her first essays, "Mental Improvement" and "School Teaching" published in the same periodical. Approximately from June to December 1864 no information is available about her. Collins reappeared in the *Recorder* on December 2

and later December 23, 1864 writing from Oswego, New York. In February 1865, *The Curse of Caste* began to appear as a series. Unfortunately, Julia C. Collins did not finish it because of her fatal illness. The author died on the 25th November, 1865.

1.2.4 The Biography of Frances E. W. Harper

Unlike the previous three novelists, Frances E. W. Harper can be considered as an exception because we know much more about her life. At her time, she became successful and famous among the activists in the African American community through her numerous activities (she was a novelist, poet, essayist, journalist orator, and civil activist). She was born in 1825 as a free black in Maryland. At an early age she was orphaned. Frances E. Watkins got educated at the William Watkins Academy for Negro Youth in Baltimore where she was trained in languages, biblical studies, and elocution. When she was twenty-five, she moved to Columbus, Ohio, to become the first woman professor at the Union Seminary and in 1853, she came to Philadelphia where she settled at an Underground Railroad station where runaway slaves sought assistance in their escape. She literally devoted her life and literature to abolition and other social reform movements. (Foster 2001: 188)

After accepting a position of one of the first professional woman orators in the US in the Maine Anti-Slavery Society in 1854, Harper began travelling throughout New England, southern Canada, Michigan and Ohio where she delivered highly successful speeches. Alongside, she

regularly published in abolitionist periodicals and slowly was earning a national reputation.

In 1860, Watkins married Fenton Harper. Even though she still remained active in her social and literary pursuit, she devoted most of her time to her family. In 1864, her husband died though and already within months she used to set off down to the Southern states except Texas and Arkansas where she taught the former slaves reading, writing, home management, and politics, while urging the North for moral and physical support for the Reconstruction of the United States. (Foster 2001: 189)

Harper was a prolific author. Among her most famous works belong for example the collections of poems such as *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), *Sketches of Southern Life* (1870), or *Martyr of Alabama and Other Poems* (1895). But she also wrote novels. The book she is best known for is definitely *Iola Leroy* (1892). Novels such as *Minnie´s Sacrifice* (1867 – 1868, it was serialized just like *Iola Leroy*), *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story* (1867), or *Trial and Triumph* (1888). After venerable 68 years of her professional career, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper died on 20 February 1911.

2. Hannah Crafts: *The Bondwoman´s Narrative*

2.1 Introduction: The Publishing History

In 2002, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University Professor and editor, received the annual mailing of the catalogue by Swann Galleries which conducts an auction of "Printed & Manuscript African-Americana" every year (Gates 2002: ix). While reading through the offerings in this catalogue, he got especially impressed by lot 30 which was described as follows:

> Unpublished Original Manuscript. Offered by Emily Driscoll in her 1984 catalogue, with her description reading in part, "a fictionalized biography, written in an effusive style, purporting to be the story, of the early life and escape of one Hannah Crafts, a mulatto, born in Virginia." The manuscript consists of 21 chapters, each headed by an epigraph. The narrative is not only that of the mulatto Hannah, but also of her mistress who turns out to be a light-skinned woman passing for white. It is uncertain that this work is written by a "negro". The work is written by someone intimately familiar with the areas in the South where the narrative takes place. Her escape route is one sometimes used by run-aways. (Gates 2002: xi)

This description evoked many questions in Gates´s mind and thus started off his arduous attempt to trace back the origin of the slave narrative and its unknown author, Hannah Crafts. The results of his painstaking research presented in the "Introduction" to *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* try to identify Hannah Crafts. Gates edited the novel and it was published in 2002, immediately becoming a bestseller. In this chapter, several facts relating to the book´s origin and a short approach to the storyline of *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* will be presented. However, most attention will

be paid especially to the themes that Hannah Crafts opens in her unique narrative.

While authenticating the text, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. cooperated with a variety of scholars who tried to determine the date of the book´s composition. They all concluded upon the mid-nineteenth century as the most probable period when the novel was written. In their opinion, *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* must have been written before 1861, because "had it been written afterward, it would have most certainly contained some of the war or at least secession" (Gates 2002: xxix). Their theory gained more support when Gates had the examination of ink done which proved that Crafts wrote with the iron-gall ink, widely used up until 1860. Finally, he appealed to Dr. Nickell, a historical document examiner, to inspect the narrative. According to Dr. Nickell´s report, "considerable evidence indicates that *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* is an authentic manuscript of circa 1853-1861" (Gates 2002: xxx).

This was a significant finding in American literary history because, provided that Hannah Crafts was black, "this "fictionalized slave narrative" - … - would be … possibly the first novel written by a black woman and definitely the first novel written by a woman who had been a slave" (Gates 2002: xii). After a detailed examination of style and language, Gates agreed with others that Crafts was really most likely of black color especially because of the way she referred to black characters, the knowledge of specifics regarding slave escape routes and

her conventional mistakes in language (Gates 2002: xxii, xxxi-xxxiii). However William Andrews and others have not been substantially satisfied with "most likely of black color" based on writing style or language and conclusive evidence is still missing. We know of purported slave narratives, for example Mattie Griffith´s *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1856) which was written by a white woman from Kentucky (who owned slaves). Regardless some formal insufficiencies, Hannah Crafts created a skilful piece of work which deserves close notice, and seems likely that it was written by a black woman.

2.2 The Plot Structure and Narrative Style

The Bondwoman´s Narrative is a first-person semi-autobiographical novel about a woman´s experience as a house slave and later a plantation slave in North Carolina and her adventurous escape to freedom in the North. Despite being a slave who is not supposed to be literate and talented, Hannah Crafts proved her amazing skill to tell her life´s story in a breathtaking way. She used her storytelling technique combining "…three of the most prominent literary conventions of her day: the slave narrative; the Gothic novel; and sentimental fiction" (Stauffer 2004: 53). Thus she created a thrilling and captivating story which was, unfortunately, never published until 2002.

In the "Preface", Hannah Crafts traditionally apologizes for her brave act to share her "literary venture" (Crafts 2002: 3) with the readers. She humbly realizes the deficiencies due to her background as a slave and

"feels a certain degree of diffidence and self-distrust" (Crafts 2002: 3). Crafts modestly questions the literary value of her true story and shows great uncertainty about her ability to reliably portray the institution of slavery. Indisputably she considers slavery as immoral and believes that those who stand behind it will eventually reap "the fruit of their doings" (Crafts 2002: 3). Despite the fact that she pervades her story with gothic motifs, Crafts emphasizes that her novel does not pretend to be a romance. Indeed, it is, especially when we consider the end of her novel which can be summarized as "and they lived happily ever after." However, it seems to be a vivid testimony of a female fugitive slave who has to face to the evil which the institution of slavery produced.

Crafts´s novel consists of 21 chapters, almost each headed with a short citation. Conventional for novels of that time, these citations preface each chapter and obviously illustrate what the reader might expect in the following part of the story. She carefully picked them from the Bible which was, as Lawrence Buell states, "by far the best-selling, most accessible, most cited book in the United States between the Revolution and the Civil War" (Buell 2004: 17). Throughout the whole text, many allusions to the Bible signal that Hannah Crafts was very familiar with it; and not only with the Bible itself but with many other books written by a variety of authors from which she drew her inspiration for her own work.

According to several essays, executed by scholars cooperating with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., such as Hollis Robbins, Catherine Keyser, Jean

Fagan Yellin and others, Crafts was mainly influenced by famous British authors of the 19th century such as Charles Dickens, Walter Scott or Charlotte Brontë as well as Americans such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Wells Brown or Edgar Allan Poe (Gates, Robbins 2004: 71-116, 195-294). She weaves bits of their diverse motifs into something distinctly her own and creates an original piece of work. Even though Hannah Crafts presents herself as lacking confidence in the quality of her storytelling in the "Preface", she proved throughout the novel her successive growth into a writer of her own right.

2.3 Slavery and Youth Depicted

Crafts opens the story with the humble description of her early life. Not knowing who her parents were, she grew up in her master´s house "employed" as a house slave. Nobody cared for her sensitive child´s soul; nobody offered her true love; nobody comforted her when she was in pain. Instead, she learned that she was not born for anything but hard, unpaid toil. From the very beginning, she had to face to the painful curse of her race which affected her whole life. Her intelligence was constantly underestimated and her self-confidence suppressed. As a result, she describes herself as being "neither clever, nor learned, nor talented" (Crafts 2002: 5). However, Hannah excelled in a different, and for the good writer also important, way. She patiently observed everything happening around her and desired both knowledge and intellectual improvement.

> I had none of that quickness and animation which are so much admired in children, but rather a silent unobtrusive way of observing things and events, and wishing to understand them better than I could. (Crafts 2002: 5)

Nevertheless, Hannah was a slave and slaves are destined to work for their masters and not to be educated. Even though she claims her master is "generally easy and good-tempered" (Crafts 2002: 6), he never permitted his slaves to be taught reading and writing. The author explains that "education in his view tended to enlarge and expand their ideas; made them less subservient to their superiors, …" (Crafts 2002: 5). It is clear that he realized the importance and great power of knowledge which could easily endanger his superior status as well as the dependability of his slaves to serve unquestioningly. Hannah did not give up though and lived in hope that one day she would be able to understand the meaning of letters. Her dream came true and due to the kindness of an old couple from the North she finally learned to read. Her ability to observe and her curiosity and strong determination helped her to transform what she learned as a slave onto the pages of her novel.

Hannah´s love for books eventually started off a series of events which followed in her life. Becoming a personal maid of her master´s new wife, Mrs. Bry, she often stole away into a parlor where she devoured the books. One day, hidden behind the damask curtains, she overhears a private conversation between her mistress and mysterious old man, Mr. Trappe, and learns that her mistress is actually a fair-skinned mulatto who is secretly and illegally passing for white. They decide to run away

to the North and thus begins Hannah´s adventure on her way to freedom. Due to her intelligence, rational thinking, incredible perseverance and strong inner strength, she finally manages to realize her dream to become free.

2.4 Selected Motifs: Complexion, Baby-Switching, Miscegenation

Hannah Crafts pervades her moving story with several motifs. Her novel is especially based on the motif of skin complexion which is closely connected with the theme of mixed race. Crafts describes herself as a lighter-skinned woman with European features. However, she also points out at her "obnoxious" descent which "gave a rotundity to my person, a wave and curl to my hair, … " (Crafts 2002: 6). Her "obnoxious" descent did not influence only her outer appearance but especially her social status. The African blood circulating in her veins kept her on the fringes of society. In the eyes of her master, she was not even regarded as a human being, but as a humble animal. Throughout her story, the author actually presents the huge absurdity of the institution of slavery. In her opinion, it is ridiculous to judge somebody just on the basis of the color of their skin. For her, slaves are always, first and last, human beings.

As it was already mentioned above, Hannah serves as a personal maid to her master´s new wife who soon turns out to be a fair-skinned mulatto who passes for white but is, unfortunately, "trapped" by Mr. Trappe. Since Hannah inadvertently overheard the secret conversation between her mistress and this evil family lawyer Mr. Trappe, her mistress had no

reason for not unraveling the mystery of her true racial identity. She confides to Hannah that as a slave´s new-born baby she was switched for a white dead child.

> Only one thing is wanting to complete the chain of evidence, and that is the testimony of an old woman, who it seems was my mother´s nurse, and who placed me in her lady´s bed, and by lady´s side, when that Lady was too weak and sick and delirious to notice that the dead was exchanged for the living. (Crafts 2002: 44)

Here Crafts involves an old motif of switched babies of different races into her plot which later also appeared in Mark Twain´s novel *Pudd´nhead Wilson* (1894). This shocking fact actually caused significant reversal of plot. Under the threat of revelation, Mrs. Bry realizes that her only chance to save herself is to escape from the Lindendale plantation. She was raised as a white and enjoyed the advantages which this life offered to her. There is no wonder then that she cannot imagine the expected fall to the bottom of society. Even though she was filled with remorse towards her white, slave-owning husband, her last resort was to abandon him and set off on the dangerous journey of a refugee (“It is horrible, dreadful to be sure, but better after all than to be sold for a slave.” (Crafts 2002: 55). She actually became a victim of racial inequality between people of that society, which had a serious effect on her health and eventually resulted in her death.

Nevertheless, Crafts does not only depict the racial inequality between the whites and the blacks but surprisingly also portrays the intraracial differences which are connected with the trouble of mixed blacks finding

their own identity. This racial division between black people is based especially on their skin color. Whites used to distinguish between the lighter and darker blacks and thus triggered the intraracial discrimination. Those who had good luck and were born with lighter complexion were given more “power” and “privileges” in comparison to those of darker skin. This meant that light-skinned blacks received easier work in the house while the dark-skinned blacks had to perform harder work in fields. Precisely this is what the author portrays in her novel. After embarrassing her later mistress, Mrs. Wheeler, Hannah is sentenced to abandon the house and become a plantation field slave while living in the dirty primitive huts. Moreover, she is forced to marry a plantation slave against her will. It is something unimaginable for her and obviously she is disgusted with the darker-skinned field slaves with whom she must share the fate. Her desperateness finally drives her to escape again; this time for good.

> ... and most horrible of all doomed to association with the vile, foul, filthy inhabitants of the huts, and condemned to receive one of them for my husband my soul actually revolted with horror unspeakable. (Crafts 2002: 205)

At the beginning of Hannah´s story the reader also meets one of the important novel´s protagonists whose name is Lizzy. Lizzy is portrayed as a very beautiful and educated Quadroon with an almost white complexion. She works as a first maid of Hannah´s mistress and is obviously very proud of her honorable white ancestry.

> She came, she said of a good family and frequently mentioned great names in connection with her own, and when I smiled and said it mattered little she would assume an

> air of consequential dignity, and assert that on the contrary it was a very great thing and very important even to a slave to be well connected – that good blood was an inheritance to them - … (Crafts 2002: 33)

It is apparent that, no matter what Lizzy´s status was, she felt higher on the social ladder in comparison to the rest of the house slaves. Only a ridiculous thought of having the blood of someone white and rich made her haughty as if she lived in some strange dream. On the contrary, Hannah seems to be realistic since she is aware of no difference between them both. They are both just poor slaves and both share the same rotten fate described by Crafts below:

> But Lizzy, notwithstanding her good family, education and great beauty, had been several times under the hammer of the auctioneer, had passed through many hands, and experienced all the vicissitudes attendant on the life of a slave. She had been the pet of a rich family and the degraded drudge of another, had known alternately cruelty and kindness, and suffered the extremes of a master´s fondness, a mistress´s jealousy and their daughter´s hate. (Crafts 2002: 34)

The importance of Lizzy´s character later inheres also in the presentment of another motif. It is the interracial relationship between her new white master, Mr. Cosgrove, and his beautiful female slaves. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “in the slave narratives, these relations on the plantations are usually referred to in veiled, or metaphoric, language” (Gates 2002: 268). In contrast, in this novel explicit picturing of the master-slave sexual relations is openly depicted. These kinds of clandestine relationships commonly happened in America in the 19th century. The maintenance of the relationship with the master ensured on one hand many advantages for slave women, but on the other hand it also

posed troubles. Most often the masters were already married with white women which caused tension and hatred between the slave and the mistress of the house as portrayed in Crafts´s novel: “Rage, jealousy, hate, revenge all burned in her bosom. To think that she had been rivaled by slaves” (Crafts 2002: 175).

These relationships often resulted in the birth of many mulattoes who thus became sore reminders for the mistress of her husband´s betrayal. In connection with racially mixed children, Crafts inspires herself with a true story of Margaret Garner and develops the motif of murdering a child to prevent its sale as a slave in her novel.

> … she snatched a sharp knife which a servant had carelessly left after cutting butcher´s meat, and stabbing the infant threw it with one toss into the arms of its father. Before he had time to recover from his astonishment she had run the knife into her own body, and fell at his feet bathing them in her blood. (Crafts 2002: 177)

The 20th century writer Toni Morrison drew inspiration for her famous novel *Beloved* on the history of Margaret Garner too. This mercy killing shows the desperate situation of a mother who, in an effort to save her child from the evil of slavery, would rather end his life.

2.5 Gothic Elements in the Novel

Evil is also a significant motif which strongly appears in Crafts´s novel. It is symbolized by slavery itself and slavers who stood behind it (e.g. the character of Mrs. Wheeler) as well as by one Crafts´s antagonist in particular, Mr. Trappe. Crafts´s approach to slavery is very interesting.

Obviously, she is aware of the viciousness and disgrace which slavery causes to human beings who are held as poor sub-humans; as equal only (if not rather inferior to) animals. They are judged only by the quality of their health, strength and endurance, like beasts of burden. Moreover, she emphasizes the degrading effects of slavery upon the slaves and their injured sense of self-worth which is expressed in the following paragraph.

> It must be a strange state to feel that in the judgement of those above you, you are scarcely human, and to fear that their opinion is more than half right, that you really are assimilated to the brutes, that the horses, dogs and cattle have quite as many priveledges, and are probably your equals or it may be your superiors in knowledge, that even your shape is questionable as belonging to that order of superior beings whose delicacy you offend. (Crafts 2002: 201)

Crafts seems to regard this human degradation as even worse than physical violence towards slaves. A man can somehow stand the cruelty however to feel as a fully-valued human being is much more important. It gives us strength to cope with the evil committed on us, which she proved by her next statement: “Alas; those that view slavery only as it relates to physical sufferings or the wants of nature, can have no conception of its greatest evils” (Crafts 2002: 130).

Mr. Trappe is another example of the embodiment of evil. His portrayal is very similar to that of the Devil which anticipates his true character in advance. He is veiled in some pall of mystery and thus provokes the reader´s mind. Mr. Trappe actually moves the novel´s plot. In order to enrich himself, he decides to blackmail Hannah´s mistress and drive her

to despair. She is forced to leave her life behind and escape with Hannah from Lindendale. However, he is ghostlike, invisible but always very close, and does not cease to hunt her until he gets what he wants.

> We were alone, yet it seemed to me that the shadow of an evil presence was near us, that some evil eye was nothing our doings, and that evil plans were concocting against us. (Crafts 2002: 62)

He really got it but his baiting costs Hannah´s mistress´s her brittle life. Nevertheless, Trappe´s fate catches up with him and he finally pays the highest prize as well, his own life.

Crafts´s ending of the book is conciliatory and written in the spirit of sentimentalism. However, she also pervaded her novel with gothic elements which compel the readers to reveal the secrets hidden behind her words and contribute to the originality of her work. The gothic motifs are displayed first of all in the depiction of space and its color. At the very beginning, the main protagonist enters the gloomy family drawing room which is filled with family portraits. They serve as a rememberence of the past generations of important ancestors and appeal very majestically. This majesty, the heaviness of the space and the ambient duskiness is typically gothic which evokes the feeling of worthlessness of a man which is in case of Hannah emphasized even more by her lowly status of a slave. Thinking about the dead, Hannah feels their presence.

> Then all we have heard or fancied of spiritual existences occur to us. There is the echo of a stealthy tread behind us. There is a shadow flitting past through the gloom. There is a sound, but it does not seem of mortality. A supernatural thrill pervades your frame, and you feel the presence of mysterious beings. (Crafts 2002: 15)

Crafts shows the blending of the past and the present and thus evokes a thrilling sensation. She anticipates some kind of mystery which will be soon revealed, again following the gothic romance tradition. She actually prepares us for the ghost story connected with the linden tree as the symbol of slavery hardship.

> … the linden was chosen as the scene where the tortures and punishments were inflicted. Many a time had its roots been manured with human blood. Slaves had been tied to its trunk to be whipped or sometimes gibbeted on its branches. (Crafts 2002: 21)

This linden tree through the creaking of its limbs reminds her of the cruel violence and pain which have incurred to slaves. Moreover, as the legend says it will signal death, or sickness, or misfortune which is to befall the family. Thus, when Hannah´s mistress came to Lindendale to marry the master and the whining linden tree tossed about in the wind, Crafts actually implied that evil was coming.

However, Hannah does not show fear when talking about the family drawing room or about the linden tree. She accepts the past as it is and feels no jeopardy. She well realizes that death makes everyone equal; it does not distinguish between the superior and inferior, between the white and the black, between the smart and the dull. We all are predestined to that doom in which she actually sees the salvation and so desired real freedom: “I was not a slave with these pictured memorials of the past” (Crafts 2002:17).

The author also develops the Gothic motif of insanity. On her escape to freedom Hannah and Mrs. Bry hide themselves in the small cabin built in the middle of a deep, dark forest; it is the place where a murder had been committed a while ago. Crafts tries to affect the readers´ senses again. Through the space, color and sounds she evokes the feeling of fear and anxiety in reader´s mind and thus anticipates some kind of change. Hannah´s mistress, physically and emotionally drained, lets herself easily be overcome by increasing fear of being hunted and becomes insane.

> She fancied herself pursued by an invisible being, who sought to devour her flash and crush her bones. She would scream with affright, and crouching to the earth point with her finger to the dreadful creation of her distempered fancy. (Crafts 2002: 67)

However, this perverse irrational force in her mind which drives her crazy is conquered from time to time by the rests of rational thinking as if she had become schizophrenic. Crafts actually depicts the inner struggle of a person whose fear is but so strong that she is not capable of winning over it. At the very moment when she learns that she has been seized by the man who has caused all the evil she is passing through, Hannah´s mistress gives up her struggle and dies.

2.6 Conclusion

Hannah Crafts wrote an extraordinary and moving story partly based on her real life. She proved to be a good observer and displays her ability to sensitively perceive the environment around her. She somehow played the game with the reader who approaches her work in a bit diffident way at the very start. However, later the author surprises us with the amazing

gradual growth of her writing qualities. She managed to depict all the horrors of slavery; not only the cruel treatment with the human beings, but also the degrading effects which slavery has on human mind and self-assessment. Crafts especially portrayed the life difficulties of enslaved women who are just someone´s property and have no protection in any way. They live in constant fear which badly affects their personality and influences their acts. Moreover, she met the demands of the readers of her own time and perfectly managed to interconnect three favorite literary genres; the slave narrative, the sentimental novel and the Gothic romance, and thus created a masterpiece.

3. Harriet E. Wilson: *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*

3.1 Introduction and Harriet Wilson´s Preface

On September 5, 1859, the George C. Rand and Avery company published a short novel fully entitled *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In A Two-Story White House, North. Showing That Slavery´s Shadows Fall Even There* (Wilson 1983: xi). It is a third-person autobiographical work of fiction dealing with, as the title suggests, the free black´s life experience of white racism in the North in antebellum days. Its author, Harriet E. Wilson, experienced much of the racism presented and described the controversial theme which might have raised a tidal wave of objections from her colored brothers who, as being free blacks, did not want to get in trouble with their white masters in the North. Harriet E. Wilson is known as the first African-American woman to publish her novel in English and whose contribution to the treasure of American literature is highly significant since she represents one of the innovators of the American fictional narrative form. *Our Nig* combines aspects of the slave narrative form, which was typical for those who experienced years of hard toil and its cruel impact on them, and the tradition of the sentimental novel, which was extremely popular in white Victorian society. In this chapter, I am going to approach the storyline of *Our Nig* and introduce several main motives appearing in Harriet E. Wilson´s novel.

Harriet E. Wilson precedes her novel with a short Preface in which she defends her act of writing and asks her "colored brethren" to "rally around me a faithful band of supporters and defenders" (Wilson, 1983: 3). Since she was not a professional writer, Harriet E. Wilson begins her Preface with the apology for all literary deficiencies in the text, showing her great modesty. This is quickly followed by the explanation of the main reasons why she actually wrote the book. Her driving power was not a desire for fame, nor her inner effort to express her feelings and complain about the life of a free black, but, as she inexplicitly writes, her desperate financial condition.

> Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life. (Wilson 1983: 3)

Harriet E. Wilson basically reveals the incredible and admirable power of the black woman of dignity who does not beg others to provide her with money for nothing but rather asks them to buy her moving book and thus help her to survive. The tone of the Preface on one hand reflects the burdensome life destiny of its author who battles with deep abandonment and failing health and on the other hand shows amazing strength of the "independent" woman searching for an honorable way to get out of her distressful situation. Moreover, Wilson´s story does not only serve as the means of procurement of her and her child but also as the general defence of her race and the indictment of racism in the North and slave-like treatment of blacks as a whole, which adds even greater significance to it.

3.2 The Novel´s Structure

Our Nig is an autobiographical novel which includes twelve chapters in total. Each chapter is opened by the epigraphs of major and minor American and English writers such as Josiah Gilbert Holland, Thomas Moore, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Eliza Cook, Lord Byron, Martin Farquhar Tupper, Henry Kirke White, G.W.Cook, Solomon and others whose names are unknown or could well have been composed by Harriet E. Wilson herself (Wilson 1983: xl). Her choice of quotations shows the author´s literary taste and intellect. Each epigraph quoted illustrates the theme of the section to follow and thus indicates what the reader may expect.

Even though the novel is supposed to be autobiographical, it is written in the third person, which might raise a question whether Harriet E. Wilson really retells her own life story. Yet this is often the convention of select number of slave narratives, of whom it can be said that “truth is stronger than fiction.” The author clearly writes as if she were the observer rather than the main protagonist. However, the first three chapters´ titles contain the first-person pronoun “My” according to which we must assume Wilson´s close relation to what is narrated. Moreover, the life of the main protagonist in the last chapters overlaps with the ascertained facts of Harriet E. Wilson´s final years of life, though we know very little about most details of her biography. On the basis of the historical materials, Henry Louis Gates Jr. attempted to reconstruct the author´s identity. All in all, Mrs. Wilson perfectly managed to connect the fictional signs with

the biographical ones. Thus she enabled us to take a look back at the life of a free black living in the North in antebellum days.

3.3 The Main Protagonist

Our Nig tells the story of the young mulatto girl named Frado, who is deprived of her parents and hence the needed love every child expects. Frado is employed as an indentured servant to a white lower middle-class family. As the six-year-old child, she is unexpectedly snatched from the familiar home environment filled with parental love and children´s games, and exposed to an everyday drudgery and severe torture from the side of her mistress, Mrs. Bellmont, and her equally nasty daughter, Mary.

Mrs. Wilson depicts real suffering and the feeling of the helplessness of an innocent child who does not understand the situation she has been thrown into. The author focuses on Frado´s psychology; on the ways she perceives the outer world and the ways she resists the external pressure in her inner world. Frado faces absolute abandonment, unbearable racial hatred, cruel bullying, and a persistent feeling of fear. She lives under very bad conditions which in turn results in her failing health. As a vulnerable child and an indentured servant she cannot defend herself. There is no way of escaping from her current situation and the only solution is death (“I´ve got to stay out here and die. I ha´ n´t got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead.” (Wilson 1983: 46).

However, as the poor victim of her time, Frado managed to find the incredible inner power to stand up to the contemporary injustice for twelve years when, at the age of eighteen, she was released from servitude. Nevertheless, painful wounds and failing health caused by distressful years spent at the Bellmonts did not vanish.

> Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her history is unknown, save by the Omnipresent God. Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid. (Wilson 1983: 130)

This penultimate paragraph of Mrs. Wilson´s novel repeats the claim already mentioned in the Preface.

> I would not from these motives even palliate slavery at the South, by disclosures of its appurtenances North. My mistress was wholly imbued with southern principles. I do not pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life, which the unprejudiced would declare unfavorable in comparison with treatment of legal bondmen; I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home. (Wilson 1983: 3)

Harriet E. Wilson confesses she remained silent about the worst events in her life, which could commit a public nuisance in the North and thus harm the antislavery movement by aiding the Southern argument that ′slaves are treated better in the South than free blacks in the North′. She actually alerts that nothing is as it seems to be. The North did not agree with the Southern politics, but its citizens´ approach to colored people resembles the same inhumanity and same disgust as the Southerners. This is also pointed out in the following paragraph.

> She passed into the various towns of the State she lived in, then into Massachusetts. Watched by kidnappers, maltreated by professed abolitionists, who did n´t want slaves at the South, nor niggers in their own houses, North. Faugh! To

> lodge one; to eat with one; to admit one through the front door; to sit next one; awful! (Wilson 1983: 129)

3.4 Selected Motifs: Motherhood, Abandonment, Gender Question, Race

Next to the basic story line, Mrs. Wilson develops several pivotal motifs. The first chapter, "Mag Smith, My Mother", opens the theme of motherhood. Frado´s mother is depicted as a fallen white woman of Irish origin. Between 1845 and 1852, Ireland was struck by the Great Famine which resulted in mass emigration of Irish population, among others to the United States. The Irish were unwelcomed at first in the New World and had to face to poverty and human contempt, and so did Mag Smith. The disdain even deepened when she married a black man named Jim who saved her from her desperate situation of poverty.

> You can philosophize, gentle reader, upon the impropriety of such unions, and preach dozens of sermons on the evils of amalgamation. Want is a more powerful philosopher and preacher. Poor Mag. She has sundered another bond which held her to her fellows. She has descended another step down the ladder of infamy. (Wilson 1983: 13)

The interracial marriage, or so called amalgamation, was improper in the 19th century and automatically led to the harsh critique of both the whites and blacks who were involved in it. Mag´s marriage with a black man was the climax of repulsion. Mrs. Wilson actually built her novel on this controversial social matter whose result was the birth of the mulatto girl Frado, the main protagonist who eventually became a victim of societal disgust with their matrimony.

> How many pure, innocent children not only inherit a wicked heart of their own, claiming life-long scrutiny and restraint,

> but are heirs also of parental disgrace and calumny,… (Wilson 1983: 6)

The role of mother as described in the novel completely differs from the general idea of a loving woman dedicated to taking care of her children as best as she can. Frado´s biological mother as well as her "surrogate mother", Mrs. Bellmont, are pictured as being the opposite of nurturing and maternal. Her mother gave her up and abandoned her with her step-father in order to find a better life. To get rid of her child was some kind of relief for Mag Smith. What sort of mother would be able to do that? Can such a woman be genuinely called "a mother"? Frado was subsequently entrusted into the hands of "a right she-devil" (Wilson 1983: 17), who constantly hurt this little child´s self-esteem. The motif of motherhood, moreover, comes forth since it was especially Wilson´s own responsibility as the mother which directed her to write the novel and thus attempt to gain support for her sick son.

Another strong motif of *Our Nig* is the theme of abandonment, which accompanies Frado throughout her whole life. Firstly, she loses her parents, then her trusting dog, Fido, which is the only best friend and constitutes a great solace to her. Whomever she loves, sooner or later, departs from her life and leaves bare desolation in Frado´s hearth. At the end of the story, Frado repeats her own history and abandons her child so that she could "recruit her health, and gain an easier livelihood …" (Wilson 1983: 129).

From gender point of view, the position of woman as pictured in the 19th century novel is very shocking. In the Victorian society, the subjection of women by men was a universal custom. Women were taught to obey their husbands, to be good wives and mothers. It was their duty to live for others and completely suppress their own personality. The domination of men over women basically resembled in many ways the domination of the white man over blacks. The character of Mrs. Bellmont completely transgresses this social rule, for she is presented as a strong woman whose word is law while her husband and other members of the family stay rather passive. Mr. Bellmont is pictured in their relationship as a phlegmatic coward who does not agree with his wife´s stern approach to Frado but is not capable of opposing her. Violence is something which is historically a characteristic of men, not in the slave narratives though: the white mistresses, often out of jealousy, beat nice mulatto women slaves frequently while men often tried to help them.

The racial difference represents another topic which *Our Nig* is mainly based on. Frado is the victim of racial prejudice. Even though she has white mother, the amalgamation was considered contemptible and affected her whole life. However, the question appears to what degree does race influence Mrs. Bellmont´s behavior? Frado is depicted as "a beautiful mulatto, with long, curly black hair, and handsome, roguish eyes, sparkling with an exuberance of spirit almost beyond restraint" (Wilson 1983: 17). Mulattoes are frequently depicted for their beauty in literature and jealousy could play a central role in the relationship

between Mrs. Bellmont and the main protagonist. Both Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary attack Frado and physically torture her. Their aim is actually to humble and even humiliate her. As a result, Frado´s exuberance and vitality gradually wither away. Her body becomes increasingly feeble as it is ruined by the ceaseless tyranny. It is apparent their hatred originates in envy of Frado´s beauty as the following sentence indicates: "I´ll not leave much of her beauty to be seen, if she comes in sight; …" (Wilson 1983: 47).

3.5 Conclusion

Frado represents an example of so-called Tragic Mulatto; the literary character which firstly appeared in the American literature in the 19th century and is mostly portrayed as a very beautiful young woman (rather than a child growing up, as in this case). She usually looks like white but part of her is black. She sometimes hides her blackness as a sign of dirt and human wickedness through the whole story. However, her origin finally catches up with her and she is exposed and expelled from society. In the end, her life ends in tragedy. Even though the character of Frado is considered as the Tragic Mulatto her life story differs up to a point. She cannot conceal her biraciality and need not worry about revelation of her past. Mrs. Wilson openly criticizes the immorality of slavery and its impact on human life rather than introduces a certain type of fictional character. The tragedy of Frado´s life consists in the cruel treatment with her brittle body and vulnerable soul, and is even more emphasized by the fact that the author´s inspiration flowed from her real experience. All in

all, Frado represents the victim of social prejudices and is finally left alone in the immense world of injustice.

4. Julia C. Collins: *The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride*

4.1 Introduction: The Publishing History

The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride (1865) is an unfinished serialized novel which was published in thirty-one installments in *The Christian Recorder* between February 25 and September 23, 1865. Its author, Julia C. Collins, one of the *Recorder´*s essay contributors, had, in the same periodical, previously issued several shorter articles dealing with her opinions about raising African American moral behavior, the necessity of intellectual improvement and women´s education. Thus, she personally participated in so called uplift movement whose main goal was to elevate blacks intellectually and morally. She literally encouraged them to rise from chattel slavery and proved their immense value to the nation as a whole. Through her powerful words, she supported their strongly needed personal self-confidence and racial pride.

> The old year has been fraught with real and important changes and events – events that have far towered – changing the seemingly invincible destiny of our people, and building us up a nation that shall shine forth as a star on the breast of time, and be gathered into the brilliant galaxy of great nations! (Collins 2006: 129)

The Christian Recorder was a weekly newspaper published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Established in 1852, it was especially religiously oriented although it did not ignore secular issues such as the social, political, and cultural interests of African Americans. *The Christian Recorder* also served as a strong religious and intellectual opponent to slavery, challenging blacks to

protect their own families from whites and nurturing blacks´ consciousness. It called for justice and equal rights and actually represented an anchor for the Black American community (Andrews, Kachun 2006: xi-xii). It is no surprise then that Julia C. Collins chose this somewhat significant African-American newspaper as a home platform for sharing her ideas with the others.

Collins wrote a serialized narrative on the dealing with a mulatto woman which she intended to publish on the *Recorder´*s pages. The next week, on February 25, the first chapter of her moving story appeared as promised and was followed by others each week until September 23, 1865. However, right at the moment when the story approached its conclusion and the readers impatiently expected to learn how it would end, the September 30 issue of the *Recorder* publicized under the headline of Collins´s narrative that the correspondent was sick. More than two months later, *The Christian Recorder* announced the following:

> We are sorry to inform our readers that we have received a letter from Mr. S. C. Collins, informing us of the death of his estimable wife, Mrs. Julia C. Collins, authoress of ´The Curse of Caste; or, the Slave Bride.´ She departed this life on the 25th of November last, and, as the letter says, in the full triumph of everlasting bliss. We know that many of our readers will be greatly disappointed on hearing that they are to be deprived of the pleasure of reading the balance of the beautiful story which she was writing for our paper. (Andrews, Kachun 2006: xvi)

Collins´s editors surmised that she died of tuberculosis, leaving the end of her novel unwritten and incomplete to everybody. Nevertheless, thanks to professors William Andrews and Mitch Kachun, the

contemporary readers have been offered two alternative final chapters, one happy, the other tragic, including an explanation about which one Mrs. Collins would most probably have picked.

Serialized stories had different structured requirements than books at that time. Many chapters in serials often recapitulated old information to remind the readers a bit what had happened so far. Providing that these serials were popular among readers, they were usually republished in a book form again. However, this meant that they had to be somehow restructured to conform to the official book standards. Andrews and Kachun, though, published this sentimental novel as book exactly as it appeared serially and thus they retained the original form of Collins´s narrative.

4.2 Plot Structure and the Main Themes

The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride is a short narrative which actually contains two plot lines. First of all, it tells the story of an extremely beautiful and "orphaned" young mulatto girl, Claire Neville, who deeply suffers from the unknown mysterious background. After successful finishing of her education in Connecticut, she decides to become a governess in a wealthy southern family in Louisiana who later appears to be her long desired relatives. Through them she discovers information about her estranged white father, Richard Tracy, who is still alive, as well as her quadroon mother, Lina, already dead. Second of all, it portrays the encounter of Claire´s parents who were later forced to face

to the caste prejudices of that time since the interracial marriage was abhorrent and actually cast the shadow on the whole white family. The plot´s structure goes hand in hand with the tradition of 19th century novel conventions as written by women authors. For example the parental absence and unknown ancestry as well as the interracial relationship are recurring motifs typical for both black and white sentimental fiction of that time. The sentimentality of the narrative is underscored by the happy-ending via a family reunion. Nevertheless, whether Julia C. Collins eventually intended to finish her narrative in a happy or tragic way, the readers can only guess. With ′Curse′ in the title one might expect a disappointing conclusion for the heroine, perhaps.

At the story´s opening scene, Julia C. Collins introduces the main protagonist Claire Neville and thus projects the theme of familial estrangement and alienation. Claire is a young woman with a pleasing personality and a striking appearance “that once beheld, you voluntarily turn to gaze again” (Collins 2006: 3). She is well-educated and even though she seems at the first sight that she cannot lack anything, Claire is deeply stricken with grief. The source of her sorrow flows from a perplexed identity because she literally does not know anything about her family origins. Claire has never seen her own parents and never experienced the parental love and solicitude. She does not know whether they are still alive or not and is not even sure of the validity of her name. Everything regarding her origin is completely veiled and the only link

between her past and present life is her beloved black nurse named Juno who, however, does not impart anything to her.

> … I am homeless and almost friendless – have never known a mother´s kind, protecting care, and I don´t know that I even have a right to the name I bear. I know nothing of my mother, not even her name. I know not if a shadow rested on her fair fame. … (Collins 2006: 5)

From the very beginning, Collins actually involves a stereotypical model of mixed-race female character appearing in American fiction of the 19th century. First of all, the mulatto protagonists were most often depicted as the young and extraordinary beautiful women with only a slight trace of noticeable African heritage. Claire is portrayed as being "strangely, wildly, and darkly beautiful" (Collins 2006: 3). When depicting her beauty, Collins does not explicitly claim that Claire is of mixed blood. She only foreshadows Claire´s real origin which is truly revealed only later. Second of all, the mulatto heroines were unaware of their racial heritage and were often raised as the white persons. As it was already mentioned above, Claire is constantly disturbed by her obscure family background which apparently triggers a suspicion that Claire´s orphanhood conceals a sinister secret and serves as the impetus moment of the whole narrative.

Both motifs, the incredible beauty as well as mysterious family history, appear in the narrative later again when Julia C. Collins reverts in the plot to the past to depict the life story of Claire´s parents. Actually, Claire meets the similar fate as her mother Lina did before. She was also "beautiful as the fancied image of poet´s dream". Lina´s "dark flashing

eyes … a profusion of curling black hair … dark, rich-looking complexion … dark brownish skin which we observe in the Spaniard and half-breed Indians" also raises suspicion that Lina´s appearance conceals a secret racial origin (Collins 2006: 18-19). In fact, the birth of Lina was the result of miscegenation between her Louisiana white father and an enslaved woman who is not mentioned or identified in the narrative at all. Although marriage was banned by anti-miscegenation laws, children of a racial mixture were not unusual in the 19th century when enslaved black women were often seduced or even cruelly raped by their white masters. Nevertheless, Lina grew up as a white child; the respectable and lawful daughter of a white wealthy man, Mr. Hartly, until she was bought as a slave by Richard´s father, Col. Tracy. At that moment, her hitherto life totally fell apart and the tragedy of her fate was established.

Another theme which Julia C. Collins deals with in her narrative is the interracial romance. She develops it on two levels. Firstly, she describes the growing love between Claire´s mother Lina and Richard. Later the author portrays the relationship between Claire herself and Count Sayvord. However, in the spirit of the sentimental tradition, Collins builds a huge obstacle in the way of their love – an ambiguous racial identity which is in both cases a source of successive troubles.

Still ignorant of her nonwhite heritage, Lina was on her return home from the convent school on board of a steamer where she encounters Richard Tracy, a noble-looking youth and a son of an honorable Southerner.

Richard is strongly attracted by Lina´s beauty and soon falls deeply and helplessly in love with her. They resolve to marry. Nevertheless, their shared happiness is constantly disturbed by an unexpected change in Lina´s brother´s and sister´s behavior towards her.

> "Richard," she said, while something like sadness vibrated through her voice, "I fear my happiness is too great to last. A presentiment of evil hovers over me. It is foolish, no doubt," she added, as Richard began smiling, "but I cannot divine why Ralph and Mary treat me so strangely." (Collins 2006: 19)

Through Lina´s doubts as well as other mysterious allusions such as the sudden changes of weather, Collins suggests the approaching catastrophe. Lina turns out to be a quadroon who has been purchased by Richard´s father. From day to day she was deprived of all her rights and sank to the bottom of the society. In spite of this terrible fact, Richard´s love was so strong that he remained steadfast in his vow to marry Lina, so they managed to leave for the North where they found their short-lived marital bliss. Due to some circumstances, strong southern proslavery ideology of Richard´s father and the vicious contribution of the story´s villain Manville who pretended to be Richard´s faithful friend, their love was doomed to destruction, resulting in Lina´s untimely death. However, her spirit survived in the heart of their new-born daughter, Claire.

Even Claire was exposed to the "curse of caste" as relating to the interracial relationship. Since her move from the North to Louisiana and her entrance to the Tracy family as a governess, she attracted Count Sayvord´s attention and thus aroused the jealousy and hatred of a

southern belle and her actual aunt, Isabelle Tracy, who had been hoping to marry him. However, Claire´s devotion to the others did not gain his admiration. In the last chapters Julia C. Collins raises the ultimate question of whether Sayvord will propose to Claire. When talking to Dr. Singleton about his feelings for Claire, Sayvord finally acknowledges that he loves her: “I do love Claire – and if she will accept me, I will make her my wife, beloved and honored above woman” (Collins 2006: 105). However, when the doctor conveys to him the truth about Claire´s real ancestry he shows a great surprise. On the contrary to Richard who stood by his promise that “no power on earth shall take you (Lina) from me” (Collins 2006: 20), the Count suddenly seems to be in doubt exclaiming: “Impossible, Doctor! You are laboring under some mistake!” (Collins 2006: 105). That information apparently shook his certainty about his true love to Claire. By accepting her origin and expressing his feelings towards her publicly Sayvord would expose himself to the scorn of southern society. Whether he finally ignored the curse of caste or not is not disclosed though since the narrative was not finished.

4.3 Two Alternative Endings

According to the editors of Collins´s story, William L. Andrews and Mitch Kachun, the readers face three unresolved questions at the end of *The Curse of Caste*. First, will Count Sayvord, knowing Claire´s racial identity, propose to her? Second, will Claire, knowing her racial identity, accept the Count´s proposal, if he does ask her to marry him? Third, having refused a happy ending to the first interracial marriage in her

novel, will Collins allow the unoffending offspring of that marriage to enter into marriage herself? If so, how, where, and to what end? (Andrews, Kachun 2006: liii) They both attempted to answer these questions in the appendix to *The Curse of Caste* which includes two versions. The first one ends in conventional happy ending with marriage while the second one represents the tragic ending with rejection.

In the first version, Count Sayvord overcomes the general caste prejudices and asks Claire for her hand. Since he realizes that in America their love would be threatened by the "curse of caste", and so he wants to take her away to his family estate in France where they finally live together with Claire´s newly-found father Richard. Andrews and Kachun suggest that if Collins chose this ending she would actually reconfirm the legitimacy of interracial marriage. She would reiterate the previous scenario of her plot when Richard decided to ignore the racial prejudices as well and followed the voice of his love. By sending them to Europe, she would clear the ground for their happy family life and reunion since in France they would not be forced to face the ingrained American racism. The editors also considered the possibility that Collins could have planned for Claire to reject the Count´s proposal and remain single, working, like Collins herself, as a teacher. However, they warn that there is, in fact, no mention in the novel which would acknowledge this hypothesis.

According to the second version, the editors propose the same scenario but with one exception. Right at the moment when Claire is about to accept Sayvord´s proposal, Isabelle Tracy, Claire´s aunt, is unable to cope with the Count´s rejection of her and ensuing personal humiliation and severely attacks Claire verbally and afterwards shoots her. Collins implies the possibility of such ending several times throughout the text. Before Claire´s departure to the Tracy family, Juno entreats her to stay in the North. She literally says: “Dear child, I fear you will see great sorrow.” (Collins 2006: 9) and thus the author foreshadows a tragic future reversal in Claire´s fate. Later on, she introduces a beautiful but very hostile character, Isabelle Tracy, for whom Claire became a “serious” rival. Collins vividly portrays Isabelle´s increasing jealousy and hatred towards Claire. Isabelle cannot stand that the only person everybody notices is the family´s governess and evinces her exasperation, however, she never insults her openly. Claire is so terrified by the sight of Isabelle that she shrieks: “Those eyes are burning through my brain. Save me, oh, save me! She will kill me!” (Collins 2006: 86).

Claire´s death at the hands of her aunt Isabelle would actually recapitulate the near-violent death of Richard Tracy at the hands of his father, the Colonel. However, it is highly improbable that a woman would kill another one for any reason, especially a Southern belle. In this respect, Andrews and Kachun seem to exaggerate the possible novel´s finale in order to make it more sensational for today´s readership. Therefore their first version of happy ending seems to be more realistic.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that it still does not exclude the potentiality of tragic ending since the marriage and cheerful reunion do not necessarily have to form the end of the story. Thus only Julia C. Collins knew the real conclusion of her narrative.

4.4 Representatives of White vs. Black Society

Next to Claire, Colonel Tracy is the second most skillfully developed character in the story. He actually represents the Confederacy and vindicates its views in contrast to his son who is strongly influenced by abolitionist notions. Their harsh disputes echo the many disputes between proslavery adherents and antislavery abolitionists in antebellum America which is obvious in the following extract:

> Our society is getting into a pretty state, when the sons of the best families stoop to marry their fathers' slaves. You have imbibed the pernicious sentiments of northern demagogues until they have encompassed your ruin. What is to become of our institution, if we take our slaves upon an equality with ourselves? (Collins 2006: 39)

Due to this fact, Collins creates a huge tension between both characters which finally results in the Colonel´s attempt to murder his own son. Colonel Tracy obviously cannot reconcile with the fact that his son would marry a black person which can hardly be called a human being by a southern slave-owning patriarch. Moreover, he expresses the fear of making blacks or slaves equal to the whites under the law because he well realizes that all his wealth and consequently even his power originate right from slavery. Thanks to this awful institution, he actually became such an honorable man, respected all around. However, his son

still repudiates his father´s ideology and thus basically doubts his respectable position from which eventually even Richard has profited as well. When Richard insists on the absurdity to annul his marriage by claiming that he “cannot forsake his wife” (Collins 2006: 41), his father suddenly bursts in rage yelling: “I will see you die at my feet before you shall return to the arms of that accursed wife! Yes, I will kill you, and suffer hanging for it!” (Collins 2006: 41). This scene of family violence re-enacts the aggression that led the nation into the Civil War over race. Nevertheless, as Lina unintentionally set father against son, there must have been somebody who would mediate between them. This turned out to be nobody else but Claire.

Amongst other protagonists, it is important to mention the character of Juno who plays a small but very considerable role. She was Lina´s black servant and later on Claire´s nanny and surrogate mother. She was the only one who knew of Claire´s family origins and that was the main reason why she objected to her placement to the Tracy´s. She intuitively knew it was going to end disastrously. Collins actually portrays her as a very devoted woman with strong intuition. Juno feels and foretells events and thus serves as some kind of spiritual and moral element of the story. Her role is even more interesting because, as an “ordinary” black servant, she surprisingly holds a higher personal position. She is not despised and treated badly by the whites. She even expresses her own ideas and gives advice to her masters, which was unusual if not inadmissible in the old times. Throughout the novel, Juno proves herself as a perceptive, sensible

and sensitive woman whose qualities are absolutely irrelevant in regard to the blacks, the acknowledged subhuman beings. In this respect, the author entirely omits the common awful practices in harsh treatment of blacks in American society.

4.5 Conclusion

Julia C. Collins presented a catching narrative in which she depicts the hard life destiny of two generations of beautiful mulattos who, from one day to the next, became poor victims of their mixed-blood ancestry. If the ending was tragic, then they literally succumbed to the “curse of caste” which determined their fates. In portraying the character of “tragic mulatto” she brings a new element into literature. While Claire´s mother Lina really suffered from her African American heritage, Claire, barely black, managed to gain the affection and respect of the white family up to the point when the unfinished novel stops. Then comes the question: to what extend would her character really be tragic? There are undoubtedly the tragic moments in her life; especially the fact that her mind is constantly laden with the issue of her family´s past as well as the fact that she basically became a poor servant in her grandpa´s wealthy household to financially support herself. Jealousy and rage in her competitor, a “pure” Southern belle, is also her tragic curse. Nevertheless, since we can only speculate on the ending of Collins´s narrative, this question cannot be entirely answered.

Collins´s narrative also differs in some other aspects in comparison to the tradition of African American literature. Her novel does not directly indict the southern proslavery appetite, nor does it expose the callous contempt for blacks during the antebellum era. There is a sign of contempt in the speech of Colonel Tracy, however it soon diminishes. Furthermore, the Tracy´s estate prospers, especially due to the slave work but there is only a vague reference to the house slaves who are given an insignificant position in the novel´s plot and no mention at all of slaves who are engaged in the field work. Since this novel deals especially with the theme of miscegenation, it offers no critique of the forcible slave owners´ pursuit of slave women (which might not suit a religious audience of the *Christian Recorder*), nor does it even directly and openly defend the abolition of slavery. It seems that Collins´s novel generally lacks a realistic perspective which is even more supported by the fact that her main protagonist ended up as a governess in her own family while, in reality, most of the separated families often never found its members again.

5. Frances E. W. Harper: *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*

5.1 Introduction

Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted is a remarkable novel first published in 1892 by an African-American abolitionist and prolific poet, short story and prose writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. She finished this significant ground-breaking novel at the age of 67 and thus made of it the culminating work of her long successful literary and public career. Until the early 1980s, *Iola Leroy* was considered the first novel written by an African-American woman author. However, in 1982, Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. rediscovered Harriet Wilson´s *Our Nig*, which was published over thirty years earlier, in 1859, and thus Harper´s novel began to be regarded "only" as one of the earliest novels written by an African-American. Nevertheless, *Iola Leroy* clearly was the first novel by an African American woman which had a wide circulation and was read and reviewed by thousands unlike Wilson´s novel which almost no one had read or even heard of.

Harper´s novel was very popular at the end of the 19th century. One of the main reasons of her success was the fact she fulfilled the demands of the women readership of that time who desired a sentimental story. Moreover, she also incorporated aspects of some other genres such as the slave narrative, historical fiction, and journalism which dealt with pressing social and political issues affecting the Black American community. Through her captivating voice and writing talent she

managed to weave all these seemingly incongruous aspects into one original and unique piece of work which attracts many readers even today. On the several following pages some important themes will be analyzed.

Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted is written in the third-person about the life of a strong mulatto woman who devoted herself to finding her long-lost and scattered loving family and to partake in the sorely-needed racial uplift during the Reconstruction era. Harper´s story is set both during Civil War (1861-1865) and later follows the social happenings during Reconstruction (1865-1877). In her book, she emphasizes the fact that even though the slavery was legally banned with the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, racial prejudices strongly remained in existence, especially in the South. Harper credibly portrayed the continuing segregation between the blacks and the whites and thus her novel actually serves as a protest novel against the engraved wrong feelings. Besides racial prejudice, she also deals with the issues of essential educational elevation of ex-slaves which could help the blacks to gain respect, social responsibility and human rights. Miscegenation which was suddenly unacceptable is also taken up. Finally, the women´s subordinated position and their independence are themes taken up as well in this novel.

5.2 The Protagonist Iola Leroy

The main character of Harper´s novel is a young mulatto slave girl, Iola Leroy, who like other tragic mulattos lived under the false presumption

that she was white. Iola is a very beautiful woman of white complexion and blue eyes which likewise are not typical signs for people of black ancestry. She was raised as white in the North by her mulatto mother who had been a slave of her white father. To protect Iola from the omnipresent discrimination, her parents decided to keep this in secret. Nevertheless, they only prepared her for a fearful awakening which came to fruition very soon after her father´s death: Iola was tricked by her evil uncle Lorraine and brought to the South to be reduced in status to a slave. However, after she endures her tragic fate, she rejects feeling sorry for herself like a poor victim. Iola soon changes her perspective and begins to realize her true black identity which she proudly endorses.

The author actually presented an innovative literary motif because the heroine openly identifies herself as an African-American who dedicated her life to the defense of black race instead of trying to pass as white, which would be much easier for her, and which was quite often the theme of late 19th and early 20th century African-American literature. Moreover, Iola could be also viewed as the symbol of women´s power and independence. She serves as the middle(wo)-man between the reader and the author who through Iola´s ideas performs her own attitudes. Quite dark herself, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a very active abolitionist who participated in various reform movements. She struggled for women´s rights, suffrage, temperance and the abolition of slavery. She also taught within the black community and was personally involved

in the very important racial uplift movement which she argued for in her novel.

5.3 *Iola Leroy* as a Historical Novel

The novel´s opening chapters are set into the period of Civil War. The author introduces us several significant characters of Iola´s story such as Iola herself, Robert Johnson, Dr. Gresham and others. Harper often skips around in the narration; once she flashes back to the period before Civil War, the next time she shifts the plot forward to the "present" - this time to the period of Reconstruction. Thus she builds up the complex portrayal of a historical era around Civil War as well as the concrete effects of historical and social events and thinking on the lives of the main characters of her book.

At the beginning, she opens the theme of a black´s social passing linguistically. Harper depicts an interesting and maybe surprising fact that the black slaves whose only duty was to work hard were not that indifferent to the circumstances happening around them. In detail, she portrays their strong perception of the progress of the Union army. Since they were not supposed to think at all about political and military issues, they elaborated their own ways about how to communicate the news of the war´s battles. Harper literally says that they "invented a phraseology to convey in the most unsuspected manner the latest news to each other from the battle-field" (Harper, 1992: 8) and proves her statement by adding:

> … if they wished to announce a victory of the Union army, they said the butter was fresh, or that the fish and eggs were in good condition. If defeat befell them, then the butter and other produce were rancid or stale. (Harper 1992: 8)

The blacks were in most cases illiterate and could not read newspapers to learn about the political climate. Therefore they were entirely dependant on the alert observation of their masters´ discussions and behavior. Even though they were not able to understand the meaning of the letters, they could closely read in people´s faces, and thus they gathered the important information. The author depicts it by introducing a character of Aunt Linda, the house cook, who was able to anticipate the events by a simple glance at her mistress´s facial expression.

> I can´t read de newspapers, but ole Missus´ face is newspaper nuff for me. I looks at her ebery mornin´ wen she comes inter dis kitchen. Ef her face is long an´ she walks kine o´ droopy den I thinks things is gwine wrong for dem. But ef she comes out yere looking mighty pleased, an´ larffin all ober her face, an´ steppin´ so frisky, den I knows de Secesh is gittin´ de bes´ ob de Yankees. (Harper 1992: 9)

This example of masking the news through social passing was important at that time. It was the only way of acquiring knowledge which was crucial in regard to blacks´ future fate. The results of Civil War were to decide about the future of the institution of slavery and the question of the rights of all human beings. Moreover, this behavior of concealing through masked language helped to weld the blacks and enabled them to face the terror of slavery together.

Unfortunately, the end of Civil War and the victory of the North did not result in the complete end of discrimination, prejudices and hatred

against the blacks which was so deeply-rooted in the whites, but just the formal end of slavery. Blacks still had to confront racial abuse daily during Reconstruction. They were generally despised and rejected, and Southern whites even tried to limit their civil rights. Fortunately, the black race produced the warriors who became a glimmer of hope for them. Such was the heroine of Harper´s book, Iola Leroy. She deeply committed herself to race solidarity and to the elevation of her race. The first step to help other members of her race was to claim herself proudly as black even though she looked white and had the chance to avoid racial problems by passing as white. Moreover, it must have been even more difficult for her since she had been raised as white in the North with all the privileges.

5.4 Racial Identity of the Protagonist

Assuming she had not a single drop of black blood circulating in her veins, Iola firstly held a pro-slavery opinion. She was not aware of any evil that slavery brought since her parents, the slave owners, behaved to their slaves very nicely, just as to “real” people. She said:

> Slavery can´t be wrong for my father is a slave-holder, and my mother is as good to our servants as she can be. My father often tells her that she spoils them, and lets them run over her. I never saw my father strike one of them. (Harper 1992: 75)

Iola seemed to be very naive and obviously never encountered the horrors of slavery at that point. She could not realize the pain of whipping or belittling as well as the horrible feeling of being imprisoned in the cage. The importance of freedom played a subsidiary role for her.

Nevertheless, she soon changed her opinion by claiming: “I used to say that slavery is right. I didn´t know what I was talking about” (Harper 1992: 81). She was then deceived by her spineless uncle Lorraine and sold as a slave. From day to day she was deprived of all her personal rights and especially of natural freedom. She suddenly realized what it meant to encounter the real evil of slavery.

Harper, who was a darker black woman than Iola, is interested in having white readers identify with this protagonist. Apparently, she wanted to convince them that slavery was one of the most horrible things that white man had committed. Thus Iola´s change of opinion could be something the white readers might be able to identify with. Moreover, her novel also rebuts generally acknowledged stereotypes that black men are sexual brutes who can easily become the threats to the pure white women and black or partly black women serve only as a private (sexual or not) commodity. Harper, on the contrary, portrays some black male characters as domestically-oriented husbands and fathers of their families and black female protagonists as virtuous women who are committed to the race.

Paradoxically, Iola´s cruel experience helped her to find the true identity and to gain confidence in her convictions. After she was rescued from the hands of her sadistic master, Iola decided to stand on the side of the blacks and to fight for their civic rights. She openly embraced her black heritage. Iola proved her commitment to the African-American race even by her refusal to marry Dr. Gresham who was a successful and

undoubtedly rich “white” doctor who would lovingly care for her. Although she fully enjoyed his pleasant presence and highly valued him, Iola “had never for a moment thought of giving or receiving love from one of that race who had been so lately associated in her mind with horror, aversion, and disgust” (Harper 1992: 85). Moreover, she was filled with remorse and felt it was her duty to reveal her “secret” regarding her origin since, as she adds, “to the man I marry my heart must be as open as the flowers to the sun” (Harper 1992: 85).

After revealing the facts about her racial background, Dr. Gresham still insisted on his proposal, however, Iola persisted in not accepting it. She asked him:

> … should the story of my life be revealed to your family, would they be willing to ignore all the traditions of my blood, forget all the terrible humiliations through which I have passed? I have too much self-respect to enter your home under a veil of concealment. (Harper 1992: 89-90)

It is apparent she is proud to be an African-American; she is not ashamed of her black heritage and can see no reason why she should hide her true identity. This is another innovative part of Harper´s novel´s most significant message – be proud of your race and fight for it!

Iola´s sense of duty towards her race finally determines her future direction. She decided to sacrifice herself for the benefit of those who suffered so much from the human malignity and hatred. She even conveyed the real aim of her life to Dr Gresham: “I intend, when this conflict is over, to cast my lot with the freed people as a helper, teacher,

and friend" (Harper 1992: 88). Through this statement, Iola gave up on the calm and content family life and showed herself as a very strong female social activist who stood into the opposition to the traditional idea of gender roles. Harper actually seems as if she would like to give the inspiration to the late 19th century women to emancipate themselves and pursue higher goals.

While the relationship to Dr. Gresham would mean to recede far from Iola´s race and her inner conviction, it was not that with Dr. Latimer, a handsome light-skinned educated gentleman; "a man capable of winning in life through his rich gifts of inheritance and acquirements" (Harper 1992: 180), who Iola fell in love with and finally married. Like Iola, he rejects passing for white and decides to serve to the needs of the blacks in the South. His character actually overcomes the 19th century presumption that blacks are not capable of any higher progress and cannot reach such qualities which would lift them up on the same level as the whites were. Moreover, he fully supports Iola in her beliefs and tries to convince her to write a book which would become another contribution to the elevation of their long condemned race. Through Dr. Latimer´s words, Harper also communicates the idea which many black intellectuals held that it is in blacks´ benefit to create their own literary tradition and educate themselves to prove their high, equal intellectual skills. In addition, Dr. Latimer expresses his (as well as Harper´s) opinion that white authors can never reliably convey the blacks´ experience and hardship as accurately as those who had gone through slavery would.

> Miss Leroy, out of the race must come its own thinkers and writers. Authors belonging to the white race have written good racial books, for which I am deeply grateful, but it seems to be almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place. No man can feel the iron which enters another man´s soul. (Harper 1992: 197)

5.5 Family: A Slave Market

In the spirit of the 19th century literature, Harper incorporated several sentimental aspects which appeared not only in the depiction of Iola´s relationships to both men but also in the theme of unceasing inner determination to find her family scattered because of the slave trade (before and during the war). The institution of slavery not only caused the physical pain but especially left the scars on people´s souls. One of the cruelest aspects of slavery, which used to happen very often, was the unscrupulous breaking of family ties that was, among other themes, also powerfully portrayed in Harper´s novel. Iola as well as her uncle Robert could not cope with the fact they would never encounter their lost relatives and therefore they did their best to find them.

Firstly, due to surprising coincidence, they found each other when Iola, working as a nurse, took care of Robert who had been wounded. Afterwards, they both continued in search for the rest of their family. At one prayer meeting, where, as Harper stated, there "were remnants of broken families – mothers who had been separated from their children before the war, husbands who had not met their wives for years" (Harper 1992: 135), Robert reclaimed his long-lost loving mother, Harriet. Finally, the whole family reconnects at a Methodist Conference.

The enslaved African Americans suffered from incredibly and unceasingly hard work, no matter whether they were “employed” in the house or in the fields. They must have endured the physical pain and the diet was mostly inadequate in comparison to their heavy workload. As a consequence, they frequently succumbed to the diseases which were rarely treated. Nevertheless, one of the worst conditions they had to live under was the constant threat of sale. They were considered as any other valuable commodity and the whites also treated them in this way. They were often sold at auctions to the person who bid the most money for them, which often resulted in the separation of the whole family since the bidder might not want to buy all the family members but only the strongest and healthiest ones. Sometimes slaves were even sold as a form of punishment. The most forcibly scattered families then never got together again. Harper entirely dismissed this historical fact though. Even though she made reference to these cruel and inhuman acts, her novel´s protagonists finally happily find each other. In this respect, her view is quite unrealistic, though happily sentimental.

5.6 Conclusion

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote a successful novel about an extraordinary woman, a mulatto, whose life story carries some tragic moments. However, it has a happy-ending. The tragedy of her fate consisted especially in the experience of the hardship of slavery which must have been even worse for her since she had lived with the

presumption of belonging to the white race before. Suddenly, she awoke as a poor slave with no rights, with no respect and served only as her master´s toy. Moreover, she lost all the clues about the whereabouts of her whole family. From day to day, Iola found herself entirely lonely and helpless, strolling in the world of injustice just on her own. Nevertheless, to delight most of the 19th century women readers, Harper made up a real fairy-tale ending for her heroine. Iola not only found her soul mate but also her scattered family.

In her novel, the author emphasized in particular the importance of realizing who you are and where you belong to. Through accepting one´s true identity, a man can live a real valuable and useful life. Harper also concentrated on developing the central theme of racial uplift which was necessary for equalization of the black race, its rights and rich culture. She did not choose this topic as the central theme of her novel at random but truly intentionally because she herself was concerned with the elevation of African-Americans and at some point sacrificed some opportunities in her life to help her race in many directions. She also dealt with the question of the woman´s position in society and encouraged female independence and emancipation. Moreover, she presented a rather reliable picture of the Civil War age and life of people at the end of the 19th century.

However, it must be added that her novel carries many aspects which are not that realistic as she depicted them. She did not include the fact that

most broken enslaved families never found their members again and remained scattered all over the country without a single trace of them. Moreover, she also avoided the portrayal that many slaves continued to be victims of violence even in the postbellum era. Finally, Harper omitted the idea of a master seducing or even raping the beautiful blue-eyed slave girl although this kind of abuse was widespread, as the man with authority commonly took advantage of their situation. Iola, however, never experienced this obvious danger in the novel, probably so the white female audience would recommend the book and not be disturbed by too much of the awful realities of slavery.

6. Conclusive Comparison

All four women of letters whose novels were presented in the previous chapters constitute the first women writers of African American fiction. They all significantly enriched the literature written by blacks and thus participated in creating the literary history of the black race. Although their novels have many themes in common, they also differ in several aspects. Therefore, the main aim of this chapter is going to be the brief thematic comparison of their novels.

Firstly, it might be useful to present a simple chart which sums up basic information about concrete novels and their authors. This could help to better orientation in the whole theme.

Author	Title	Year	Problem or Criticism
Hannah Crafts	*The Bondwoman´s Narrative*	1853-1861	Not published; semi-autobiographical novel; uncertain race of author
Harriet E. Wilson	*Our Nig*	1859	Not a novel but autobiography
Julia C. Collins	*The Curse of Caste*	1865	Serialized in *The Christian Recorder*; unfinished and incomplete; the author is known
Frances E. W. Harper	*Iola Leroy*	1892	First published novel with known, ascertained African-American author; complete

The first two novels, *Our Nig* and *The Bondwoman´s Narrative* may be loosely designated slave narrative fiction (although Frado in *Our Nig* was legally free) and both more or less draw inspiration from the real lives of their authors. While Harriet E. Wilson portrays her harsh experience of being a free black in the North who had to face racism and conditions which were often worse than Southern house slaves, Hannah Crafts on the contrary depicts the difficulties of the real and legally enslaved house servant as well as a plantation slave who decided to take flight to the "antislavery" North. Unlike the other two novels, the famous and widely-read *Iola Leroy* and the novel published as a series in an African American Christian Journal *The Curse of Caste*, these novels had been quite forgotten for more than one hundred years until they were rediscovered and brought to the public´s attention again by the reputable Harvard scholar, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Frances E. W. Harper´s *Iola Leroy* also partly overlaps with the life experience of the author herself but, apparently, her novel contains many more fictional or imaginative aspects than *Our Nig* or *The Bondwoman´s Narrative*. While the novel´s heroine reflects Harper´s attitudes and opinions, nevertheless the rest of the story is completely imaginative whole cloth to frame the picture of that period and to captivate the women readership of the 19th century. The crossover from nonfiction slave narrative to fiction is most obvious in Julie C. Collins´s novel *The Curse of Caste* because there is nothing in the plot of her novel which would correspond with the author´s own biography. Almost certainly her

novel emanated from Collins´s own imagination. Thus the authors were slowly "giving up the authenticity of life for the authenticity of imagination" (Mulvey 2004: 18) based especially on the imitation of the popular Victorian novel.

All four novels have a lot in common. As a unifying aspect, we may consider especially the main protagonists. All authors concentrate on the depiction of life fates of women who represent a stereotypical fictional character, a so-called "tragic mulatto", which appeared in American literature during the 19th and 20th century. The stereotypical tragic mulatto is delineated as a very beautiful woman of light complexion whose ethnicity is usually not immediately detected. She lives in a racially divided society and finally becomes a victim of racial prejudices.

The heroines of the four novels which are subjects of this thesis are in many aspects portrayed in a very similar way. They are very attractive, mostly with only a slight trace of African heritage visible. Except of beautiful Frado in *Our Nig* who is half black and half white, all other heroines are able to pass as white. Their skin complexion is very light and Harper´s Iola Leroy can be even proud of her blue eyes. Nobody would actually suppose at the first sight that they are the results of miscegenation or so-called amalgamation. However, according to the one-drop rule they are eventually considered as the blacks whose beauty can be sometimes a huge disadvantage because it often provokes a burst of jealousy in the mind of their mistress.

In Wilson´s *Our Nig*, Frado´s mistress, Mrs. Bellmont, as well as her daughter, Mary, both being not that pretty as Frado was, constantly attacked verbally or even physically the vulnerable girl whose brittle body and soul were totally defenseless. As a result of abject terror Frado slowly faded. Of all the main protagonists, Frado sustained over the course of the novel the cruelest physical mistreatment and abuse which originated just from the fact that she was very pretty. She gained the attention of the rest of the family, especially of Mary´s brother Jack as well as Mr. Bellmont who liked her. Their innocent interest in this half black girl, whom one referred to as "our nig", was totally unacceptable for both white women who, as a result, victimized her and treated the child inhumanly. It is even more surprising that this hardship happened in the generally antislavery North.

In Crafts´s *The Bondwoman´s Narrative*, the main protagonist, Hannah, has to cope with ridiculous "vanities, and whims, and caprices" of Mrs. Wheeler (Crafts 2002: 154). She represents a typical Southern white lady who disdains the blacks from the bottom of her heart. Unlike Frado´s mistress, she does not hurt Hannah physically but destroys her mentally. Her hostility towards Hannah escalates after using a beautifying powder, which Hannah bought for her, causing Mrs. Wheeler´s face to turn black, even blacker than Hannah´s. It was the sign of the highest humiliation for Mrs. Wheeler. As revenge, she punished Hannah by sending her to work on the fields of the plantation and what more she ordered her to marry one of the field slaves which was something entirely unacceptable for

Hannah. Hannah is actually the only protagonist of the four novels who shows prejudice against darker blacks. Frado as well as the Claire and Iola would never say anything kind of racist about the blacks, however, Hannah displays the strong intraracial hatred.

The jealousy of a Southern white mistress against the mulatto heroine is also vividly depicted in Collins´s novel *The Curse of Caste*. Here, the main protagonist Claire even serves as the love rival to Isabelle Tracy. Her beauty and personal qualities transcended those of the white Southern belle Isabelle and thus won the attention of Count Sayvord. However, in comparison to Frado or Hannah, Claire does not become a victim of verbal or even physical attack at the hands of her mistress but a sense of psychological rivalry is apparent. She is "only" exposed to Isabelle´s malignant sight.

Frances E. W. Harper avoided the portrayal of such relationships. Her novel is dated at the end of the 19th century and she rather concentrated on the depiction of the racial uplift movement whose idea her main protagonist Iola Leroy dedicated her life.

The life´s tragedy of each heroine always lies in something else and sometimes there is a question coming up whether they can be really identified as the tragic characters. In the case of Wilson´s *Our Nig*, Frado´s life experience is, indeed, grievous. As a small, vulnerable child who needs especially the family´s protection, she is left by her parents in

the Bellmonts´ house where she literally becomes a victim of her own mulatto beauty. She is intentionally exposed to the everyday hard work, contempt and cruel treatment whose main purpose is to break the human being entirely. The rough conditions, which she has to face to, deeply affects her health and eventually even her future life since due to her failing health Frado is later forced to abandon her own child and thus repeats her history. Wilson´s story has even stronger effect on the readers because it is the author´s real testimony of racial prejudice experienced in the North and its disastrous results, and the victim is just a child abandoned by her white mother.

Hannah Crafts developed the motif of passing in *The Bondwoman´s Narrative*. Hannah´s mistress, Mrs. Bry, represents another typical example of the "Tragic Mulatto" character who realizes that she is partly black (she was switched for the dead white baby) but decides to disguise her true identity and passes for white. However, her past catches up with her soon and she has to face to her real ancestry which leads to the tragic ending. In contrast, Hannah´s ancestry is well-known. She does not have to conceal her true identity and to live in fear that one day she might be exposed. Nevertheless, similarly as Frado, the tragedy of Hannah´s life mainly consists in the fact that she is forced to somehow cope with her low social status. She lived in the society which was generally convinced of the good of slavery and which was greatly pervaded by the racial prejudices. She must bear all the injustices of that system against which she could not struggle by any means. Unlike Frado though, Hannah´s

story ends in happy-ending. When we read the final chapter of Crafts´s novel we realize that we are deeply within the realm of the sentimental novel.

The motif of passing also appears in Harper´s novel about Iola Leroy who is initially not aware of her real African-American ancestry at all in contrast to Mrs. Bry who knew from the very beginning. Iola is that type of tragic mulatto who has all the social graces but later is unexpectedly turned into slavery – she is transformed from white to black like the heroine of Collins´s novel. She completely loses her former social standing and must endure the horrors of that horrible institution. However, Iola soon experiences a turnaround. After her rescue from the chains of slavery, she finds a new sense of being. She proudly embraces her African-American heritage and applies herself to the racial elevation of the African American community. Moreover, she manages to gather with all the members of her scattered family and even falls in love and gets married. Harper mostly concentrated on Iola´s fate after the Civil War as she struggled against the widely-spread racist opinion of the whites of the impossibility of the uplift of blacks. Even though she was still exposed to the racial prejudices her character cannot be truly regarded as tragic. While Wilson and Crafts portrayed Frado´s and Hannah´s extremely difficult way of coping with the hardships during the antebellum era, Harper chose the theme which became pivotal in the Reconstruction period after the abolition of slavery and thus avoided in

the length of her plot the depiction of real suffering as experienced by Frado and Hannah.

The question whether the character is entitled to be qualified as a “Tragic Mulatto” or not especially comes out in Collins´s novel *The Curse of Caste*. Although her heroine, Claire, anguishes over her obscure ancestry, she has never had to endure the years of torment and abuse at the hands of a brutal man or woman as for example Frado did. She worked as a governess in the Southern family who behaved toward her with respect and love (not knowing that she was actually their relative). Moreover, she gained the Count´s affection. Almost nothing in her life story implies the tragic moments as the other novels do. In this respect, her character totally deviates from the tradition of “Tragic Mulatto” literature. Collins did not manage to finish her novel though so we cannot be sure what kind of ending she had in mind for Claire. In the two alternative endings made up by the novel´s white male editors, Andrews and Kachun, it is interesting that neither of them considered the option of the white Count rejecting Claire for being black, nor of Claire rejecting the Count. Collins published her novel in *The Christian Recorder* whose only readers were black Christians. Therefore, it is highly probable that the author would rather choose for Claire to marry a black man. The black readership would probably prefer that kind of ending more than those of Andrews and Kachun. This is exactly what for example Harper had her protagonist do in her novel. Her heroine Iola rejected Dr. Gresham´s proposal and finally gave precedence to the black suitor to stay faithful to her own race.

All in all, even though the authors handled the theme of the “Tragic Mulatto” from different perspectives, they enabled today´s readers to look into the problematics of the life at the crossroads of black and white culture. They presented the themes which are for most of the Europeans quite new and unique. Moreover, they significantly enriched the distinct Afro-American literature. The value of their novels is even much higher since they more or less drew the inspiration from their own experience.

7. Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na literární rozbor čtyř novel, jejichž autorky patří k první generaci Afro-Amerických spisovatelek 19. století. Zejména se zabývá tragickými osudy ženských hrdinek smíšeného rasového původu, jejichž pleť je téměř k nerozeznání od světlé pleti bělochů. Pro tento typ specifické literární postavy se v angličtině vžilo pojmenování "Tragic Mulatto" (v doslovném překladu "tragická mulatka"). Tragičnost jejího osudu lze vidět v mnoha aspektech, které veskrze plynou z historických a kulturních skutečností, které ovlivňovaly Ameriku v době před i po občanské válce.

Samotnému rozboru předcházela detailní četba jednotlivých novel a seznámení se s historickým a literárním kontextem doby, ve které daná díla vznikala. Přitom největší pozornost byla věnována zejména sledování mezirasových vztahů, otázce rasové identity, problematice rasové nenávisti a v neposlední řadě i tématu, které získalo na důležitosti v období poválečném, a to vzdělávání Afro-Američanů. Na základě toho byla sestavena první úvodní kapitola diplomové práce, která nejen podává stručné informace o bohatosti sexuálních vztahů (lze-li je skutečně nazývat vztahy v pravém slova smyslu) mezi lidmi různé rasové příslušnosti a zmiňuje se o problematice maskování skutečné identity, ale také vysvětluje podstatu tragičnosti osudu dané literární postavy. Součástí úvodu je však i krátké seznámení se se životem autorek

zkoumaných novel, a to z toho důvodu, že tyto ženy se při psaní svých děl, ať už z větší či menší části, inspirovaly vlastním životem.

Následující kapitoly se věnovaly samotné analýze konkrétních literárních děl, které byly úmyslně uspořádány do pořadí, v jakém postupně vznikaly, tj. od nejstarší po nejmladší. V centru zájmu byly především postavy hlavních hrdinek jednotlivých novel, představitelek "tragických mulatek", a podrobnější rozbor stěžejních motivů zmíněných výše. Důkladná analýza byla navíc podpořena citacemi z primární literatury.

Náplní závěrečné kapitoly je pak stručné porovnání. V průběhu četby se ukázalo, že hrdinky mají mnohé společné a v porovnání s typickým příkladem této stereotypní literární postavy, již obvykle potká špatný konec, nemůže být, s výjimkou jedné (Frado z novely *Our Nig*), osud našich hrdinek označen za zcela tragický. Autorky totiž obvykle v duchu tradic sentimentální literatury volily šťastný konec (*The Bondwoman´s Narrative* a *Iola Leroy*), nebo alespoň osud hrdinky zarámovaly do snesitelnějších životních podmínek (*The Curse of Caste*).

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