

Ghent University  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy



# Criticizing Du Bois's Propagandistic Views on Literature

The Literary Ideology of the Niggerati in  
*Not Without Laughter* and *The Blacker the Berry*

Supervisor:

Professor P. Codde

May 2012

Paper submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of "Master in de  
Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels-  
Spaans" by Femke Bracke

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
1. The Rise of Educational Programs for African-Americans .....	8
1.1. Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute .....	8
1.2. Washington’s Accommodationism vs. Du Bois’s Political Uplift Program .....	11
2. Du Bois’s Uplift Ideology .....	13
2.1. <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> and “The Talented Tenth” .....	13
2.2. The NAACP and <i>The Crisis</i> .....	17
3. WWI: Towards Democracy .....	18
4. A New Mentality: Alain Locke and <i>The New Negro</i> .....	20
5. Debate about New Negro Art .....	23
5.1. Du Bois and Propaganda .....	23
5.2. The Niggerati and Lower Class Life .....	28
5.2.1. Wallace Thurman .....	28
5.2.2. Langston Hughes .....	31
6. <i>Not Without Laughter</i> .....	35
6.1. The Racial Situation in Stanton .....	35
6.2. Evaluating Ideologies and Characters .....	35
6.2.1. Hager and Booker T. Washington .....	35
6.2.2. Critique on Washington: Sister Johnson & Hager’s funeral .....	37
6.2.3. Tempy and W.E.B. Du Bois .....	39
6.2.4. Critique on Tempy: Non-Blackness .....	42
6.2.5. Jimboy & Harriett: Blackness and Nature .....	44
6.3. Sandy: Reconciling Ideologies and Characters .....	50
6.3.1. Growing Awareness .....	50
6.3.2. Critical Voice and Attitude .....	54
6.4. Towards a Better Future .....	58
7. <i>The Blacker the Berry</i> .....	62

7.1. Intrarracial Color-Prejudices of a Blue Vein Family.....	62
7.2. Racial Performativity: Challenge the Discrimination.....	63
7.3. Emma Lou’s Attitude towards Blackness.....	64
7.3.1. Avoiding Black Stereotypes.....	64
7.3.2. Oscillating Between Personal Feelings and Color-Consciousness.....	67
7.3.3. Inauthenticity and Self-Betrayal.....	69
7.4. Criticizing Emma Lou’s Behavior.....	72
7.4.1. Truman Walter.....	72
7.4.2. The Rent Party.....	75
7.4.3. Accusations and Recommendations Rejected.....	76
7.4.4. Self-Realization.....	78
Conclusion.....	82
Works Cited.....	85

## Introduction

During the Harlem Renaissance, the literary community was divided into two ideological camps. On the one hand, numerous authors defended the propagandistic views of W.E.B. Du Bois on literature and exclusively wrote in a respectable way about the black population. On the other hand, the younger writers of the Niggerati opposed the bourgeois view of Du Bois and encouraged a more realistic and authentic depiction of African-American society. This dissertation will consider two authors of the younger generation, namely Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman, and their literary works *Not Without Laughter* (1930) and *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) respectively. First of all, I hope to show that they oppose sensationalist literature with their realistic portrayal of black culture and furthermore criticize Du Bois's views on the content and function of literature. In line with this assertion, I contend that that these writings promote the literary ideology of the Niggerati by reconciling highbrow and lowbrow aspects of African-American existence.

My discussion of *Not Without Laughter* primarily deals with the conflicting literary beliefs of black intellectuals and the younger generation. However, I will also illuminate the debate about education at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as certain characters openly express their sympathy for either Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. Du Bois. Sandy, the protagonist, plays an essential role in my critical exploration of the novel. Throughout the story, this boy shifts from one relative to another and constantly adopts the corresponding values and ideologies. Initially, Sandy lives a lower-class existence together with his grandmother Hager, his father and mother, and his aunt Harriett. Yet, after the death of Hager, he is adopted by his bourgeois aunt Tempy, who denounces her black background and teaches Sandy the refined values of the black middle-class. As he grows up, the boy becomes increasingly independent and starts to form his individual convictions regarding schooling and black authenticity. I claim that he ultimately reconciles the viewpoints of his highbrow

relatives and his low-class family members and accordingly defends an entirely different belief system. With regard to the debate about education, I will especially use Matthew Mosley's article, as he confirms the identification of certain characters with the ideologies of either Washington or Du Bois. However, whereas this author especially emphasizes the political and social aspects of the novel, I will use the essay of Elizabeth Schultz to discuss Hughes's depiction of African-American authenticity. By combining the statements of primarily Mosley and Schultz, I contend that Sandy's compromising character, at the end of the story, embodies both the sociopolitical and the literary convictions of the Niggerati.

Emma Lou, the protagonist of *The Blacker the Berry*, resembles Sandy, as she eventually also represents the ideology of the younger generation. However, her mindset is much more difficult to define, as the story deals with a complex subject, namely intraracial color-prejudices. As the epigraph indicates, the title of the novel refers to the Negro folk saying "The blacker the berry The sweeter the juice..." (Thurman, n.p.). This sentence expresses a bias that exists among African-Americans regarding the sexuality of darker women and accordingly introduces the central theme. Emma Lou, the protagonist of the story, is rejected by her Blue Vein family because of her dark skin tone and consequently develops an extreme color-consciousness. Throughout the novel, the girl desires to associate exclusively with "the right sort of people", in other words individuals with a lighter complexion, and tries to act as white as possible in order to overcome the prejudices (Thurman, 711). This behavior not only awakens her contempt towards other dark-skinned persons, but also has a negative impact on her personal life. While in the beginning, Emma Lou is ignorant to her racial attitude, at the end of the story, she realizes her mistakes and decides to adopt a different mentality towards both herself and other dark-skinned persons. First of all, I will demonstrate that Thurman discards the literary ideology of Du Bois, as he denounces the behavior of middle-class blacks towards unrefined individuals. In line with this

criticism, I argue that his inclusion of low-class individuals does not suggest the engagement of the author in sensationalist literature, as Du Bois' claimed. On the contrary, with these portrayals, Thurman simply gives a realistic representation of American-American society. It is worth mentioning that, in his review of the novel, Du Bois indeed "condemns the novel's licentiousness" and compared it with Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (Scott, 326). Nevertheless, I denounce Du Bois's statements and align with Daniel Scott's views about the content and function of this literary work:

Flawed as it seems, the novel may be read best as Thurman's conscious attempt to converge political, aesthetic, and personal oppositions of his time, as a work that reflects his awareness of his position as a black writer in 1920s Harlem. Caught between the era's demand for the exotic and the race's desire to present edifying themes, it is an extraordinary novel that dwells on the border between Van Vechten and Du Bois [...]. (Scott, 327)

Yet, whereas Scott primarily focusses on the performance of race in the novel, I will accentuate Thurman's depiction of black culture and his critique on Emma Lou's inauthentic behavior to support my arguments. In view of this approach, I contend that Thurman, like Hughes, discards Du Bois's propagandistic literature and attempts to convince the readers of the literary ideology of Niggerati.

My thesis begins with a theoretical part that clarifies the efforts and beliefs of the major political and literary figures during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First of all, I will indicate the ideological differences of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, who actively engaged in political and social activities to uplift the race. Although both men claimed that education played an important role in the struggle for social recognition, they supported distinct schooling methods. I aim to clarify this disagreement, by comparing both the accomplishments and the writings of these two intellectuals. This assessment will then

serve as a theoretical framework to discuss the ethical conflict between Hager and Tempy in *Not Without Laughter*. The second part of the theory will deal with the beginnings of the New Negro Movement and starts with a discussion Alain Locke. As his anthology *The New Negro* encouraged African-Americans to use literature in their struggle for acceptance, his literary beliefs served as a basis for the subsequent conflicts between the black intellectuals and the Niggerati. Ultimately, a discussion of the achievements and literary essays of Du Bois, Thurman and Hughes, will elucidate this debate in more detail. This theoretical chapter is then succeeded by a critical evaluation of the two novels and a final conclusion.

## **1. The Rise of Educational Programs for African-Americans**

In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment to the American Constitution abolished slavery and the former slaves were set free. One year later, the Fourteenth Amendment gave them full citizenship, and in 1869, they were even allowed to vote thanks to the Fifteenth Amendment. Despite the political support, the African-American population still had to cope with various social problems, as it lacked the abilities to develop independently. As Giulia Fabi notes, “[s]ince there was no redistribution of land in the South and the promise of ‘40 acres and a mule’ remained unfulfilled, freedom for millions of ex-slaves came without any structural improvement in their condition of economics dispossession and subordination” (Fabi, 35). What is more, as slaves they had always had a master who determined their existence, but now blacks had to take their lives into their own hands. In addition to this independence, the founding of violent, racist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, put the freedmen in a state of constant terror. Nevertheless, the African-American population in the South made great efforts to improve these poor conditions, especially by means of education. Fabi asserts that “[e]ducation was deemed central to the uplift of the race. Postbellum decades saw a proliferation of freedmen’s schools, black colleges, literary societies and clubs, journals, and independent black presses” (Fabi, 35).

### **1.1. Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute**

One of the first black leaders who actively encouraged the teaching of African-Americans was Booker Taliaferro Washington. In *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*, Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer explain that Washington was born in slavery on April 5, 1856, as the son to a white slave-owner and colored slave (Hughes and Meltzer, 240). Although they had to work during the day, “Booker and his mother tried to learn their A-B-C’s at night by the light of the fire” (Hughes and Meltzer, 240). The ability to read was the first step towards



his future career, since Washington became a teacher in the years after the Civil War and started educating freedmen at the Hampton Institute. However, the most significant job opportunity presented itself in 1881, when he was asked to open a normal school for colored people in Tuskegee, Alabama. Although at first there were hardly any resources available, Washington nevertheless managed to found the Tuskegee Institute. As Hughes and Meltzer explain, “[t]here was little money for his salary, but none for the books, land or a building. The young teacher and his students decided to raise funds for land and to build a school. [...] In this way, in 1881, Tuskegee Institute came into being” (Hughes and Meltzer, 240). Washington had a very clear program in mind for his students at the Tuskegee Institute, which was linked to his ideas about uplifting the race. In 1895, he presented his main arguments at the Atlanta Exposition in front of a mixed-race audience. Before I describe his speech, it is important to illuminate briefly the context in which this event took place. Melbourne Cummings describes the historical situation of the 1890s:

[e]conomic collapse cut deeply into all classes. [...] At the bottom of the economic heap blacks suffered most. [...] Blacks were plagued by further confusion when the disenfranchisement and segregation movements started in 1890. The South robbed black people of their votes and the North treated them with scorn. They were excluded politically and socially by acts of states’ laws. [...] It was believed to be improbable at that time, to obtain political equality for black people [...]. (Cummings, 75-76)

Although the support that the African-Americans enjoyed in the 1860s was weakening its grip, Washington, however, did not propose any political solution. Martin Kilson confirms that “[t]here was in Washington’s accommodationist schema no timetable for the establishment of African American citizenship and human rights” (Kilson, 303). On the contrary, he stimulated economic respectability and believed that blacks first needed to acquire practical skills in agriculture and industry, before claiming equal rights. In the speech

at the Atlanta Exposition, which is included in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*, Washington clarifies his ideas:

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; [...] No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. (Washington, 84)

By developing practical skills and establishing a strong work ethos, African-Americans would earn money and learn to be self-sufficient. He emphasized that this type of industrial education not only rewarded colored people; this approach implied many advantages for the white population as well. It was essential for Washington to stress and illuminate his educational program, since whites were generally opposed to the teaching of blacks. Cummings explains that “[t]hose blacks educated in academics were whites ‘uppity’ and unmindful of ‘their places’ for they wanted to enjoy the same kind of life as whites” (Cummings, 78). However, Washington did not believe in an academic education and states in his autobiography that “in order to lift them up, something must be done more than merely to imitate New England education as it then existed” (Washington, 48). As a consequence of his distinct approach, whites were more willing to support the project. In his speech, Washington highlights the benefits for the white Southerners, indicating that “[c]asting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy you surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories” (Washington, 84). He hoped that, with this industrial education, he could establish a mutual respect between the two races. On the one hand, by forming decent relationships with the

white Southerners and by displaying their commitment and trustworthiness using agriculture and industry, African-Americans would win the respect of the white population. On the other hand, whereas blacks learn the dignity of working on the fields, the other race would benefit from their efforts. Washington even anticipated that, as a consequence of this working attitude, African-Americans would gradually pave the way for a society in which they were perceived as equal. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Exposition appeared to be a great success. As Mark Bauerlein indicates "[i]t was a revolutionary moment, a black man sharing a podium with whites, shaking their hands, declaring a new social policy for the South" (Bauerlein, 107). Hughes and Meltzer confirm that "[t]he speech put Booker T. Washington on the front pages of papers across the nation and in the eyes of white America made him the 'official' leader of the Negro race' [...] From that time on, Washington was supported by governmental, industrial, and educational leaders throughout the nation" (Hughes and Meltzer, 244). He was one of the first African-American leaders who earned the respect from both black and white audiences, and as a result of this great triumph, many people donated large sums to the Tuskegee Institute and other black schools.

## **1.2. Washington's Accommodationism vs. Du Bois's Political Uplift Program**

Although the educational project of Washington was a great success, it received negative comments as well. Cummings states that "Washington's views were opposed by the black 'intellectuals'. They felt he did not sufficiently emphasize political rights, and that his stress on industrial education might result in keeping black people in virtual bondage" (Cummings, 79). One of the most prominent opponents was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. He was born in 1868 and obtained his doctorate at Harvard in 1895. As Hughes and Meltzer indicate, this was "the first Ph.D. conferred on a Negro by that institution" (Hughes and Meltzer, 248). After his years at Harvard, he worked at the Atlanta University as professor in history,

sociology and economics. Du Bois was another key figure in the struggle for racial uplift, but advocated a completely different program than Washington. While the latter suggested a gradual development towards equality by establishing a work attitude among the colored population, Du Bois favored a more direct and political approach. Bauerlein declares that “Washington advocated ‘go slow’ accommodationism, while Du Bois favored militant protest” (Bauerlein, 106). In his article, he furthermore distinguishes between both leaders, indicating that “Du Bois stood for race pride and higher education, Washington for tactical conciliation and vocational education” (Bauerlein, 112). In 1903, Du Bois published a collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he dedicates an entire chapter, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” to Washington. It is important to note that Du Bois did not completely reject his ideas. Since both leaders are in favor of black education and racial equality, they have particular arguments in common. In this chapter, Du Bois first of all acknowledges that Washington was “a successful man” and that he “has done so much” (Du Bois, 37). What is more, in the concluding paragraph he declares that “[s]o far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him [...]” (Du Bois, 47). However, in most parts of the text, Du Bois strongly criticizes the industrial project. The earlier statements of Cummings about the criticism on Washington are confirmed in this essay, as Du Bois asserts that “there is among educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land a feeling of deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which some of Mr. Washington’s theories have gained” (Du Bois, 38). In this chapter, Du Bois further illuminates the central strivings of himself and the other academics. As I have mentioned before via the Bauerlein quote, African-American intellectuals disapproved of the lack of political action and in general the “go slow” tactics of Washington. Du Bois explicates that “[s]o far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and

duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,-so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this, we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them” (Du Bois, 47). Because these educated men desire to gain political rights for the African-Americans, they emphasize the need for “the right to vote” and “civic equality” (Du Bois, 43). Moreover, they support academic knowledge instead of accommodationism, as a method to obtain racial equality. In addition to the various points of criticism, the text also contains a call for action or for “militant protest” (Bauerlein, 106). Especially in the final paragraph of the chapter, where Du Bois includes a fragment of the Declaration of Independence, his energy and determination are very noticeable:

The black men have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,-a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader. [...] By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. (Du Bois, 47)

While Washington advocated a compromise between blacks and whites by highlighting the importance of economic development, Du Bois and other black academics firmly encouraged a more direct and political approach. Nevertheless, although Washington and Du Bois favor distinct methods, both leaders agreed that education constitutes a vital element in the struggle for racial uplift and equality.

## **2. Du Bois’s Uplift Ideology**

### **2.1. *The Souls of Black Folk* and “The Talented Tenth”**

During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Du Bois further developed his uplifting program by writing many essays and helping to create several political movements. He was well aware that these endeavors were greatly needed in the existing segregated society, where racial discrimination was omnipresent. In “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” another essay that was published in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois presents the problem of the Negro’s double-consciousness. He explains that it “is a strange experience” to be discriminated and excluded by others on the basis of your skin color (Du Bois, 8). This odd sensation is linked to what Du Bois in other texts has called the problem of the color line. Since the natural distinction between whites and blacks was a social construct to uphold white supremacy during slavery, it obviously feels strange for an African-American to be discriminated merely because of his black physiognomies. Du Bois points out that the double-consciousness is a major effect of the color line:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, --an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body [...]. (Du Bois, 9)

On the one hand, the African-American considers himself to be an American with the same rights as white individuals. On the other hand, he realizes that whites will not grant him these privileges, because he is of African descent, and he cannot but see himself through the eyes of white people. In other words, the Negro embodies a combination of two identities that, up until that period, remained unreconciled, and her or she senses a feeling of ‘double-consciousness’. Moreover, Du Bois declares that, although the blacks were theoretically given their freedom at the end of the Civil War, “the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land” (Du Bois, 11). With this statement, he refers to the existing racial segregation

and the perseverance of the Jim Crow laws in the South, which still confine the rights of African-Americans. However, because of the growing attention to “book-learning” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the black population became more aware of themselves and their race, and acquired a new sense of responsibility. As Du Bois declares “the journey [...] gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, [and] self-respect”. [...] he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission” (Du Bois, 11). In his concluding paragraph, Du Bois displays the central elements that form the core of his uplifting program and his striving towards equality:

[...] the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. [...] there are today no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folklore are Indian and African [...]. (Du Bois, 14)

In this excerpt, he furthermore expresses the ideals in which he believes, namely a world where blacks are considered both African and American, “without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows” (Du Bois, 9). In addition to his theory on race, the manifestation of his militant protest and the reference to the Declaration of Independence are also noteworthy, as they appeared in his previously mentioned essays as well. According to Du Bois, the Negro has long been in an inferior social position due to slavery and he still is because of the existing system of segregation. Nevertheless, with the improvement of higher schooling for blacks, he sees a way out of that dreadful situation. Next to political efforts, education forms

an essential factor in Du Bois's uplift ideology, as it challenges the ignorance of the Negro and helps to develop his racial awareness. This new attitude will stimulate him even more in the acquisition of political and equal rights.

Next to a clear ideology and fixed purposes, Du Bois also had a specific group in mind that would undertake these political and social actions. In his essay "The Talented Tenth," also published in 1903, he asserts that a few exceptional men, "the talented tenth", would lead the African-Americans towards a civilization based on racial equality:

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of its race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. (Du Bois, n.p.)

Du Bois explains that, in order to generate these persons, "[t]he best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land" (Du Bois, n.p.). He believes that institutions of higher education will produce the talented tenth. These, in turn, will create a firm group to challenge the racial problems in America. As Du Bois explains, "[i]t has, however, been in the furnishing of teachers that the Negro college has found its peculiar function. [...] and the sending out of teachers whose training has not been simply for bread winning, but also for human culture, has been of inestimable value in the training of these men" (Du Bois, n.p.). In his statements, he again emphasizes the importance of academic schooling and insists on the spread of intellectual knowledge. Moreover, Du Bois again challenges Booker T. Washington and his industrial training, as he claims that African-Americans should first of all be trained on an academic level; the acquirement of practical skills is situated on a second tier. Du Bois's emphasis on academic education and the political aspect of racial uplift made him a strong opponent of Washington's industrial program. His



insight in the existing social problems and attitudes of African-Americans made him one of the most significant black leaders of his time.

## 2.2. The NAACP and *The Crisis*

In addition to writing an elaborate collection of articles, Du Bois achieved much on the social and political level as well. He was, amongst other things, the co-founder of various movements that actively supported racial uplift. A first organization, the Niagara Movement, was formed in 1905 as a consequence of the increasing disagreement with Washington's model. According to Hughes and Meltzer, Du Bois and the editor Monroe Trotter initiated "this 'radical group' of men who were critical of the Man of Tuskegee" (Hughes and Meltzer, 250). Although this movement had clear goals, which were especially aimed at the termination of lynching and other violent actions against African-Americans, it was only short-lived. A few years later, in 1909, Du Bois instigated another, biracial, organization known as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). George Hutchinson explains the associations between the two organizations in his book *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*: "The Niagara Movement's positions were largely identical to those of the NAACP, but the organization lacked the funding and influence that would have given it a greater base of power. It also explicitly prohibited full membership by whites. The NAACP seemed to promise greater effectiveness for the campaign against institutionalized racism" (Hutchinson, 141). While some of its black participants had attended the Niagara Movement, the NAACP permitted white members as well, and consequently depended on interracial relationships. The authors furthermore reveal that this new organization both protested against lynching and struggled "for civil and political liberty" (Hughes and Meltzer, 260). In 1910, the movement created its own magazine *The Crisis*,

which propagated its ideas about its uplift ideology by publishing articles about various racial topics. In the first issue, Du Bois explains the general purposes in his editorial:

The policy of *The Crisis* will be simple and well defined: It will first and foremost be a newspaper; it will record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect the Negro-American. Secondly, it will be a review of opinion and literature, [...] in the white and colored press on the race problem. Thirdly, it will publish a few short articles. Finally, its editorial page will stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race, for the highest ideals of American democracy, and for reasonable but earnest and persistent attempt to gain these rights and realize these ideals. (Du Bois, 10)

As indicated in these statements, the themes of *The Crisis* perfectly align themselves with the objectives of the NAACP and the black elite. Their political and social efforts were essential in the struggle towards a democratic society, since they actively encouraged citizens and writers to engage in the racial uplift.

### **3. WWI: Towards Democracy**

The desire among African-Americans to establish a democracy, without racial segregation or discrimination, was extremely strong during the 1910s. The key event in the reinforcement of this ideal was the First World War. During the first years of WWI, America presented itself as a neutral nation. Nonetheless, as Hughes and Meltzer note, “[i]n 1917 the United States entered World War I under the slogan ‘Make the world Safe for Democracy’” (Hughes and Meltzer, 262). As these authors further explain, there were many colored soldiers who went to fight in Europe, particularly in France. While white and black soldiers fought overseas to establish a democracy, in America, however, the nondemocratic lynching and race riots continued. In view of that, the reaction of the intellectuals to this war could be problematic.

On July 28, 1917, for example, the NAACP had already organized a Silent Protest Parade “in which thousands of New Yorkers marched, bearing banners asking, ‘Mr. President, Why Not Make America Safe for Democracy?’” (Hughes and Meltzer, 267). Yet, Du Bois saw WWI as a positive experience for the African-Americans and states the following in “Close Ranks,” published in *The Crisis* of 1918: “Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy” (Du Bois, 111). The reason for his response is given in a later edition of in 1919, after the soldiers have returned to the US. According to Du Bois, the war in Europe would teach the G.I.s the spirit of democracy. Subsequently, they could use that energy and apply it to the miserable situation in their home country. In “Returning Soldiers”, Du Bois explains that “[w]e fought gladly and to the last drop of blood: for America and her highest ideals [...] But today we return. We return from fighting. We return fighting. Make way for democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why” (Du Bois, 13-14). Eventually, WWI proved a valuable experience for the black population in the US for several reasons. First of all, it increased their racial pride, as they helped to defeat an American enemy like Germany, but most importantly, the victory of democracy in Europe increased the desire to change the social situation in America. In addition to fortifying the democratic spirit among the African-Americans, WWI was also largely responsible for the demographic change in the big cities. Hughes and Meltzer explain that the war put a stop to the influx of European immigrant labor and that, as a result, the demand for work force in the Northern factories increased (Hughes and Meltzer, 269). When, in addition, the work conditions improved, many African-Americans moved from the South to the North to find work (Hughes and Meltzer, 269). Next to job opportunities, the southern Jim Crow laws and the violence towards colored people were extra reasons to partake in what became known as the “Great Migration.” This

migration, in its turn, had a great influence on black culture. In her book *Enter the New Negroes*, Martha Jane Nadell states that “[t]his assortment of individuals [...] provided rich material for the writers, artists, and intellectuals who gathered in Harlem. [...] The expressive Negroes of 1920s Harlem [...] became known as ‘New Negroes’” (Nadell, 2-3). Together with the optimistic spirit of the post-war decade, urbanization helped to strengthen black mentality and the desire for racial equality. This new mindset particularly affected the literature of that period, as writers hoped to use their art in the struggle for recognition. Consequently, black literature flourished and the Harlem Renaissance, or New Negro Movement, found its entry in America.

#### **4. A New Mentality: Alain Locke and *The New Negro***

One of the most influential African-American intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance was Alain Locke. In 1925, he edited a special issue of the *Survey Graphic* about black literature with the title *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*. During that same year, he elaborated on this edition and eventually published the anthology *The New Negro*. In both the issue and the successive volume, Locke offers his ideas about the features and objectives of the New Negro. According to this academic, the current task of writers is to challenge the black stereotypes depicted in earlier literature. In other words, the time has come to replace these Old Negroes by realistic representations of the New Negroes, so that African-Americans can finally be perceived and appreciated as they really are. Nadell confirms that “[h]e was seeking new voices and new faces for the race, in contrast to the limiting representations of the past, when the Negro was seen through ‘the dusty spectacles of past controversy’ and ‘typical stereotypes’- uncles, aunties, pickaninnies, and others-were in vogue” (Nadell, 36). With regard to these racial categories, it is important to note that they appeared not only in the literary tradition, but also in the entertainment sector of Harlem. As a consequence of the

growing number of colored residents, the whites became increasingly interested in African-American culture. William Nash indicates that especially the “upper-middle-class white New Yorkers” came “uptown to ‘experience’ black life” (Nash, 153). On the one hand, the curiosity of whites had several advantages for the African-Americans. Since various white patrons were willing to support their work, it became easier for authors to introduce their writings to a wider audience. On the other hand, however, whites generally controlled nightclubs, such as The Cotton Club. It was in those clubs, and also in theatres, that coloreds were usually depicted as stereotypes. As Nash declares, “[t]he Cotton Club, where the floorshows often portrayed blacks as primitives, expanded opportunities for individual artists who performed there. In some sense, it also limited the black community through its emphasis on blacks’ exoticism and otherness” (Nash, 153). During slavery, the African-Americans were depicted as primitive others in order to accentuate their inferior position. With the use of these stereotypical features, the white supremacist population could easily control their society. However, the daily confrontation with prejudiced categories in Harlem threatened the black citizens, as they currently strove for an equal status. Locke was one of the first intellectuals who explicitly rejected these racial labels and proposed an alternative aesthetic method to portray black characters based on urban reality. Nadell explains the unique characteristics of this man and his literary collection:

By placing so many different essays, poems, short stories, drawings, prints, photographs together, in a series of volumes, Locke created a field in which he and his readers could use a variety of aesthetic styles and forms to account for the heterogeneity of the African American population, something denied by the stereotypes of the past. (Nadell, 67)

Locke thus encourages writers to represent a wide-range of African-American experiences, instead of the restricted and monotonous typecasts. Furthermore, he advocated a

reconsideration of the African heritage conform to the modern developments of blacks. As Nadell indicates, “[i]n the decades to come, writers, artists, and critics would tackle literary and visual stereotypes by recasting ideas of African American identity, folk culture, and history” (Nadell, 33). Locke reasoned that traditional folk features should not be understood as exotic or primitive, first of all because earlier authors had exaggerated these black characteristics, and second because African-Americans, are shaped not only by African but by American culture as well. Therefore, authors should deprive folk imageries of their negative connotations and emphasize both the African and the American effects on black identity. William Nash confirms the former statements and specifies Locke’s ideas about African background, as specified in *The New Negro*:

[it was] a volume that celebrated the accomplishments of African Americans of his era. *The New Negro* also argued that black artists could extend those gains by recognizing their heritage. This does not mean that Locke uncritically embraced an African past. Indeed, he rejected such a notion in his essay, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” on the grounds that forced immersion in Western culture has alienated the “Aframerican” from his heritage. However, Locke does not regard this alienation as a permanent thing; instead, he challenges black artists to form an original relation to Africa and African artistry. (Nash, 157)

Consequently, authors gave modern, realistic illustrations of colored characters and included a variety of authentic experiences in their work. In that way, they particularly tried to convey the richness and heterogeneity of their culture, as encouraged by Locke. In addition, black writers hoped to demonstrate the value of their race and, moreover, the humanity of its individuals. Eugene Holmes illuminates this modern approach on literature, and clarifies the subjects that were depicted:

It was a self-confidence which grew and proliferated into an outburst of emotional expression, never matched by any comparable period in American history. [...] The New Poetry Movement embraced every facet of Negro experience from lyricism, African heritage, social protest, folk songs and blues, Negro heroes and episodes, lynchings, race riots, treatment of the Negro masses [...] and franker and deeper self-revelation. (Holmes, 66)

Because of these innovative ideas about the representation of African-Americans and the combination of diverse writings, Locke's anthology became a model for the new generation of authors who desired to depict the New Negro as truthfully as possible.

## **5. Debate about New Negro Art**

### **5.1. Du Bois and Propaganda**

Writers and literary critics generally accepted Locke's argument about the central position of folk tradition in the new literature. Nevertheless, a large debate emerged about how the Negro could best be represented and in what context, soon after the publication of *The New Negro*. While various groups supported the racial uplift and therefore desired exclusively positive depictions, others rejected this kind of propaganda and wrote freely about the rougher lower class experiences. Despite the fact that Locke had tried to include a great variety of writings in order to reveal the heterogeneity of African-American literature, critics noted that all of them solely illustrated the positive side of black life. While the majority of the writings accentuated typical folk themes, Locke excluded the rougher portrayals of lower class life from his collection. Nash comments on the volume and links Locke to the uplifting program of Du Bois:

In the poetry section, *The New Negro* includes representations of black life at its most polished and its most basic, from Cullen's high-flown poetic diction to the thick

dialect of Zora Neale Hurston's short story, "Spunk". And yet, in the main, the representations of black life, at least in Harlem, are positive. This choice in some way aligns Locke with Du Bois and his peers, who sought to help the race by promoting positive images of black life in all venues. (Nash, 157)

As mentioned before, Du Bois was actively involved in the uplifting of the race and made great political efforts to achieve civil rights and a better education for the black population. When the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing, he supported writers by publishing their texts in *The Crisis* and in that way helped many of them to establish a career. Furthermore, Du Bois saw art as an ideal instrument to promote African-Americans and to express racial pride. As a consequence, he wanted black authors to write exclusively respectable texts about their race, that is, especially about the cultured classes. These writings then could be used as propaganda in the political struggle for equality. In 1926, Du Bois wrote the essay "The Criteria of Negro Art" as a defense of this specific vision on art. In his conclusion, Du Bois expresses the idea that "all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (Du Bois, n.p.). Du Bois aligned himself deeply with this propagandistic view, particularly after the publication of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. This novel caused a wave of controversy in the literary field, since Van Vechten was one of the first writers to depict the life of the lower class African-Americans. As Robert Worth explains, "[m]ost of the reviews against *Nigger Heaven* focused on the supposed 'immorality' of the novel, its naked representation of sex and crime. [...] Most of Harlem seems to have agreed that the book was vile and demeaning to the race" (Worth, 464). Du Bois's review on the novel contains a similar response and it again echoes his aspiration for propagandistic literature. According to Du Bois, "Carl Van Vechten's 'Nigger Heaven' is



a blow in the face. It is an affront to the hospitality of black folk and to the intelligence of white” (quoted in Kishimoto, 33). Kishimoto further clarifies Du Bois’s critique: “As a leader, Du Bois fought for respect and admiration of his people, and he could not tolerate even a young black writer treating the vices or the morally degrading situations of certain blacks” (Kishimoto, 33). Since lower-class African-Americans are far from refined, Du Bois denounces their representation and condemns Van Vechten’s story.

However, the novel not only received negative comments because of its content. The main point of criticism concerned the racial category of the author. Since Van Vechten was white, several critics, including Du Bois, linked the author and his work to the existing white interest in black exoticism, as explained earlier. Worth explains that “[w]hite reconnaissance missions into the black world, no matter how careful or conscientious, would always smell of sensationalism” (Worth, 463). With regard to this sensationalism, he furthermore adds that “[f]or many black intellectuals the white cult of the primitive could only seem bizarre and infuriating. [...] They hoped-against the odds-to build a culture, not to tear one down. And if the sensationalism of *Nigger Heaven* seemed relatively benign from a white point of view, most blacks did not enjoy being gawked at” (Worth, 470). Du Bois believed that white authors could only write about African-Americans in an exaggerated and prejudiced way, not only because they could never fully grasp their culture, but primarily because they liked the exotic typecasts. He asserted that this literary sensationalism was a result of the existing vogue of the Negro and the “cultural tourism” of the white population in Harlem (Nash, 157). On other words, whites loved black stereotypes as a source of entertainment and therefore included them in their literature as well.

Claude McKay, an African-American writer, received similar comments on his novel *Home to Harlem* (1929). Although McKay obviously has a better understanding of his race, critics nonetheless condemned his work, since it also focuses on the experiences of lower

class blacks. Charles Scruggs indicates that “[r]adical leftists did not like his novel because it was not propagandistic; the Negro middle class did not like it because it showed the realities of lower-class existence, which embarrassed them” (Scruggs, 556). What is more, the black elite again argued that McKay tried to appeal to the white audience by depicting “two young Harlemites who prize hedonism and dissipation above all things” (Nash, 157). Once more, they associated the decadent and coarse themes with the existing hype of African-American types. In other words, the black elite understood nearly every strong reference to primitiveness, whether depicted by whites or blacks, as a desire to satisfy the prevailing sensationalist taste of white readers. As Darwin Turner confirms, “[Du Bois] feared that the wildness was not a sincere expression of the artist but an effort to attract popularity from white critics by repeating the clichés about the character of black people” (Turner, 8). For a black author, it was extremely difficult to get your work published and to acquire a large readership. Since whites formed the largest part of the reading audience, the intellectuals assumed that this wildness was the only way for a writer to be successful. George Hutchinson indicates that indeed “Du Bois became convinced that white publishers published books on the “sordid” aspects of Negro life because they knew white readers got a thrill from reading “about the filth and crime and misfortune”” (Hutchinson, 166). However, as Nash indicates, McKay had other reasons to display lowbrow people: “In this case, it is the establishment view of Harlem that McKay fights back against, rejecting the notion that he must focus exclusively on genteel people and subjects when portraying black life” (Nash, 157). McKay was not the only author who challenged the propagandistic view on literature of Du Bois and the black elite. Various authors of the younger generation wanted to portray every aspect of African-American culture and society, without having to worry about the possible social consequences these might have. This group firmly believed in the power of literature to represent the equality and humanity of colored persons, but refused to exclude undesirable

images, because that would affect the authenticity of the work and its characters. Since African-American culture concerns various classes and practices, whites would have to accept both the refined as well as the more ordinary groups of that society. To some extent, the younger generation aligned with the ideology of Locke. Although Nash commented that this intellectual incorporated predominantly positive images of blacks in his collection, Nadell argues that, nonetheless, he discarded literary propaganda. On the one hand, Locke agrees with Du Bois, claiming that art should serve as a technique to challenge the old stereotypes and that it should provide essential features of the folk tradition. On the other hand, however, he denounces the propagandistic view of Du Bois and other black intellectuals, because it influences the quality of the artistic work:

He believed that art should do more than function as a corrective to prejudice; art that that was merely a corrective he labeled “propaganda,” a matter about which he and Du Bois disagreed often and publicly. He wanted racial art to stand for nothing more than itself: “Unfortunately for art, the struggle for social justice has put a pessimism upon playing-up to Caucasian type-ideals, and created too prevalently a half-caste psychology that distorts all true artistic values with the irrelevant social values of ‘representative’ and ‘unrepresentative,’ ‘favorable’ and ‘unfavorable’-and threatens a truly racial art with the psychological black of ‘lily-whitism’.” (Nadell, 57)

Both Locke and the younger generation rejected the propagandistic attitude of Du Bois. Yet, with regard to the heterogeneity that Locke defended, the younger generation holds slightly different opinions. As mentioned before, Locke included a variety of authors and writings in his volume to show the diversity of black life. However, since he left out the lower classes, you could argue that his portrayal of African-American culture remained incomplete. The younger writers likewise attempted to display the variety of black experience, but as opposed to Locke, they incorporated unpolished illustrations as well. What is more, these authors

disagreed with the so-called sensationalism that critics linked to Van Vechten and McKay. They claimed that not all colored writers presented exotic elements and typical characteristics of uncultured life to entertain white readership. On the contrary, these features revealed the richness and genuineness of their culture and furthermore completed the picture of African-American existence.

## **5.2. The Niggerati and Lower Class Life**

### **5.2.1. Wallace Thurman**

One of the strongest defenders of this new literary approach was Wallace Thurman, who denounced any literature that was used as propaganda. Furthermore, he opposed the existing literary magazines *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity* led by respectively Du Bois's NAACP and Charles S. Johnson's National Urban League, another political organization. As mentioned before, these journals supported the careers of young writers by publishing their texts and by organizing literary contests. However, Thurman criticized these journals, because they advocated a social and political function for art. Nadell indicates that he "was ready to take on these magazines, which he believed were entrenched in the politics of their organizations and in outdated aesthetic positions" (Nadell, 70). As a consequence of this disagreement, Thurman founded his own magazine *Fire!!* in 1926, along with other writers, such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, and called his literary group the 'Niggerati'. Both Nadell and Maria Balshaw agree that the foreword of *Fire!!* expresses the spirit of the younger generation, as it wants to burn, sear and penetrate the elder one (Nadell 76-77, Balshaw 24-25). With regard to this new periodical, Nadell continues that "*Fire!!* self-consciously broke from the African American arts and letters and the extant periodicals of the Harlem Renaissance. It became a place where young writers and artists, while articulating a generational difference from their elders, didn't have to worry about propaganda" (Nadell, 70). The determination of these

younger authors to condemn propagandistic writings corresponds to Locke's philosophy. Thurman even included one of his articles in the first edition of *Harlem*, published in 1928, after a fire ironically burned down the headquarters of *Fire!!* and put a stop to the publication and distribution of its first issue. Nadell reveals that this new magazine was Thurman's "final attempt to construct a forum for art that explored the complex, multifaceted lives of African-Americans" (Nadell, 84). Locke's article "Art or Propaganda" examines the ongoing debate about the function of art. Nadell clarifies its ideology:

Locke objected to propaganda, because of its "monotony" and because it promoted the feeling of "group inferiority". [...] Art, instead, should be expressive of the group: "In our spiritual growth, genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression, -in a word, must choose art and put aside propaganda." Locke is advocating not "art for art's sake" but rather a "deep realization of the fundamental purpose of art and of its function as a tap of root of vigorous, flourishing living." (Nadell, 91)

Both Locke and the younger generation thus believed in the inherent characteristics and the authority of art to show the humanity of African-Americans. Literature should serve as an instrument to express the most individual feelings and experiences, and therefore should contain features typical of black culture. What is more, Locke stimulates the younger generation to distance itself from propaganda, because it lacked a true aesthetic expression. Nadell explains this motivation, stating that "[e]ditors and journalists—Thurman's "elders" did not know yet how to deal with new artistic production. Resistant to innovation and change, they published with no eye for beauty and no ear for lyricism—qualities that were missing from propaganda" (Nadell, 72).

However, as Balshaw explains, "*Fire!!* was edited by one of Harlem's more controversial figures, Wallace Thurman, whose disparagement of Harlem's intelligentsia

almost certainly led to his not being asked to contribute to *The New Negro*” (Balshaw, 23). While Thurman supported Locke’s declarations about propaganda, he deeply disagreed with him about the proposed black themes. You could argue that Locke engaged in propagandistic literature as well, as he eliminated negative images for motives related to the uplift ideology. Thurman, by contrast, asserted that exotic or less refined elements were fundamental to the New Negro Movement, since they contributed essential aspects to the diversity and authenticity of the African-American culture. In other words, he claimed that literature should not only grasp the uniqueness of black experience, but should try to demonstrate the genuineness of colored existence on all social levels, varying from cultured to more vulgar classes. In view of that, he allowed authors to depict various low-class themes, such as prostitution, sex, drugs, adultery, homosexuality and bisexuality in his publications (Nadell, 77). Thurman’s interpretation of Negro art clearly explicates his ideology:

Thurman demanded a “truly Negroid note” in the American canon, by which he meant a body of African American art and literature that not only was created by blacks but reflected the range of African American experiences. These experiences would include representations of the “proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie,....people who still retained some individual race qualities and who were not totally white American in every respect save color of skin.” (Nadell, 73)

Considering these arguments, Thurman saw the lower class as the most genuine African-American people. He denounces the black middle class, because they attempt to uplift their race by acting increasingly according to white standards. What is more, in their aspiration for white characteristics, this highbrow group eliminated features that would refer too much to their inferior African-American heritage. Thurman claimed that, as a result of this rejection, the bourgeoisie lost a great part of its authenticity. Therefore, Thurman praised the proletariat, since they did not have any white aspirations and stayed true to their inheritance.

### 5.2.2. Langston Hughes

Another author who preferred to depict black life without any restraints was Langston Hughes. As mentioned earlier, this writer formed part of the literary group that created *Fire!!*. He thus collaborated closely with Thurman and supported the same aesthetic ideology as the younger generation. First of all and most significantly, Hughes was the most talented writer with regard to the integration and portrayal of African heritage. According to Holmes “[t]he most developed poet and literary figure of the New Negro Movement, Langston Hughes, wrote on all manners of subjects and always movingly of Africa” (Holmes, 65). Nash confirms his deep engagement with black culture, stating that for Hughes “blackness is a source of inspiration and strength” (Nash, 156). Although he has written a few novels as well, Hughes became most famous for his poems that were mostly about blues, jazz or other African-American styles of music. Felicia Miyakawa explains that “[w]riters of the Harlem Renaissance generation, particularly Langston Hughes, celebrated these vernacular musics in their fiction, finding in blues, jazz, spirituals, and other ‘black’ musics, not raw materials to be civilised into the shape of high art, but the truest articulation of the ‘Negro’ experience” (Miyakawa, 273). With regard to African tradition and the portrayal of lowbrow folks, Nash asserts that “Hughes bridges the gap between vernacular culture and the real of high art” (Nash, 156). To some extent, you could argue that Hughes tried to represent in literature the double-consciousness of Du Bois. Miyakawa clarifies this assumption and confirms Nash’s view:

Hughes also saw in jazz and blues the best hope for bridging the cultural divide between Harlem Renaissance readers – who reached for the trappings of high, ‘white’ culture by subjugating their own markers of cultural ethnicity – and average Harlemites – who lived in the world of jazz and blues. This divide between high and

low culture seems to parallel W.E.B. DuBois' well-known concept of 'double-consciousness' (Du Bois 1903), a concept Hughes consistently explored throughout his poetry and fiction. (Miyakawa, 273)

Hughes, like Du Bois, considered a colored citizen as both African and American. As a result, he attempted, on the one hand, to represent the African heritage in a realistic manner, instead of overemphasizing them as earlier writers had done with old stereotypes. On the other hand, he also accentuated the American identity of his characters, by situating them in a realistic, modern context. In other words, he reconciled African heritage with American culture and in that way presented full African-American citizens. Considering the previous arguments, Hughes thus writes exceptionally and with great respect about the authentic aspects of black life. What is more, he includes lower-class experiences in his work regardless of the possible social effects. Nash indicates that he "illuminates difficulties that most members of the black community face: economic hardship [...]; sexual exploitation [...]; and the omnipresent threat of violence and loss [...]. Through his Renaissance-era work, Hughes effectively balances political engagement with celebration of the "low-down folks"" (Nash, 156). It is true that Hughes's literary patron was Van Vechten and that this white man helped to establish his career. However, Phillip Richards asserts that "[a]t the core of this bond was not Hughes's cynical deference to a patron but shared value: a selfless commitment to art and rejection of inhibiting bourgeois standards" (Richards, 133). Although the black elite could argue that Hughes only included these lowbrow themes in order to please his patron, Richards furthermore indicates that "Hughes does not even seem to have cared one way or the other whether he satisfied the aesthetic tastes of the cultural intelligentsia to which Van Vechten [...] belonged" (Richards, 133). A difference should be made between a white author and a black author with regard to the representation of African-Americans, especially with Hughes. Although there were white and black writers who emphasized African-American primitivism



in order to obtain the attention of the white readership, Hughes included their cultural distinctiveness to prove the opposite. He hoped to show that not all folk or lowbrow themes are to be perceived as stereotypical representations or that they serve merely to satisfy the sensationalist taste of whites. On the contrary, by realistically and aesthetically displaying African-Americans of all classes and combining them with folk experiences in a modern context, he hoped that whites would finally perceive blacks as humans.

In 1926, Hughes's essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," which illuminates his ideas about literature, was published in *The Nation*. This text is considered the manifesto of the younger generation of writers, as it summarizes the main arguments of their shared ideology. Nash declares that "Hughes argues the uniqueness of African-American culture and a corresponding need for blacks to cultivate a sense of racial pride" (Nash, 153). He opposes Hughes to writers of the black bourgeoisie, such as George Schuyler, who aspire after whiteness and consequently reject their background. Hughes himself asserts that "this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (Hughes, n.p.). As explained in a previous part, the black elite adopts as many white features as possible, since supposedly any semblance of whiteness will help them become accepted in a white supremacist society. Hughes, on the other hand, feels more sympathy for the "low-down folks" who "furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations" (Hughes, n.p.). Unmistakably, Hughes wanted to write poetry that made people conscious of their race and of the existing social situation. However, he simply refuses to eliminate this group of African-Americans from his writings, since they remain truest to their culture and express pure authenticity. Hughes also explains his motives for writing about jazz and other black music,

stating that “jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world [...]; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile” (Hughes, n.p.). The writer thus encourages blacks to cherish their cultural distinctiveness. They should be proud of their Negro soul and not suppress it with white desires. Nash confirms that “[o]nly by doing this, he argues, can the Negro artist treat the most complex and sensitive subjects in a manner that distinguishes him individually and serves the race collectively” (Nash, 154). In the concluding paragraphs, Hughes again expresses what he holds to be the task and attitude of the modern writers:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes, n.p.)

This fragment contains one of the strongest arguments in defense of his literary ideology. According to Hughes, it does not matter how or in what context colored people are portrayed, as long as the representation is truthful and presents African-Americans as real human beings with their own authentic culture. Furthermore, writers must not care about any criticism regarding themes or imageries, since their chief task consists of depicting their fellow citizens in the most realistic and aesthetic manner. For Hughes, this modern literary approach is the only way to surpass prejudiced racial categories and to reach the mountaintop.

## **6. *Not Without Laughter***

### **6.1. The Racial Situation in Stanton**

Hughes's *Not Without Laughter* primarily deals with Sandy, a dark young boy who gradually becomes an adolescent and discovers the implications of his racial identity. He grows up in Stanton, a small rural town, in the proximity of four women who each have a specific influence on him. The community of Stanton is visibly divided into two groups of inhabitants. While the poor African-Americans live in wooden shacks, the prosperous whites, such as Mrs. Rice, reside in "the long residential street, with its large houses sitting in green shady lawns far back from the sidewalk" (Hughes, 46). Accordingly, there exists racial inequality among the population, which furthermore reveals itself in the social relationships. Sandy's mother Annjee, for example, works as a maid in the household of Mrs. Rice and declares that "[w]hite folks sure is a case! [...] So spoiled with colored folks waiting on 'em all their days! Don't know what they'll do in heaven, 'cause I'm gonna sit down up there myself" (Hughes, 47). Her statement indicates that whites still perceive blacks, to some extent, as their inferior servants. Although slavery has been abolished many years before, it continues to exist, though less violently and altered with regard to the tasks and social relationships. Although Annjee makes her own living, she still works for a white woman with a superior social position. In the first subsequent paragraphs, I will discuss Sandy's grandmother Hager and his aunt Tempy, as both women have their own way of respond to the existing racial situation and align with the educational program of respectively Washington and Du Bois.

### **6.2. Evaluating Ideologies and Characters**

#### **6.2.1. Hager and Booker T. Washington**

Since Annjee works long days at Mrs. Rice's house, Sandy is predominantly raised by his grandmother at home, who spends her days washing the clothes of mainly white neighbors.

This laundry service is a first example of her adherence towards Washington's approach on schooling, since she simply needs practical skills in order to gain a salary. Matthew Mosley confirms that "Hager's occupation fills a need in the local community and establishes her economic value. Her occupation also intertwines two notions of Washington's ideology, cleanliness and industry" (Mosley, 12). What is more, with this type of job, she establishes decent relationships with her neighbors and increasingly gains the respect of the other race. This attitude, based on thrift and the mutual respect between whites and blacks, is exactly what Washington proposed in his writings. The citizens of Stanton not only appreciate Hager for her hard work, they perceive her as a reliable person when it comes to personal caretaking as well. As Hughes indicates, "[a]ll the neighborhood, white or colored, called his grandmother when something happened. She was a good nurse, they said, and sick folks liked her around. Aunt Hager always came when they called, too, bringing maybe a little soup that she had made or a jelly" (Hughes, 9). For example, when at the beginning of the novel a big storm passes through the little town and ruins many houses, Hager is the one who takes care of the injured people. As a result of her economic and social efforts, Hager wins the respect of her fellow citizens and thus engages in the uplifting program that Washington encouraged.

Hager desires to transfer her sense of thrift onto her grandson and therefore encourages him to help her in her laundry service. By teaching him the importance of a work attitude, she hopes that, one day, he will become an important black leader just like Washington or Frederick Douglass. As Hager explicitly states: "If de Lawd lets me live, I's gwine make a edicated man out o' him. He's gwine be another Booker T. Washington. [...] so's he can help this black race o' our'n to come up and see the light and take they places in de world. I wants him to be a Fred Douglass leadin' the people" (Hughes, 99-100). When Sandy finds a job at the local barbershop and buys a suit and a cap with his well-earned money, Hager overtly praises his work ethos: "You'se a 'dustrious chile, sho is! Gwine make a smart man even if

yo' daddy weren't nothin'. Gwine get ahead an' do good fo' yo'self an' de race, yes, sir" (Hughes, 139)! Her expression of pride also implies the denouncement of Sandy's father Jimboy. As she furthermore proclaims, there is "[a]lways something wrong with that nigger! He'll be back here now, layin' around, doin' nothin' fo' de rest o' de summer, turnin' ma house into a theatre with him an' Harriett singin' their ragtime, an' that guitar o' his'n wangin' ever' evenin'" (Hughes, 23). As Jimboy only cares about his music and lacks a decent work attitude, his character challenges the ideals that Hager encourages. With regard to her criticism, Mosley asserts that "Jimboy, associated with blues music and instant fulfillment, values art and entertainment over economic value and hard work. [...] Hager specifically implies Jimboy's lack of economic value" (Mosley, 12). With these statements Hager once more echoes the ideology of Washington, as she believes that only with the use of thrift and mutual respect, blacks will eventually achieve social equality.

### **6.2.2. Critique on Washington: Sister Johnson & Hager's Funeral**

It seems as if the social prestige of this black woman indeed increases, after she has proven her commitment and trustworthiness to the whites. Consequently, you could argue that Washington's accommodationist program of racial uplift works for Hager. However, Hughes criticizes her approach at specific points in the story. First of all, with the use of Sister Johnson, the author constantly challenges Hager's viewpoint on whites. For example, when Sandy cannot attend the Free Children's Day Party because he is black, his grandmother shows tolerance and declares that "[t]hey's po' trash owns that park what don't know no better, hurtin' chillens' feelin's, but we'll forgive 'em! [...] let's we have a party of our own" (Hughes, 143). Instead of struggling for their rights or taking up a rebellious attitude, she advocates patience and stresses that good work in the community will eventually provide blacks an equal status. Sister Johnson, on the other hand, displays hatred towards racism and

proclaims that “[d]ey ain’t nary hell hot ‘nough to burn ole white folks, ‘cause dey’s devils deyselves! De dirty hounds” (Hughes, 143)! This woman furthermore condemns the humble working attitude of Hager and her daughter Annjee, who likewise demonstrates her thrift at Mrs. Rice’s house. For instance, when Hager declares that whites “always likes you when you tries to do right”, Sister Johnson opposes her opinion: “When you tries to do yo’ work right, you means. Dey ain’t carin’ nothin’ ‘bout you ‘yond workin’ fo’ ‘em” (Hughes, 98). Hager’s daughter Harriett agrees with Sister Johnson and cannot understand how her sister and her mother allow whites to dominate and insult them: “You and Annjee are too easy. You just take whatever white folks give you—*coon* to your face, and *nigger* behind your backs—and don’t say nothing. You run to some white person’s back door for every job you get, and then they pay you one dollar for five dollars’ worth of work, and fire you whenever they get ready” (Hughes, 56). Harriett and Sister Johnson both realizes that whites still take advantage of the black population and want to make others aware of the existing racial conditions. They refuse to be patient and instead encourage an attitude of militant protest. By giving these two critical characters a voice, Hughes puts Hager’s attitude into perspective and shows the ignorance of Hager towards existing racial problems.

The critique of Hughes on Washington’s type of learning is most noticeable in his portrayal of Hager’s funeral. In this scene, the author first repeats her social achievements and acknowledges that all races and classes respected her:

The Little Baptist Church was packed with people. The sisters of the lodge came in full regalia, with banners and insignia, and the brothers turned out with them. Hager’s coffin was banked with flowers. There were many fine pieces from the families for whom she had washed and from the white neighbors she had nursed in sickness. There were offerings, too, from Tempy’s high-toned friends and from Harriett’s girl

companions in the house in the Bottoms. Many of the bellboys, porters, and bootleggers sent wreaths and crosses with golden letters on them [...]. (Hughes, 167)

With regard to the crowd that attends the service, Mosley notes that “Hughes makes a point to note the differing complexions, occupations, and geographic locations of those who express sympathy for Hager’s passing. Her recognition transcends socially constructed boundaries” (Mosley, 16). Nevertheless, Hughes’s criticism emerges near the end of the service, as Hager is buried in “the far, lonesome corner where most of the Negroes rested” (Hughes, 167). With this last image, the author indicates that, despite her numerous efforts and accomplishments, Hager remains an inferior black woman, and furthermore suggests that Washington’s “‘go slow’ accommodationism” offers no solution to racial inequality (quoted in Bauerlein, 106).

### **6.2.3. Tempy and W.E.B. Du Bois**

As the program of Washington has proved unsuccessful, Hughes decides to offer and evaluate a second approach to education. With the portrayal of aunt Tempy, who forms part of the black middle-class and adopts Sandy after Hager’s death, the author introduces the ideology of Du Bois and other intellectuals. When the boy discovers an issue of *The Crisis* in Tempy’s personal literary collection and asks about W.E.B. Du Bois, his aunt openly expresses her deep sympathy for this “great man” (Hughes, 175) and explains why he deserves more respect than Washington:

“Teaching Negroes to be servants, that’s all Washington did!” [...] “Du Bois wants our rights. He wants us to be real men and women. He believes in social equality. But Washington—huh!” The fact that he had established an industrial school damned Washington in Tempy’s eyes, for there were enough colored workers already. But Du Bois was a doctor of philosophy and had studied in Europe! ... That’s what Negroes needed to do, get smart, study books, go to Europe! “Don’t talk to me about

Washington,” Tempy fumed. “Take Du Bois for your model, not some white folk’s nigger.” (Hughes, 176)

Tempy aligns with the criticism of black intellectuals on Washington, stating that his method will only lead to the continuation of oppression. Du Bois, on the other hand, encourages a higher education and uses a more direct and political approach to uplift his race. Consequently, as Mosley confirms, “Du Bois, for Tempy, is associated with real progress of African Americans” (Mosley, 19).

Inspired by Du Bois, Tempy actively engages in the uplifting of the race, by participating in the development of local organizations for coloreds, such as local Red Cross and the Liberty Bond clubs (Hughes, 185). As a middle-class woman, she furthermore believes that blacks will only acquire social recognition, if they aspire for white standards: “Colored people certainly needed to come up into the world, Tempy thought, up to the level of white people—dress like white people, talk like white people, think like white people—and then they would no longer be called ‘niggers’” (Hughes, 173). Because of the existing racial prejudices, it is highly possible that whites will associate an African-American with a “nigger”, in other words, a stereotype. Since whiteness is associated with superiority, the black bourgeoisie consequently will try to emphasize white features in order to challenge those racial categories and prove their equal status. When whites, in turn, see their characteristics reflected in the other race, they will start to show respect for the black population. Next to her individual portrayal of superiority, Tempy in addition surrounds herself exclusively with “the best people”, in other words, “people of standing in the darker world—doctors, school-teachers, a dentist, a lawyer, a hairdresser” (Hughes, 173-174). In view of this, Tempy thus adopts as many white characteristics as possible and avoids any association with blackness, since that could harm her social status. What is more, this aunt even wishes she had been a white woman. The author indicates that Tempy has worked as a



maid for Mrs. Barr-Grant for several years. When this white woman expressed her appreciation for Tempy and declared that “it’s too bad you aren’t white”, the aunt “had taken this to heart, not as an insult, but as a compliment” (Hughes, 172). In view of her attitude towards both races, it is remarkable that the rejection of her black heritage does not seem to form any personal problem, as this middle-class woman esteems whiteness above anything else.

Tempy desires to convey this bourgeois attitude onto her nephew and consequently encourages him to act more like a white individual and less like a black one. A first thing that needs to be modified is his black dialect, since she associates this language with inferiority. Therefore, whenever Sandy uses vernacular forms, Tempy corrects him: “You needn’t say ‘yes’m’ in this house. We are not used to slavery talk here” (Hughes, 170). Secondly, she forbids him to eat typical black food, such as black-eyed peas, pigtails or watermelons, because “[w]hite people were for ever picturing colored folks with huge slices of watermelon in their hands” (Hughes, 173). Instead, she cooks ‘white’ meals from *The Ladies’ Home Journal* (Hughes, 173). Another element that forms an obstacle to a middle-class existence is the name ‘Sandy’, since this nickname refers to his African-American background. Accordingly, Tempy prefers to call him by his birth name ‘James’, which “suggests a new identity for the protagonist. He is no longer ‘Sandy,’ the boy shrouded in poverty and deep racial injustices; now he is ‘James,’ a member of an exceptional class of African-Americans” (quoted in Mosley, 18-19). By encouraging the boy to use proper language, eat decent food, and accentuate his birth name, Tempy hopes that he will develop a respectable identity based on white norms. In view of this, it appears obvious that she requests Sandy to take the classical course in high school, which was based on European knowledge and “included Latin, ancient history, and English” (Hughes, 177). As Tempy indicates, “[c]olored people

needed to encourage talent so that the white race would realize Negroes weren't all mere guitar-players and housemaids" (Hughes, 171).

I argue that Tempy's attitude towards race corresponds to Du Bois' ideas about the content and function of black literature, since he likewise encouraged the exclusion of uncultured and prejudiced images. Although lowbrow features exemplify black culture, both Tempy and Du Bois fear that these would reiterate the stereotypes of the past, and therefore denounce them. In other words, these two persons desire to promote their race by displaying black middle-class values, whether in real life or in literature, and consequently identify primarily with white characteristics. Not only Tempy's lifestyle personifies the propagandistic literature that Du Bois proposed, moreover, her literary collection also contains exclusively white authors and black propaganda. First of all, she possessed "a row of English classics bound in red, an *Encyclopedia of World Knowledge* in twelve volumes, a book on household medicine full of queer drawings, and some modern novels—*The Rosary*, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, the newest Harold Bell Wright, and all that had ever been written by Gene Stratton Porter, Tempy's favorite author" (Hughes, 175). It is clear that these books are either written by white individuals and or deal with academic themes. Secondly, when it comes to black authors, Hughes specifies that "[t]he Negro was represented by Chestnut's *House Behind the Cedars*, and the *Complete Poems* of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, whom Tempy tolerated on account of his fame, but condemned because he had written so much in dialect and so often of the lower classes of colored people" (Hughes, 175). Her critical statements about these black authors and their literary themes once more repeat the aesthetic thinking of Du Bois, as she prefers the depiction of cultured highbrow African-Americans.

#### **6.2.4. Critique on Tempy: Non-Blackness**

However, comparable to what he had done with Hager and Washington, Hughes also uses Tempy's character to criticize the ideology of Du Bois. Throughout the novel, the author predominantly accentuates the negative aspects of her personality and links them to her rejection of blackness. The main point of critique is given with regard to the treatment of her lower class family members. Now that Tempy is a member of the bourgeoisie, she "ashamed of her family connections" and therefore hardly ever visits her mother and sisters (Hughes, 174). Hager is aware of Tempy's embarrassment and states that "[n]ow, my Tempy, she's married and doin' well. Got a fine house an' her husband's a mail-clerk in de civil service makin' good money. They don't 'sociate no mo' with none but de high-toned colored folks [...]. Course Tempy don't come to see me much 'cause I still earns ma livin' with ma arms in de tub" (Hughes, 19). Whenever Tempy does visit the little Negro shack where she was raised, she always behaves as a superior (white) person: "Then she came through the house into the kitchen, with much the air of a mistress of the manor descending to the servants' quarters. [...] When she had gone, everybody felt relieved—as if a white person had left the house" (Hughes, 112-113). Hughes indicates that Tempy's attitude towards her family is highly hypocritical, since her feelings appear to be artificial: "She was almost a stranger to Sandy, yet she kissed him peremptorily on the forehead as he stood in the doorway" (Hughes, 112). It is noteworthy that the author explicitly reiterates this formulation and implication, when Tempy visits her sick mother Hager. Once more, Hughes underlines her feeling of superiority and furthermore compares Tempy to Annjee's white mistress: "That afternoon, Tempy came, like a stranger to the house, and took charge of things. Sandy felt uncomfortable and shy in her presence. This aunt of his had a hard, cold, correct way of talking that resembled Mrs. Rice's manner of speaking to his mother when Annjee used to work there" (Hughes, 162). Although she has escaped poverty and acquired a higher status in society, she nevertheless has become an emotionless individual who treats her lower class family as an

inferior group of African-Americans. By constantly emphasizing Tempy's hypocrisy and disloyalty towards her own family, Hughes thus strongly criticizes her bourgeois behavior. While her family members stay true to their authentic African-American heritage, Tempy discards her black background and accordingly seems to have become a member of the white race. What is more, since her character personifies the ideals of Du Bois, this critique furthermore implies the denunciation of his ideology. Although Hughes respects Du Bois' educational program, as I will clarify in the following chapters of this thesis, he disagrees with his aesthetic beliefs. I argue that Tempy's rejection of her family members corresponds to the exclusion of unrefined individuals in propagandistic literature. In view of this, both Tempy and Du Bois betray the black race, as they aspire for whiteness and disregard the authentic African-Americans in their struggle for racial uplift. Since their racial attitude does not correspond to Hughes's personal beliefs, he criticizes these bourgeois individuals.

#### **6.2.5. Jimboy & Harriett: Blackness and Nature**

In the previous parts, I have showed that Hughes rejects the educational method of Washington and the aesthetic beliefs of Du Bois with the portrayal of Hager and Tempy. In the following chapters, I will discuss mainly Jimboy and Harriett, as they are the most authentic black characters of the novel. With their portrayal, Hughes challenges the white aspirations of the bourgeoisie and furthermore denounces the aesthetic ideology of Du Bois. The adherence of Jimboy and Harriett towards African-American culture becomes clear in their love for blues, jazz and dancing. Moreover, Hughes particularly conveys their racial loyalty, by associating Jimboy and Harriett with nature. In her article, Schultz explains that black culture is deeply permeated with natural references and declares that "[a]s Hughes' novel develops, a class difference as well as a difference in the quality of life itself is revealed through his descriptions of nature" (Schultz, 1178). As mentioned before, Tempy's middle-

class attitude appears highly unnatural and her life in the city additionally opposes the natural environment of her lowbrow family. Schultz confirms that “[b]y alienating her from nature, Hughes underscores her desires not only to identify with the color and material prosperity of Stanton’s upper-class whites, but also to distance herself from the rich African-American culture embraced by other members of her family” (Schultz, 1185). Jimboy and Harriett, on the other hand, remain loyal to their racial background and enjoy all types of black music, such as “the old Southern songs, the popular rag-time ditties, and the hundreds of varying verses of blues that he would pick up in the big dirty cities of the South” (Hughes, 39). In his description of both characters, Hughes noticeably emphasizes their link with nature, for example when Jimboy plays the guitar:

Softly he ran his fingers, light as a breeze, over his guitar strings, imitating the wind rustling through the long leaves of the corn.[...] In the starry blackness the singing notes of the guitar became a plaintive hum, like a breeze in a grove of palmettos; became a low moan, like the wind in a forest of live-oaks strung with long strands of hanging moss. (Hughes, 39)

Harriett her dance moves expresses her relation with nature as well, as “she kept on, her hips speaking an earthly language quite their own” (Hughes, 37).

The part of the novel that most explicitly describes the connection between black culture and nature is “Dance”. In this chapter, Harriett goes to a party with her friends and takes along her nephew Sandy. Hughes description of the scene again contains numerous references to nature, as “the music was like a lazy river flowing between mountains, carving like a canyon coolly, calmly, and without insistence [...] the piano was the water flowing, and the high, thin chords of the banjo were the mountains floating in the clouds. But in sultry tones, alone and always, the brass hornet spoke harshly about the earth” (Hughes, 63). At first, the music follows a steady track and “the drum-beats [are] barely audible” (Hughes, 63).

However, as the party progresses and the dancers lose themselves in the rhythm, the atmosphere becomes increasingly sensual:

Couples began to sway languidly, melting together like candy in the sun as hips rotated effortlessly to the music. Girls snuggled pomaded heads on men's chests, or rested powered chins on men's shoulders, while wild young boys put both arms tightly around their partners' waist and let their hands hang down carelessly over female haunches. Bodies moved ever so easily together—ever so easily [...] the piano sobbed aloud with a rhythmical, secret passion [...] people danced their own individual movements to the scream and moan of music. (Hughes, 66)

Moreover, as the beat rises, the couples begin to dance more and more savage and Hughes's illustrations of nature are less peaceful: "Cruel, desolate, unadorned was their music now, like the body of a ravished woman on the sunbaked earth; violent and hard, like a giant standing over his bleeding mate in the blazing sun. [...] The earth rolls relentlessly, and the sun blazes for ever on the earth, breeding, breeding" (Hughes, 67). Because of this increasingly primitive and exotic scenery, you could argue that Hughes attempts to please the white audiences by satisfying their sensationalism with stereotypical portrayals of blacks. However, I claim that he merely tries to convey the authenticity and richness of African-American culture, by realistically and extensively describing its typical characteristics. The "tomtom of the drums" (Hughes, 67) in this chapter echoes the tom-tom about which he speaks in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", and consequently the primitivism and exoticism should be perceived in view of his aesthetic statements. Schultz confirms these arguments and furthermore explains his use of natural references in relation to his literary objectives:

Throughout the entire novel [...] Hughes also integrates images and metaphors of nature into his narrative in order to celebrate his people, their color, and their culture. His imagistic and metaphorical association of African Americans with nature might be

interpreted as promoting the exotic expectations of white readers at the risk of primitivizing the very people and culture he praises. However, the effect of this bold rhetorical move is to energize, even to flaunt, African-American diversity, beauty, and accomplishment in creating a vibrant culture, in the face of the persistent degradations of racism and poverty. (Schultz, 1182)

Schultz thus emphasizes that his exotic and energetic descriptions of the party reflect the liveliness of the black population and their optimistic spirit in the struggle for equality. In addition, this author points out Hughes's use of color, as it illustrates the richness and heterogeneity of African-American culture. In her article, Schultz furthermore states that "[h]is pleasure in nature's mosaic is no less, however, than his pleasure in the colors of African-American people as he glories in the diversity of skin tones throughout *Not Without Laughter*. [...] In chapter 8, 'Dance', Hughes' description of African-American skin tones rivals nature's colors" (Schultz, 1183). Indeed, Hughes portrays the dancing crowd as a gathering of numerous shades and accentuates this diversity: "Dresses and suits of all shades and colors, and a vast confusion of busy heads on swaying bodies. Faces gleaming like circus balloons—lemon-yellow, coal-black, powder-grey, ebony-black, blue-black faces; chocolate, brown, orange, tan, creamy-gold faces [...]" (Hughes, 68). With the depiction of Jimboy and Harriett, Hughes incorporates the authenticity of black culture and typical lowbrow life in his novel. Their love for the blues, rhythmical dancing, and other kinds of African-American art forms, expresses their loyalty towards black heritage and opposes the whiteness of Tempy. This middle-class aunt is the only character who truly despises typical African-American music, for reasons previously mentioned: "Blues and spirituals Tempy and her husband hated because they were too Negro. In her house Sandy dared not sing a word of *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, for what had darky slave songs to do with respectable people" (Hughes, 173). Nevertheless, as Hughes has indicated in his essay, his sympathy goes out for the most

authentic African-Americans and not for those highbrow individuals who are ashamed of their black background. While the portrayal of the middle-class aunt is rather cold and distant, Jimboy, Harriett and Hager, the characters who stay true to their blackness, are treated with much more sympathy and warmth. Furthermore, they add color and musicality to the novel, in other words, those features that are essential to African-American culture.

Next to remaining loyal to their blackness, these Harriett and Jimboy, in addition, exemplify the coarser aspects of colored life. This lower class lifestyle once more opposes Tempy, who associates exclusively with educated, upper-class people. As Hager has previously indicated, Jimboy prefers music and entertainment above work and taking care of his family. He furthermore lives an unstable existence, traveling from one town to another and constantly shifting jobs. Yet, Harriett is probably the most vulgar character of the novel. This aunt often enjoys the nightlife of Stanton, works as a prostitute at Maudel's brothel, and even gets arrested for street-walking (Hughes, 148). What is more, after she leaves her family, she goes to live in the Bottoms, one of the roughest neighborhoods in town:

It was a gay place—people did what they wanted to, or what they had to do, and didn't care—for in the Bottoms folks ceased to struggle against the boundaries between good and bad, or white and black, and surrendered amiably to immorality. [...] little yellow and brown and black girls in pink or blue bungalow aprons laughed invitingly in doorways, and dice rattled with the staccato gaiety of jazz music [...]. Pimps played pool; bootleggers lounged in big red cars [...] young blacks fought like cocks and enjoyed it; [...] old women ate pigs' feet and watermelon and drank beer; whiskey flowed; gin was like water; [...] and deep nigger-throated voices that had long ago stopped rebelling against the ways of this world rose in song. (Hughes, 157)

This scenery obviously differs from the upper-class existence of Tempy. In the Bottoms blacks do eat typical black food, listen to jazz music, and lead a lowbrow existence



fighting with each other, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes. Undoubtedly, these are the characters Du Bois wants to avoid in his propagandistic literature. Hughes, on the other hand, spends quite a lot of attention to these unrefined African-Americans and portrays them rather aesthetically. The previously mentioned dance scene, in which Hughes uses natural descriptions and various shades of color, is a good example of his artistic manner of portraying authentic blacks. It is worth mentioning that the author does not express any contempt for The Bottoms or its inhabitants. Instead of criticizing the immorality, he merely indicates that, in this neighborhood, whites and coloreds get along with each other quite well. Although this part of town does not represent the best kinds of African-Americans, it seems to be the only location in Stanton where you can enjoy life, regardless of the existing racial problems. With regard to Harriet and Jimboy, Hager is the only person who criticizes their attitude, as explained in the previous sections. Nonetheless, since Hughes denounced her personality for the largest part, her critique loses much of its power. What is more, her criticism about their love for black music needs to be put into perspective well. It appears that her hatred towards Jimboy's music is merely based on her Christian ideals, as his blues tunes usually have a "powerful sexual subtext" (Schultz, 1183). In fact, Hughes indicates that "when he took his soft-playing guitar and picked out spirituals and old-time Christian hymns on its sweet strings, Hager forgot she was his enemy, and sang and rocked with the rest of them" (Hughes, 25). She even requests him to "play some o' ma pieces like *When the Saints Come Marchin' In* or *This World is Not Ma Home*—something Christian from de church" (Hughes, 40). In view of this, Hager also displays genuine love for African-American music, yet only for the religious black spirituals. Harriett eventually will play a decisive role in the future of Sandy, as she encourages him to continue his studies. By providing her with this crucial role at the end of the novel, Hughes shows that even the most uncultivated daughter is worth depicting. Each of the individuals previously discussed have an impact on the

protagonist Sandy. While his grandmother teaches him the significance of a work attitude, his father and his aunt Harriett introduce him to African-American music, and Tempy conveys him the importance of a higher education. While every family member attempts to shape Sandy according to their personal ideology, the boy, in the end, displays a peculiar mindset different from all the others, yet echoing each one of them.

### **6.3. Sandy: Reconciling of Ideologies and Characters**

#### **6.3.1. Growing Awareness**

As Sandy grows up, he becomes aware of the racial situation in his town and gradually develops a critical mindset towards his relatives and society. In the novel, there are several incidences, which, each in their turn, awaken his consciousness. A first instance occurs at school, where “the Negro children were kept in separate rooms under colored teachers until they had passed fourth grade” (Hughes, 90). Up until fourth grade, Sandy was somewhat ignorant of the racial segregation, but when he enters fifth grade, he experiences this discrimination from very close. On the first day, the teacher points out a seat for every child according to their last name, but selects the whites first. Subsequently, she obliges the colored students to sit at the back of the classroom. Whereas Sandy does not understand this division, a black girl explains that “[s]he puts us in the back cause we’re niggers. [...] My name’s Sadie Butler and she’s put me behind the Z cause I’m a nigger” (Hughes, 92). From Sandy’s reaction, it is clear that he is somewhat shocked as he “felt like crying. And he was beginning to be ashamed of crying because he was no longer a small boy. But the teacher’s putting the colored children in the back of the room made him feel like crying” (Hughes, 92). A second occasion in the novel that makes the boy aware of the existing inequality is Christmas. Hughes explains that “Sandy wanted a Golden Flyer sled” as a present (Hughes, 102). However, since his mother and grandmother cannot afford it, they decide to give him a hand-

maid sled manufactured by Logan, a former carpenter. It is worth remarking that, while the days before Christmas Eve Sandy firmly hopes he will receive the Golden Flyer, Hughes already indicates that his wish will not come true by means of the setting. The author describes that “it began to snow again. The great heavy flakes fell with languid gentility over the town and silently the whiteness covered everything” (Hughes, 107). I contend that this depiction of whiteness can be read symbolically and refers to the dominance of the white inhabitants of Stanton, who own enough money to buy expensive presents. Because of this superiority, they overpower the poor blacks and accordingly the snow covers everything in white. Schultz confirms that “[i]n depicting the coming of snow, Hughes implies a symbolical connection [...] with the prevalence of white power [...]” (Schultz, 1181). At Christmas Eve, Hughes furthermore strengthens this connection by visibly contrasting the decorated houses of the whites and the empty huts of the coloreds, and again accentuating the prevalence of the snow:

Candles and poinsettia flowers. Wreaths of evergreens. Baby trees hung with long strands of tinsel and fragile ornaments of colored glass. Sandy passed the windows of many white folks’ houses where the curtains were up and warm floods of electric light made bright the cozy rooms. In Negro shacks, too, there was the dim warmth of oil-lamps and Christmas candles glowing. But at home there wasn’t even a holly wreath. And the snow was whiter and harder than ever on the ground. (Hughes, 108)

That same evening, Sandy sees his mother outside and “could distinguish quite clearly behind her a solid, home-made sled bumping rudely over the snow” (Hughes, 110). Sandy realizes that this is not the Golden Flyer he has wished for and on Christmas morning he “opens his eyes and blinked at the white world outside” (Hughes, 110). With this description, Hughes once more illustrates that the white population controls society and that African-Americans hardly have any hope for an equal economic status. Yet, although Sandy feels deeply

disappointed about the home-made sled and is ashamed to ride it, he understands that Annjee and Hager tried their best to please him. As a result, he does not want to hurt their feelings and lies that “[I]t’s an awful nice sled” (Hughes, 111). However, when Tempy enters the house and gives Sandy a volume of *Andersen’s Fairy Tales*, a book written by a white Danish author, he openly expresses his discontent: “I don’t want Tempy’s old book! [...] I like my sled what you-all gave me, but I don’t want no old book from Tempy” (Hughes, 113). As I have mentioned before, Sandy dislikes his strange, cold aunt and feels no love for her. His honest reaction about Tempy’s gift opposes his lies about the sled and, moreover, indicates that, regardless of their poverty, he prefers his closest relatives to his rich, but emotionless aunt. Put differently, even though Sandy is aware that Tempy could offer him everything he desires, he favors Annjee and Hager who remain most true and loving to him. In view of this, the symbolical richness of his affectionate mother and grandmother means more to him than the emotional shortage of his middle-class aunt.

Although Sandy is still relatively ignorant towards racial issues, he, nevertheless, starts to develop a critical frame of mind. At specific moments in the text, his growing awareness becomes clear, when the boy explicitly contemplates about his blackness and the racial attitude of specific persons:

He wondered sometimes whether if he washed and washed his face and hands, he would ever be white. Someone had told him once that blackness was only skin-deep.... And would he ever have a big house with electric lights in it, like his Aunt Tempy—but is was mostly white people who had such fine things, and they were mean to colored.... Some white folks were nice, though. Earl was nice at school, but not the little boys across the street, who called him “nigger” everyday... and not Mrs. Rice, who scolded his mother.... Aunt Harrie didn’t like any white folks at all. (Hughes, 125)

Sandy tries to form a personal mindset with the numerous opinions he has heard about race. He does not seem to generalize the skin color of individuals, as for instance Aunt Harriett does, but attempts to judge people's behavior, since he realizes that some of his white fellows, such as Earl, are actually kind to him. As a young boy, he is relatively unaware of the existing racial inequality and has friends of different skin tones. Although Earl is white, Willie-Mae is dark, and Buster owns a light-colored skin, these children nevertheless consider themselves alike. While the first occurrence that disrupted this imagined equality was the division at school, Free Children's Day Party is the event with that most powerfully highlights their racial disparity. To promote the opening of the town's new amusement park at springtime, the *Daily Reader* has distributed coupons for children with which they could get "free admittance to the park, free popcorn, free lemonade, and one ride on each of the amusement attractions" (Hughes, 140). However, black children, such as Sandy and Willie-Mae are not allowed to enter the park, because "[t]his party's for white kids" (Hughes, 141). This event furthermore demonstrates the complexity of race, as Buster was permitted entry and thus could pass for a white boy. Schultz indicates the mindfulness that grows among the youngsters, stating that "[r]acism becomes personal at Easter time, when [...] he and his friends are rejected from the city-wide children's party. Recognizing the impermeability of racial categories, Sandy painfully realizes that 'Kansas is getting like the South... They don't like us here either' (NWL 200)" (Schultz, 1182). The final and most personal discrimination occurs at the Drummer's Hotel, where Sandy cleans the spittoons and shines shoes during his spare time. In this scene, Hughes once more stresses the omnipresence of racial categories when a white southerner asks Sandy to dance like a coon, in other words, a black stereotypical character of the minstrel shows. Evidently, this typecasts is merely a fictional construction and does not bare any resemblance to real individuals. These racial categories are simply used by white racists to indicate their superior position:

“Say, little coon, let’s see you hit a step for the boys!... Down where I live, folks, all our niggers can dance!... Come on, boy, snap it up!”

“I can’t,” Sandy said, frowning instead of smiling, and growing warm as he stood there in the smoky circle of grinning white men. “I don’t know how to dance.”

“O, you’re one of them stubborn Kansas coons, heh?” said the red-necked fellow disgustedly [...]. “You Northern darkies are dumb as hell, anyhow!” [...]

“Now, a nigger his size down the South would no more think o’ not dancin’ if a white man asked him than he would think o’ flyin’. This boy’s jest tryin’ to be smart, that’s all. Up here you-all’ve got darkies spoilt, believin’ they’re somebody. [...] Boy! I want to see you dance!” he commanded. (Hughes, 155)

As a result of the aggressive request and the following insults, Sandy feels threatened. What is more, the white man does not only attack him verbally, he furthermore harasses him physically, as he “grabbed him roughly by the arm” when Sandy tries to leave. Eventually, the boy can escape the white gathering and runs down the street. It is worth mentioning that Hughes again stresses white supremacy by means of the setting, describing that “[a]s Sandy ran, he felt the snow-flakes falling in his face” (Hughes, 156). The previously described incidences all contribute to the growing consciousness of Sandy. During his youth, the boy remains rather passive towards racial issues, as he merely ponders about various viewpoints and tries to form his own opinions. Nevertheless, when he enters his adolescence, his personal conviction and criticism become increasingly visible.

### **6.3.2. Critical Voice and Attitude**

During his stay at Tempy’s house, Sandy is introduced to the cultivated upper-classes of the black population, and, initially, does not protest against their white aspirations. The boy even grows an interest in books and takes a classical course in high school. With regard to

education, Sandy has been influenced throughout his life by both Hager and Tempy. While these women try to persuade him of their favorite intellectuals, as mentioned before, Sandy thinks “they are both great men” (Hughes, 176). This personal conviction is a first example of his growing criticism and implies a reconciliation of various viewpoints. On the one hand, Sandy has learned several aspects of reality, such as the importance of work to earn money or the existence of certain social problems, at the local barbershop and at the hotel. As a consequence, he appreciates a decent work attitude as promoted by Washington and his grandmother. On other hand, he likes to read books and experiences the benefits of his education at high school. In view of this, Sandy refuses to take a side and bases his mindset on a combination of diverse influences. Nevertheless, when it comes to blackness and racial loyalty, the boy clearly supports the attitude of his lowbrow family members. As indicated before, Sandy detests the coldness of Aunt Tempy and perceives her as a stranger. With regard to her middle-class beliefs, he agrees that a higher schooling can help to uplift the African-Americans, but strongly disagrees that blacks should reject their heritage and exclusively adopt white values. In view of these personal opinions, Sandy thus refuses to identify completely with the black bourgeoisie. Moreover, he even desires to explore the nightlife at Stanton, which is mostly associated with the lower classes. Although at first he declines the offer to join his friends to Cudge Windsor’s pool hall, because “Aunt Tempy might get sore”, he eventually decides to visit this ordinary place. In the following fragment, Hughes specifies the social status of the pool hall and furthermore clarifies Sandy’s motivations to go there:

Of course, the best colored people did not patronize Cudge’s, even though his business was not in the Bottoms. [...] But since Cudge catered to what Mr. Siles called “the common element,” the best people stayed away.

After months of bookishness and subjection to Tempy's prim plans for his improvement, Sandy found the pool hall an easy and amusing place in which to pass time. (Hughes, 179)

At the pool hall, girls and boys flirted with each other, boys rolled the dice or played pool, and low-class African-Americans, such as Uncle Dan Givens, shared their stories in the thickest black dialect. To Sandy, the place offers a way to escape Tempy's strict method of upbringing and to enjoy the more pleasurable aspects of adolescence, regardless of class or social prestige. Schultz confirms that "[a]lthough Sandy submits to his aunt Tempy's demands that he develop intellectually, he resists her insistence that he reject his African-American cultural identity" (Schultz, 1186). This rebellious attitude demonstrates Sandy's growing independence, as he starts to act according to his individual thoughts about racial and class distinctions. What is more, Sandy's affiliation with lowbrow folks at the pool hall again exemplifies his compromising mentality. Whereas he associates with the more cultured African-Americans at school, he nevertheless enjoys the company of unrefined individuals as well. This attitude again opposes Tempy's character, as she disdained the lower classes from the moment she became a member of the bourgeoisie. This middle-class aunt, however, attempts to keep Sandy on the right path and discourages him to connect with uncultivated people. Accordingly, she expresses her aversion about the pool hall and about Sandy's inappropriate behavior: "I won't permit it," said Tempy. "I won't stand for it. You'll have to mend your ways, young man! Spending your evenings in Windsor's pool parlor and running the streets with a gang of common boys that have had no raising [...]. In other words, he has been acting just like a nigger [...]" (Hughes, 190)! Yet, Sandy holds on to his personal conviction and denounces her criticism. His thoughts reveal his loyalty towards his background and his rejection of middle-class whiteness, as he questions "where else was there for a fellow to play? Who wanted to go to those high-toned people's houses, like the



Mitchells', and look bored all the time while they put Caruso's Italian records on their new victrola? [...] he thought that his father and Harriett used to sing better. And they sang nicer songs" (Hughes, 192). In view of these personal viewpoints, Sandy thus criticizes Tempy's affiliation with exclusively the best people and is not ashamed to associate with lowbrow individuals. What is more, while the bourgeoisie rejects black culture and attempts to act as white as possible, Sandy adores African-American music and truly loves his uncultured relatives Harriett and Jimboy. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Sandy, at this part of the novel, still holds his critical thoughts to himself.

Tempy not only criticizes Sandy's meetings with ordinary boys at the pool hall, she furthermore condemns his friend Pansetta Young, who also forms part of the uncultured classes of blacks. Accordingly, the aunt continues her outburst, declaring that "I saw you with my own eyes yesterday walking home with that girl Pansetta Young!... Well, I want you to understand that I won't have it [...] If she were a girl of our own kind, it would be all right" (Hughes, 190). Tempy not only disapproves Pansetta's social status, she also fears that the girl will form an obstacle to Sandy's prosperous future and asserts that "she's not going to ruin you, after all I've done to try to make something out of you" (Hughes, 190). Both Tempy and her husband agree that the boy should "leave that girl alone" because "she's dangerous" (Hughes, 191). Sandy, in his turn, admits that "[h]e kept up his school-work, it was true, but he seemed to have lost all interest in acquiring the respectable bearing and attitude towards life that Tempy thought he should have" (Hughes, 190). These thoughts once more reveal his rebellious spirit towards the middle-class lifestyle and show that he only cares about their educational values. With a reference to nature, Hughes indicates that Sandy's loss of interest is furthermore accompanied by a feeling of nostalgia for his former existence: "Through his open window, as he lay in bed after Tempy's tirade about the girl, he could see the stars and the tops of the budding maple-trees. A cool earth-smelling breeze lifted the white curtains,

scattering the geometry papers that he had left lying on his study table” (Hughes, 193). Reiterating the association between nature and black authenticity, Schultz confirms that this fragment demonstrates “his resistance to her unnatural commitment to white superiority” and his empathy for “his natural African-American heritage” (Schultz, 1186). Nevertheless, despite this second disagreement, Sandy continues to obey Tempy’s instructions and decides to spend less time with Pansetta. Yet, when he notices she meets other boys, Sandy becomes jealous and regrets his obedient, snobbish attitude:

What made his mind run away with him? Because of what Tempy had said?... To hell with Tempy!

“She’s just an old-fashioned darky Episcopalian, that’s what Tempy is! And she wanted me to drop Pansetta because her mother doesn’t belong to the Dunbar Whist Club. Gee, but I’m ashamed of myself. I’m a cad and a snob, that’s all I am, and I’m going to apologize.” (Hughes, 195)

While Sandy disagreed with Tempy’s bourgeois attitude regarding the boys at the pool hall, he now realizes that he has taken up the same snobbish attitude towards Pansetta. By reestablishing his friendship with the lowbrow girl, Sandy explicitly challenges Tempy’s norms for the first time. From this moment onwards, the boy dares to manifest his critical voice and to act according to his personal beliefs about race and social classes.

#### **6.4. Towards a Better Future**

Near the end of the novel, the protagonist also displays this rebellious attitude, when he decides to accompany his mother in Chicago. Since Sandy is “an honor student” and would get “through [his] exams all right”, he is given full permission to leave high school before the end of the year (Hughes, 199). Nevertheless, although Sandy wanted to continue his education

in Chicago, he and his mother lack the money to go through with this objective. As a result, Annjee persuades against education and encourages Sandy to make his own living:

The prospects of returning to school, however, were not bright. Some weeks it was impossible for Sandy to save even a half-dollar. And Annjee said now that she believed he should stay out of school and work to take care of himself, since he was as large as a man and had more education already that she'd had at his age. (Hughes, 209)

It is worth noting that the last sentence again emphasizes Annjee's adherence towards Washington's practical program, as she declares that a higher education is superfluous. The younger Sandy would have obeyed his mother, but now he has taken up his responsibility and wants to live according to his personal standards, he decides to continue his schooling: "I've got to get out of this," Sandy kept repeating. 'Or maybe I'll get stuck here, too, like they are, and never get away. I've got to go back to school'" (Hughes, 209). In view of this statement, I think his former sympathy for both Du Bois and Washington was mainly aimed at their common objective to uplift the race and did not consider their educational method. But ever since he has experienced the advantages of an education, Sandy believes in its authority to provide him a better future and accordingly prefers the instructional program of Tempy and Du Bois to the practical project of Hager and Washington. However, although he favors a higher schooling, he refuses to identify completely the bourgeois ideology and remains loyal to his authentic African-American heritage and his lowbrow relatives. In view of this behavior, I contend that Sandy embodies the aesthetic beliefs of Hughes, as he reconciles features of both the higher and the lower classes of blacks. This compromise is made explicit, when the protagonist evaluates the positive and negative characteristics of each of his family members. In addition, it is worth mentioning that this fragment echo the criticism of Hughes on specific characters, as discussed in the previous parts of this thesis:

Like Jimboy! something inside him warned, quitting work with no money, uncaring. “Not like Jimboy,” Sandy countered against himself. [...] I’m more like Harriett—not wanting to be a servant at the mercies of white people for ever.... I want to do something for myself, by myself.... Free.... I want a house to live in [...] like Tempy and Mr. Siles’s.... But I wouldn’t want to be like Tempy’s friends [...] ashamed of colored people. [...] Clowns! Jazzers! Band of dancers!... Harriett! Jimboy! Aunt Hager! [...] But was that why Negroes were poor [...]? The other way around would be better: dancers because of their poverty; singers because they suffered; [...] Aunt Hager’s dreams for Sandy dancing far beyond the limitations of their poverty, of their humble station in life, of their dark skins. [...] “I won’t disappoint you!” (Hughes, 210-211)

Whereas, during the largest part of the novel, Sandy shifted from one relative to another and constantly adapted the corresponding values and lifestyles, at the end, he reasons according to his personal principles. With this critical assessment, Sandy reveals that his character indeed comprises features of all the individuals which have influenced him during his upbringing. Yet, as David Chinitz indicates, “[t]his attempt at reconciliation shapes most of all the ending of the novel” (Chinitz, 68). In the final scene, Sandy and Annjee reencounter Harriet, who has become a famous singer of typical black music and is nicknamed “The princess of the Blues”. Because of her success, this aunt “has achieved prosperity [...] that will allow her nephew [...] to continue his education” (Chinitz, 68). Harriett indeed supports Sandy’s decision to pursue his dreams and criticizes her sister: “Good Lord! Annjee, you ought to be ashamed, wanting him to keep that up. This boy’s gotta get ahead—all of us niggers are too far back in this white man’s country to let any brains go to waste” (Hughes, 217)! By giving her a decisive role in the final scene, Hughes suggests that this lowbrow aunt should be respected as well. What is more, Hughes again proposes a compromise of ideologies, as he makes this

woman the link between the Sandy's low class existence and his highbrow future. Chinitz confirms this reconciliation and furthermore asserts that "Harriett and Sandy embody Hughes's hope for the African-American future: equality and integration without loss of identity" (Chinitz, 68).

In this story, Hughes portrays a variety of characters that defend opposed philosophies and have a distinct attitude towards their black heritage. With the depiction of Sandy, however, the author presents a character who personifies the reconciliation of these distinct convictions. What is more, considering the assertions of Miyakawa in the theoretical part of this thesis, I furthermore assert that the boy symbolizes the concept of double-consciousness. On the one hand, Sandy favors education instead of work to become someone respectable, and thus represents the modern black individual who aspires for equal American rights. On the other hand, however, he refuses to discard neither his authentic background nor the lower classes, and thus respects his African heritage as well. Consequently, the protagonist embraces both the American and the African identity. Considering Sandy's overall portrayal, I conclude that this character resembles Hughes's opinions about the function and content of literary works. Like Sandy, this author believes in the political and social uplift program of Du Bois and aspires for a future where blacks and whites are considered equals. What is more, in the same way that the protagonist of this novel refuses to discard the lower-classes of African-Americans, Hughes challenges the propagandistic literature of Du Bois and advocates for the inclusion of authentic black life in writings. I conclude that, with the character of Sandy, Hughes not only reconciles the social beliefs of Washington and Du Bois, but furthermore explicates and defends the literary ideology of the Niggerati.

## 7. *The Blacker the Berry*

### 7.1. **Intrarracial Color-Prejudices of a Blue Vein Family**

Emma Lou's extreme color-consciousness can be explained by describing the environment in which she grew up. Her grandparents Samuel and Maria are freedmen who "went into the saloon business and grew prosperous" (Thurman, 697). Just like Tempy, these bourgeois characters adopt white values and attempt to eliminate blackness from their lives in order to achieve social recognition. However, the only difference with Tempy is that Samuel and Maria are light-skinned African-Americans. According to Emma Lou's grandparents the resemblance of whiteness in their outer appearance makes them more superior than the darker members of the black middle-class: "In their veins was some of the best blood of the South. They were closely akin to the only true aristocrats in the United States" (Thurman, 698). In line with this mentality, Maria founds the Blue Vein society and desires that the skin color of her relatives becomes "[w]hiter and whiter every generation" (Thurman, 698). The ideology of the Blue Veins on race is based on the conviction that there is a natural difference between people. This categorization goes back to the period of slavery, where the white population linked inferior characteristics to typical black physiognomy in order to underline their own authority. Although this interracial division labels the entire black race as inferior, light-skinned African-Americans claim to be superior to their darker fellows because their physical appearance is less typical. With regard to this attitude, Kassahun Checole declares that "[t]he novel presents a view of the American socialization process, which results in the internalization of the perspectives of the oppressors by the oppressed" (Checole, 117). These Blue Vein relatives thus make an intrarracial distinction based on the same conditions as the interracial categorization. Emma Lou clarifies their general view on blackness:

It was the custom always of those with whom she came into most frequent contact to ridicule or revile any black person or object. A black cat was a harbinger or bad luck,

black crape was the insignia of mourning, and black people were either evil niggers with poisonous blue gums or else typical vaudeville darkies. It seemed as if the people in her world never went half-way in their recognition or reception of things black, for these things seemed always to call forth the most extreme emotional reactions. They were never provoked mere smiles or mere melancholy, rather they were the signal either for boisterous guffaws or pain-induced and tear-attended grief. (Thurman, 695)

This fragment clearly shows that her family immediately associates blackness with undesirable concepts or stereotypes. Accordingly, since Emma Lou's dark complexion implies inferiority, she is rejected by her relatives. Another factor that contributes to her denouncement is the fact she is girl. As Emma Lou indicates: "She should have been born a boy, then color of skin wouldn't have mattered so much, for wasn't her mother always saying that a black boy could get along, but that a black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment" (Thurman, 693). Because family continually emphasizes the link between skin tones and the corresponding prejudiced features, the protagonist develops an "obsessive concern with complexion and its social significance" (Checole, 118).

## **7.2. Racial Performativity: Challenge the Discrimination**

The only person who does not criticize Emma Lou is her Uncle Joe. This man opposes the beliefs of the other family members and asserts that "only in small cities one encountered stupid color prejudice such as she had encountered among the blue vein circle in their home town" (Thurman, 703). Consequently, he convinces her to attend university in Los Angeles, since "[p]eople in the large cities [...] are broad" (Thurman, 703). Inspired by the optimistic, "Emma Lou was certain that she would find many suitable companions, intelligent, broad-minded people of all complexions, intermixing and being too occupied otherwise to worry about either their own skin color or the skin color of those around them" (Thurman, 704).

While her family believes that a light or dark complexion automatically implies respectively positive and negative features, Emma Lou desires to prove that one's physiognomy did not determine one's personality or social status. Her personal frame of mind can be explained with the notion of racial performativity. According to this theory, the classification based on skin color is a mere social construct to uphold white supremacy. As Catherine Rottenberg explains "race does not refer to a pre-given subject. Rather, it works performatively to constitute the subject itself and only acquires a naturalized effect through repeated or reiterative naming of or reference to that subject" (Rottenberg, 437). Ann-Louise Keating agrees with Rottenberg and adds that "the fact that a person is born with 'white' skin does not necessarily mean that s/he will think, act, and write in the 'white' ways [...]" (Keating, 907). With regard to Emma Lou's mentality, Daniel Scott confirms that she "is aware of the discontinuity between appearance and identity. This awareness makes her sharply conscious of race as a constructed performance rather than a natural, given fact" (Scott, 332). As a result of this realization, the protagonist eagerly wishes to "show the people back in Boise that she did not have to be a 'no-gooder' [...] just because she was black. She would show all of them that a dark skin girl could go as far in life as a fair skin one, and that she could have as much opportunity and as much happiness. What did the color of one's skin have to do with one's mentality or native ability? Nothing whatsoever" (Thurman, 716).

### **7.3. Emma Lou's Attitude towards Blackness**

#### **7.3.1. Avoiding Black Stereotypes**

Whereas Emma Lou discarded the color prejudices of her relatives, she has adopted the same view about the cultured, middle-class lifestyle. As Thurman explains:

Emma Lou was essentially a snob. She had absorbed this trait from the very people who had sought to exclude her from their presence. All of her life she had heard talk of



‘right sort of people’ and of ‘the people who really mattered,’ and from these phrases she had formed a mental image of those to whom they applied. (Thurman, 714)

Consequently, at university, Emma Lou desires to affiliate exclusively with “the best people”, in other words “northerners like herself or superior southerners [...] who were different from whites only in so far as skin color was concerned” (Thurman, 713-714). In line with her bourgeois mentality, she furthermore attempts to exclude every typical black characteristic from her individual character as well as from her circle of friends, for reasons previously mentioned in this paper. Emma Lou thus refuses to affiliate with ordinary dark individuals, such as Hazel, since they resemble black typecasts both in their outer appearance as in their behavior. A first example of Hazel’s inferiority is her black dialect:

“Tiresome ain’t no name for it,” [Hazel] declared more loudly than ever before, then

“Is you a new student?”

“I am,” answered Emma Lou, putting much emphasis on the “I am.”

She wanted the white people who were listening to know that she knew her grammar if this other person didn’t. (Thurman, 706)

With regard to language use, the bourgeois respects the white norms and consequently perceive the black vernacular as ungrammatical. In view of this, Emma Lou corrects Hazel and demonstrates her superiority. By supporting the speech of her white fellow students, Emma Lou hopes that they will do not perceive her as a typical African-American simply because of her dark skin tone, but will respect her cultured personality. Next to the dialect, the protagonist furthermore condemns the clothes that Hazel wears and explains that “black people had to be careful about the colors they affected [...]” (Thurman, 707). Since her “red-striped sport suit”, her “white hat, and white shoes and stockings” refer too much to exoticness and primitiveness, they should be avoided if you did not want to be considered as a black typecast (Thurman, 707). As Emma Lou explicates, “Negroes always bedecked

themselves and their belongings in ridiculously unbecoming colors and ornaments. It seemed to be part of their primitive heritage which they did not seem to have sense enough to forget and deny” (Thurman, 710). Emma Lou appears not to comprehend why African-Americans displays typical African-Americans features, when they know these could reinforce the existing prejudices about blacks. Even the protagonist associates Hazel with a stereotypical character of the minstrel shows:

Hazel was a veritable clown. She went scooting about the campus, cutting capers, playing the darky for the amused white students. [...] The very tone and quality of her voice designated her as a minstrel type. In the gymnasium she would do buck and wing dances and play low-down blues on the piano. She was a pariah among her own people because she did not seem to know, as they knew, that Negroes could not afford to be funny in front of white people even if that was their natural inclination. Negroes must always be sober and serious in order to impress white people with their adaptability and non-difference in all salient characteristics save skin color. (Thurman, 718)

The protagonist concludes that this type of girl would never become accepted “the right sort of people” (Thurman, 711). While Hazel merely expresses her authentic feelings, Emma Lou reasons that blacks should adapt their personality to the norms of the whites. If not, African-Americans would never acquire social recognition. In view of this, the protagonist asserts that Hazel should attend “a Negro college” where “her darky-like clownishness would not have to be paraded in front of white people, thereby causing discomfort and embarrassment to others of her race, more civilized and circumspect than she” (Thurman, 711). What is more, she claims that “[i]t was her kind who knew nothing of the social niceties or the polite conventions. [...] And they had been forbidden the chance to have intimate contact in schools and in public with white people from whom they might absorb some semblance of culture”

(Thurman, 714). By contrast, Emma Lou does make friend with dark girls, such as Alma Martin or Grace Giles, who are “genteel, well and tastily dressed, and not ugly” (Thurman, 714). Considering Emma Lou’s attitude towards other dark students, I contend that the protagonist embodies Du Bois’ view on literature. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, this black intellectual supported the use of literary propaganda in his uplift program and therefore encouraged the exclusion of unrefined African-Americans from writings. Likewise, Emma Lou attempts to distance herself from Hazel, because her company would only prevent the protagonist from gaining social recognition. Considering this, Hazel would undoubtedly never occur as a character in the propagandistic literature that Du Bois promoted.

### **7.3.2. Oscillating Between Personal Feelings and Color-Consciousness**

Although Emma Lou displays a respectable middle-class attitude, other students nevertheless continue to ignore her. At first, the girl “did not want to believe that the same color prejudice which existed among the blue veins in Bois also existed among the colored college students” (Thurman, 719). Yet, since Emma Lou and her darker friends were never asked to join the sorority, she ultimately understands these scholars possessed the same biased mindset as her blue vein relatives (Thurman, 719). This constant rejection weakens her hope to find unprejudiced individuals and consequently she appears to accept that she will never gain social recognition: “Uncle Joe had been wrong—her mother and grandmother had been right. There was no place in the world for a dark girl” (Thurman, 722). As a result of this assumption, she increasingly desires to marry a light-skinned man. Her motivations become clear when she meets Weldon Taylor, a medical student, during the summer vacation:

Here, thought Emma Lou, is the type of man I like. Only she did wish that his skin had been colored light brown instead of dark brown. It was better if she was to marry that

she did not get a dark skin mate. Her children must not suffer as she had and would suffer. (Thurman, 723)

Because Emma Lou understands that color prejudices are widely spread, she wishes to have a light-skinned husband, so her children would be spared from discrimination. It seems as if Emma Lou is willing to suppress her feelings for a dark man in order to escape the prejudices. Nevertheless, at this point in the novel, her preference for light-skinned men appears too weak, as she surrenders to her emotions for Weldon. I argue that the setting of the scene where they first kiss symbolizes her decreasing concern with complexion, as daylight fades and darkness takes over:

It was dusk now and the sun had disappeared behind the snow capped mountains. The sky was a colorful haze, a master artist's canvas on which the colors of day were slowly being dominated by the colors of night. [...] They sat down, his arm slipped around her waist, and, as the darkness of night more and more conquered the evanescent light of day, their lips met, and Emma Lou grew lax in Weldon's arms. (Thurman, 723)

Because of her love for Weldon, Emma Lou's concerns about color again decrease and she furthermore realizes that personal happiness and the love between two people is more important than what others thought of her complexion. She even repeats what she had said before she entered university: "What did being black, what did the antagonistic mental attitudes of the people who really mattered mean when she was in love" (Thurman, 725)? Yet, when Weldon "decides to become a Pullman porter", she dismisses these convictions straightaway (Thurman, 726). While the Thurman indicates that he "was just a selfish normal man and not a color prejudiced one", Emma Lou thinks he leaves her because of her dark skin (Thurman, 727). Accordingly, "all the old preachments of her mother and grandmother were resurrected and began to swirl through her mind. [...] To Emma Lou there could only be one

reason for his not having loved her as she had loved him. She was a black girl and no professional man could afford to present such a wife in the best society” (Thurman, 727-728). The female protagonist seems incapable of considering any other motive than the prejudices about her skin tone when she is rejected by someone. In view of this, she once more considers the statements of her relatives and wonders if her dark complexion indeed prevents her from leading a happy life.

### **7.3.3. Inauthenticity and Self-Betrayal**

Nonetheless, despite the incidence with Weldon, Emma Lou still has a little optimism left, as “the idea her Uncle Joe had given her about the provinciality of people in small towns re-entered her mind” (Thurman, 728). Therefore, she decides to move to Harlem, again hoping that the citizens there are unbiased with regard to skin color. Yet, the society in Harlem appears to be color-prejudiced as well. Several scenes in the novel indicate that most people indeed prefer lighter shades of complexion, especially when it comes to girls. Firstly, Emma Lou occasionally comes across men who make sexual connoted remarks about her dark skin: “There’s a girl for you, ‘Fats’ [...] Man, you know I don’t haul no coal” (Thurman, 747). Secondly, numerous application signs display the same color preference when looking for a female candidate: “Wanted: light colored girl to work as a waitress in tea-room.... Wanted: Nurse girl, light colored preferred (children are afraid of black folks)”. What is more, when the girl wishes to enter the cabaret ensemble, “[s]he noticed that there were several black men in the ensemble, but that none of the women were dark” (Thurman, 759). These incidences make Emma Lou conclude that her relatives were right and that “[b]lack boys can make a go of it, but black girls...” (Thurman, 763). The girl seems unable to escape her concerns about the reactions of society and again increasingly attempts to eliminate every dark aspect from her life. First of all, she discards John, whom she has met a few days before. Although they

have feelings for each other, Emma Lou reasons his dark skin tone would only lead to misery. Whereas the protagonist had accepted Weldon's complexion, she now denounces the darkness of John. This dismissal shows that the girl, at this point in the novel, is willing to oppress her individual emotions and to hurt those of others in order to gain social recognition. Her selfish craving for acceptance turns Emma Lou into a cold and heartless person:

She began to think about John, poor John who felt so hurt because she had told him that he could not spend any more days or nights with her. [...] Mischievously, she wished now that she could have seen the expression on his face, when, after seeming moments of mutual ecstasy, she had made this cold, manifesto-like announcement. But the room had been dark, and so was John. Ugh. (Thurman, 729-730)

However, despite her seemingly indifference at the moment of the break-up, this decision has nevertheless affected Emma Lou's emotions. Throughout the novel, the girl frequently recalls John, particularly when she feels unhappy. For example, when she is constantly rejected by employment agencies because "lots of [the] Negro business men have a definite type of girl in mind and will not hire any other" and begins to feel alone in the big city, Emma Lou thinks about their first encounter and the kindness John had showed (Thurman, 744):

Emma Lou had met John on her first day in New York. He was employed as a porter in the theatre where Mazelle Lindsay was scheduled to perform, and, seeing a new maid on the premises, had decided to "make" her. He had. [...] John had found her her room. It was John who had taught her how to find her way up and down town on the subway and on the elevated. (Thurman, 745)

Further in the story, John once more intrudes her mind when she feels "alone and disturbed" during a party (Thurman, 755): "John ought to be here, slipped out before she remembered that she didn't want John any more. [...] Imagine her, a college trained person, even if she hadn't finished her senior year, being satisfied with the company of such unintelligent

servitors” (Thurman, 755). These contradicting thoughts reveal the conflict between Emma Lou’s individual feelings and her desire for social recognition. While her heart lingers for John, her head pulls her towards respectable, light-skinned men. However, time and again, Emma Lou tries to convince herself that “John wasn’t her type. He was too pudgy and dark, too obviously an ex-cotton-picker from Georgia. He was unlettered and she couldn’t stand for that, for she liked intelligent-looking, slender, light-brown-skinned men [...]” (Thurman, 746). By denying her love for John, Emma Lou betrays herself. Instead of accepting her personal feelings, she constantly rejects them out of fear to be discriminated by color-prejudiced individuals. It is important to note, that her bourgeois values also contribute to the denunciation of John. Similar to her treatment of Hazel, Emma Lou not only discards his complexion, but furthermore rejects lower-class behavior and his black authenticity. In view of this, her color-consciousness has once more taken control of her thoughts, as she believes that only a light-skinned husband will make her happy.

Previously, Emma Lou had accepted her individual outer appearance and sought to gain recognition by displaying a respectable white attitude and affiliating with light-skinned individuals. However, because everyone appears to care exclusively about visual features she now “had decided to bleach her skin as much as possible”, even if the methods are unhealthy and cause physical pain (Thurman, 764). In this way, Emma Lou finally hopes to be acknowledged by the type of man she has described earlier:

She remembered having heard her grandmother speak of that “old fool, Carrie Campbell,” who [...] had wished to pass for white. To accomplish this she had taken arsenic wafers, which were guaranteed to increase the pallor of one’s skin. Emma Lou had obtained some of these arsenic wafers and eaten them, but they had only served to give her pains in the pit of her stomach. Next she determined upon a peroxide solution in addition to something which was known as Black and White Ointment. After she

had been using these for about a month she thought that she could notice some change. But in reality the only effects were an increase in blackheads, irritating rashes, and burning skin. (Thurman, 764)

Despite the ineffective bleaching efforts, Emma Lou nevertheless meets Alva, a light-skinned middle-class man who seems interested in her. Yet, for the reader it becomes immediately clear that he seduces her for the wrong reasons. First of all, by referring to the Negro saying “The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice”, Alva reveals his prejudiced mindset and indicates that he is only interested in sex: “Plunge in boy, plunge! The blacker the berry—he chuckled to himself” (Thurman, 771). Secondly, he explicates that he has a girlfriend, “Geraldine, who of all the people he pretended to love, really inspired him emotionally as well as physically, the one person he conquest without thought of monetary gain” (Thurman, 774). Alva thus abuses Emma Lou’s color-consciousness and pretends to love her for selfish reasons. In view of this, the female protagonist once more has become a victim of her individual behavior. Several occurrences already demonstrated the negative consequences of Emma Lou’s color-awareness on her personal life. For instance, her selfish longing for recognition gradually turned her into an emotionless person, as she hurt both her feelings and those of John. What is more, Emma Lou not only grows insensitive towards dark men, but furthermore starts to loathe her own color of skin. All through the story, the girl increasingly prefers outer appearance to personality in the hope to become acknowledged. However, until now, Emma Lou either deceived her personal feelings or was manipulated by others, such as Alva.

#### **7.4. Criticizing Emma Lou’s Behavior**

##### **7.4.1. Truman Walter**



The most explicit criticism on Emma Lou's behavior is given right before the rent party by "a group of young Negro writers and artists" (Thurman, 774). Because Alva is ashamed to introduce Emma Lou to his color prejudiced associates, he invites her to the dance and pretends these individuals are his friends. Most probably, this group of artists represents the Niggerati, as they bear many resemblances. A first correspondence emerges when Alva illuminates his bourgeois views on rent parties: "Though they had heard much of this phenomenon, none had been on the inside of one, and because of their rather polished manners and exteriors, were afraid that they might not be admitted. Proletarian Negroes are as suspicious of their more sophisticated brethren as they are of white men, and resent as keenly their intrusions to their social world" (Thurman, 774). This fragment indicates that these Negro writers, just like the Niggerati, criticize the cultured classes of African-Americans and their white aspirations. Yet, the most noticeable signs of similarity are the names of these artists, since "Truman Walter" and "Cora Thurston" look too much like 'Wallace Thurman' and 'Zora Hurston' to be arbitrary (Thurman, 775,776). David Jarraway confirms this correspondence and asserts that "[o]ne senses, therefore, that it is Wallace Thurman himself, behind the voice of Truman Walter in the novel" (Jarraway, 47). In view of this, Thurman and the other Niggerati thus convey their critique on certain characters and furthermore clarify various racial attitudes through their doubles in the story. To begin with, Truman and Cora discuss and condemn the intrarracial discrimination among African-Americans:

"As I was saying," Truman continued, "you can't blame light Negroes for being prejudiced against dark ones. All of you know that white is the symbol of everything pure and good [...]."

"Which," Cora added scornfully, "makes it all right for light Negroes to discriminate against dark ones?"

“Not at all,” Truman objected. “It merely explains, not justifies, the evil-or rather, the fact of intra-racial segregation. [...] I cannot say that I see a great deal of difference in any of their actions. They are human beings first and only white or black incidentally.”

(Thurman, 778-779)

By asserting that there is no fundamental difference between blacks and whites, Truman or Thurman denounces the behavior the blue-vein family with regard to skin color and confirms the theory of racial performativity. The writer continues his explanation, declaring that “prejudices are always caused by differences, and the majority group sets the standard. Then, too, since black is the favorite color of vaudeville comedians and jokesters, and, conversely, as intimately associated with tragedy, it is no wonder that even the blackest individuals will seek out some one more black than himself to laugh at” (Thurman, 780). I argue that these statements can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, they clarify the hypocritical attitude of Emma Lou with regard to other blacks. Although the girl is aware of the discrepancy between identity and complexion, she nevertheless rejects darker individuals in order to become accepted by the prejudiced society and thus shows the same discrimination as her relatives. On the other hand, you could also interpret these declarations as a critique on the bourgeois attitude of Emma Lou towards lowbrow characters, such as Hazel. As mentioned before, although both girls have the same dark skin tone, Emma Lou condemns Hazel’s black behavior. This racial attitude clearly opposes Thurman’s personal ideology, as he shows sympathy for all social classes, but particularly values the authenticity of lower-class African-Americans. In view of this interpretation, Daniel Walker confirms that “Thurman is not only expressing his disgust with the pigmentocracy which characterized the period, but also to the elitism and social posturing that goes along with any form of social hierarchy” (Walker, 155).

#### 7.4.2. The Rent Party

The scene that most obviously indicates Thurman's adherence towards black culture is the rent party. This chapter resembles Hughes's "Dance", as Thurman also describes the sensual dancers and the black music by using natural references. As mentioned in the part about *Not Without Laughter*, this type of portrayal emphasizes the genuineness of African-American culture and furthermore highlights its primitive and exotic characteristics:

[...] animal ecstasy agitating their perspiring faces. There was much panting, much hip movement, much shaking of the buttocks. [...] Piano treble moaning, bass rumbling like thunder. A swarm of people, motivating their bodies to express in suggestive movements the ultimate consummation of desire. (Thurman, 781)

The black pianist also displays exoticness, by "acting like a maniac, occasionally turning completely around on his stool, grimacing like a witch doctor, and letting his hands dawdle over the keyboard of the piano with an agonizing indolence, when compared to the extreme exertion to which he put the rest of his body" (Thurman, 783). Next to the music and the dancers, the food and drinks, such as "corn liquor", "hoppin'-john", which is a combination of "black-eyed peas and rice", and "pig's feet", are also indicators of authentic lowbrow existence (783). With regard to the character's response to the party, Truman, and thus also Thurman, asserts that this party is "marvelous", while the middle-class protagonist is afraid and wants to get out of this "dreadful place" (Thurman, 782, 784). Emma Lou furthermore declares that "[t]hey certainly weren't what she could have called either intellectuals or respectable people. Whoever heard of decent folk attending such a lascivious festival" (Thurman, 787)? However, I argue that this exoticness and primitiveness should not be perceived as sensationalism. On the contrary, Thurman, like Hughes merely desires to portray the genuineness and richness of African-American culture. As opposed to Hughes, however, Thurman does not depict his party in a very aesthetic manner. Yet, there are other moments in

the novel where the author artistically portrays blackness. Looking back at the setting where Emma Lou falls in love with Weldon, for instance, it is noteworthy that the author connects the symbolical darkness with beautiful natural images, such as “snow capped mountains” and furthermore describes the sky as “a master artist’s canvas” (Thurman, 723). Although this scene does not represent authentic primitiveness or exoticness, I argue that Thurman uses natural references to accentuate the genuineness of Emma Lou’s feelings for Weldon. By contrast, when the girl denounces John, the author does not associate his dark skin with nature and simply mentions Emma Lou’s coldness. I see this manner of portrayal as an extra indication that she is not showing her true emotions towards John. Although the girl remains ignorant to her individual attitude, Thurman indicates her inauthenticity by including critical characters, such as Truman Walter, and by accentuating genuineness in an artistic manner.

#### **7.4.3. Accusations and Recommendations Rejected**

Whereas Truman Walter condemns color prejudiced individuals and the black middle-class, the critique becomes increasingly personal towards the end of the novel. The first person who openly criticizes Emma Lou’s extreme color-consciousness is Alva:

It’s always color, color, color. [...] And you’re always beefing about being black. Seems like to me you’d be proud of it. You’re not the only person in this world. There are hangs of them right here in Harlem, and I don’t see them going around a-moanin’ ‘cause they ain’t half white. [...]

“I’m not moaning.”

“Oh, yes you are. And a person like you is far worse than a hinkty yellow nigger. It’s your kind helps make other people color-prejudiced.”

“That’s just what I’m saying; it’s because of my color....”

“Oh, go to hell!” (Thurman, 804)

Despite these assertions, Emma Lou refuses to believe that her obsession with color is the main cause of her unhappiness. As a result of this disagreement, she ends her relationship with Alva and leaves Harlem. Nonetheless, two year later, Emma Lou reconsiders Alva's statements and increasingly starts to doubt her personal behavior:

Two years had wrought little change in Emma Lou, although much had happened to her. After that tearful night, when Alva had sworn at her and stalked out of her room, she had somewhat taken stock of herself. She wondered if Alva had been right in his allegations. Was she supersensitive about her color? Did she encourage color prejudice among her own people, by simply being so expectant of it? She tried hard to blame on herself, but she couldn't seem to do it. (Thurman, 808)

This excerpt indicates that Emma Lou once more oscillates between realization and denial. With regard to her culpability, the reader, on the one hand, has to agree with Emma Lou that “[s]urely, it had not been her color-consciousness which had excluded her from the only Negro sorority in her college” (Thurman, 809). On the other hand, the preceding discussions have shown that her individual attitude often was the cause of her misery. In view of this, I argue that Emma Lou carries the biggest blame. Nonetheless, the female protagonist again refuses to believe this and shifts the responsibility on others.

Her concern with color-prejudices makes Emma Lou increasingly paranoid. This suspicious state of mind is most obvious near the end of the novel, when she starts to work as a teacher. As Emma Lou indicates, “several times upon passing groups of them, she imagined that she was being pointed out” (Thurman, 823). While the girl and accuses her light-skinned colleagues of being biased, Thurman puts her beliefs into perspective and reveals that “[i]n most cases what she thought was true, but she was being discussed and pointed out, not because of her dark skin, but because of the obvious traces of an excess of rouge and powder which she insisted upon using” (Thurman, 823). This fragment clearly shows her paranoia,

since the other teachers merely laughed at Emma Lou's "ludicrous habit of making up". Thurman explicates that the fellow teachers do not care about her complexion, but are willing to accept the girl for who she is. However, Emma Lou's wariness prevents them from becoming friends:

She appeared so distant and so ready to take offense at the slightest suggestion even of friendship that they were wary of her. But after she began to be a standard joke among pupils and among the white teachers, they finally decided to send her an anonymous note, suggesting that she use fewer aids to the complexion. [...] She interpreted it as being a means of making fun of her because she was darker than any one of the other colored girls. (Thurman, 824)

Considering this excerpt, Emma Lou perceives the sincere help of fellow instructors merely as an additional discrimination and thus reveals her paranoia. Despite the assertions and efforts of others, Emma Lou continues to deny the existence of unbiased persons. Nevertheless, at this point in the novel, the girl is the only person to blame for her social exclusion.

#### **7.4.4. Self-Realization**

The strongest criticism comes from Emma Lou herself. At the end of the novel, the female protagonist attains a growing insight into the true nature of other characters and once more starts to doubt her personal attitude. First of all, the girl realizes that Alva had taken advantage of her ignorance: "For the first time now she also saw how Alva had used her [...]. She also realized that she had been nothing more than a commercial proposition to him at all times. [...] Just because she was black was no reason why she was going to let some yellow nigger use her" (Thurman, 825). At last, Emma Lou understands that her color-consciousness made her disregard Alva's true character. Checole confirms this and furthermore asserts that "[h]er experience with Alva taught her the bitter lesson that her obsession with color and her

attempts to transcend it was the basis for her troubled life” (Checole, 120). The protagonist finally recognizes that she should not date light-skinned men, just because their company would increase her social reputation. On the contrary, instead of considering their complexion, she should aspire for personal happiness and look at people’s personality. With regard to her endless traveling, Emma Lou furthermore admits that “these mere geographical flights had not solved her problems in the past [...]. Hadn’t she explored every province of life and everywhere met the same problem” (Thurman, 828)? The girl understands that she cannot escape color prejudices, as they appear omnipresent. What is more, while Emma Lou attempted to escape the biases about blackness, she was actually avoiding the confrontation with her color-consciousness. In the following excerpt, Emma Lou conveys her present frame of mind:

For the first time in her life she felt that she must definitely come to some conclusion about her life and govern herself accordingly. [...] Was she alone to blame for her unhappiness? Although this had been suggested to her by others, she had been too obtuse to accept it. She had ever been eager to shift the entire blame on others when no doubt she herself was the major criminal. (Thurman, 828)

Attaining insight in her former way of life, Emma Lou realizes that her color-awareness had been the main cause of her misery. Instead of ignoring the prejudices society, the girl denounced her darkness and adjusted both her outer appearance and her behavior to overcome them. What is more, Emma Lou lost a part of her authenticity, as she oppressed and denied her feelings for John. Even though he and Hazel were the friendliest and most loving characters she had encountered, Emma Lou denounced them merely out of fear to be discriminated. At the end of the novel, however, the girl acknowledges her excessive concern with prejudices and realizes she has deceived her individual character. As a result, Emma Lou decides to change her lifestyle by starting to accept her darkness:

What she needed to do now was to accept her black skin as being real and unchangeable, to realize that certain things were, had been, and would be, and with this in mind begin life anew, always fighting, not so much for acceptance by other people, but for acceptance of herself by herself. In the future she would be eminently selfish. If people came into her life—well good. If they didn't—she would live anyway, seeking to find herself and achieving meanwhile economic and mental independence.

[...] Her motto from now on would be “find—not seek.” (Thurman, 828-829)

In line with this awareness, Emma Lou wishes to reestablish her relationship with John, the one man who she truly loved: “[S]he intended to look John up on the morrow and if her were willing let him re-enter her life. It was clear to her now what a complete fool she had been” (Thurman, 830). This decision is the ultimate indicator of her changed mentality, as it shows that Emma Lou now follows her heart instead of her mind. The girl understands she will find happiness, if only she ignores the prejudiced comments of others and acts according to her authentic feelings.

Previously, I have connected Emma Lou with the literary ideology of Du Bois, as both persons fear that the association with uncultured blacks will impede their social uplift. Nonetheless, because of her self-realization and her change in mentality, I argue that the girl ultimately personifies the literary ideology of the Niggerati. First of all, I assert that this last excerpt echoes Hughes's “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”. As revealed in the theoretical part of this dissertation, this essay advocates a general respect for African-Americans. What strikes me the most is the similarity between Emma's and Hughes's statements regarding social acceptance. Both agree that the opinion of the public does not matter, as long as you stay true to yourself. If others do not like your attitude, so be it. Moreover, I assert that Emma Lou has overcome “the mountain” that stood in the way, in



other words, she ultimately resisted “urge within the race towards whiteness” (Hughes, n.p). However, the best example of Emma Lou’s ideological shift is her treatment of John at the end of the novel. Instead of displaying an attitude that would help her to become socially accepted, the girl stays true to her genuine character and surrenders to her feelings for this dark, low-class man. Likewise, Thurman denounces the propagandistic literature of Du Bois and advocates for realistic depictions of all social levels of African-Americans, particularly the lower-classes. He encourages authors to portray the authenticity of colored life and to accentuate their cultural differences. Instead of excluding unrefined aspects from literary works in order to become socially accepted, writers should remain true to reality and include every aspect of black existence, whether highbrow or lowbrow. In view of this, I conclude that, with the acceptance of John, Emma Lou ultimately embodies the convictions of the younger generation of writers.

## Conclusion

By exploring the novels of Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman, I have tried to explicate the philosophy of the Niggerati. Although both authors clearly denounce the literary ideology of Du Bois and advocate for an authentic depiction of all African-American classes, a comparison of their writings reveals a difference in emphasis as well as a distinct manner of critique. In *Not Without Laughter*, Hughes combines a sociopolitical debate with an ideological discussion of literature. On the one hand, he explicitly mentioned Hager's and Tempy's adherence to certain respectively Washington and Du Bois. By opposing these two characters, he not only emphasized their contrasting attitudes regarding education, but furthermore emphasized their difference in social class. Whereas lowbrow Hager valued a work ethos, bourgeois Tempy is well acquainted with a more cultured existence and encourages a higher education. Thurman then furthermore uses the disloyalty of this middle-class aunt towards her low-class relatives in order to condemn Du Bois's propagandistic views on literature. Throughout the novel, Hughes is quite implicit in his denouncements, as he uses critical voices to condemn the various ideologies and racial attitudes. Especially Sandy's rebellious behavior and individual mindset, at the end of the story, serve as an overall critique on the main characters and their corresponding lifestyles. I argue that this boy not only displays a compromise of the sociopolitical perspectives on education, but furthermore celebrates the literary ideology of the Niggerati by reconciling highbrow values with low-class authenticity.

Thurman, on the other hand, does not refer to any black intellectual explicitly nor offers a sociopolitical discussion regarding education. However, both Emma Lou's bourgeois lifestyle and her fear to be associated with black stereotypes indicate the girl's adherence towards Du Bois. Thurman also includes critical characters, such as Alva and her fellow teachers, but he opposes Hughes as he explicitly conveys his critique on the black middle-

class and their white aspirations through his double Truman Wallace. Another difference between these two authors emerges when considering the portrayal and evolution of their protagonists. With regard to genuineness, Sandy remains loyal to both his unrefined relatives and his low-class friends. The only time he displays an inauthentic attitude, is when he discards Pansetta. Yet, immediately after this rejection, the boy recognizes his mistakes and starts to act according to his individual principles. Emma Lou, on the other hand, denounces blackness until the very end of the novel and continually denies her inauthenticity. Considering their changing nature, Sandy develops his individual convictions by critiquing his relatives and reconciling their positive features. Thurman, by contrast, condemns above all his female protagonist and uses her self-realization as the strongest assessment of her inauthenticity. Accordingly, Emma Lou's ultimate attitude results from her insight into her individual mistakes. In view of this, whereas Hughes opposes his protagonist to other characters, Thurman contrasts Emma Lou's initial behavior with her changed personality at the end of the novel.

Despite these differences, I claim that both Hughes and Thurman depict black authenticity to refute De Bois's criticism on the Niggerati and to promote their individual ideology. First of all, these authors oppose sensationalist literature by artistically portraying African-American culture. This is especially the case in Hughes' chapter "Dance", Thurman's "The Rent Party" and the love scene between Emma Lou and Weldon. I argue that the inclusion of unrefined themes denotes both their respect for the lowbrow blacks as well as their desire to portray all social classes as truthfully as possible. Moreover, Thurman asserts that typical characteristics should not always be interpreted as an imitation of stereotypes, but should be seen as a realistic representation of black genuineness. In addition, with the character of Emma Lou, he encourages blacks to remain true to their authentic nature and ignore the possible reactions of others. In view of this, Hughes and Thurman discard both Du

Bois's fear of depicting low-class life as well as his propagandistic literature with their portrayal of authentic low-class existence. Although the insertion of unrefined themes already points to the literary approach of the Niggerati, I conclude that the protagonists are the biggest representatives of their ideals. As Sandy and Emma Lou both reconcile highbrow features with respect for African-American genuineness, they truly embody the ideology of the younger generation of writers.

## Works Cited

- Balshaw, Maria. *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African-American Literature*. London: Pluto Press. 2000.
- Bauerlein, Mark. "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 46 (2004-2005): 106-114.
- Checole, Kassahun. Rev. of *The Blacker the Berry*, by Wallace Thurman. *Journal of Black Studies* 12.1 (1981): 117-120.
- Chinitz, David. "Rejuvenation through Joy: Langston Hughes, Primitivism, and Jazz." *American Literary History* 9.1 (1997): 60-78.
- Cummings, Melbourne. "Historical Setting for Booker T. Washington and the Rhetoric of Compromise, 1895." *Journal of Black Studies* 8.1 (1977): 75-82.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. *Electronic Classic Series*. Pennsylvania State University. 2006.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Talented Tenth." (1903). *Ashland University*. Web. 24 May 2012.  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=174>
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Crisis." Editorial. *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. New York: 1.1 (1910). *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 27 March 2012.  
[http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?id=1274705002750000&view=mjp\\_object](http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?id=1274705002750000&view=mjp_object).
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "Close Ranks." Editorial. *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. New York: 16.3 (1918). *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 27 March 2012.  
[http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?id=1288962204868875&view=mjp\\_object](http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?id=1288962204868875&view=mjp_object).
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "Returning Soldiers." *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. New York: 18.1 (1919). *The Modernist Journals Project*. Web. 27 March 2012.

[http://www.modjournal.org/render.php?id=1292429485961000&view=mjp\\_object](http://www.modjournal.org/render.php?id=1292429485961000&view=mjp_object).

Du Bois, W.E.B. "Criteria of Negro Art." *The Crisis*, 32 (1926). Web. 24 May 2012.

<http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html>

Fabi, Giulia. "Reconstructing the race: the novel after slavery." *The Cambridge Companion to the African-American Novel*. Ed. Maryemma Graham. Cambridge: University Press. 2004: 34-39.

Holmes, Eugene C. "Alain Locke and the New Negro Movement." *Negro American Literature Forum* 2.3 (1968): 60-68.

Hughes, Langston. "Not Without Laughter." *Harlem Renaissance: Four Novels of the 1930s*. Ed. Rafia Zafar. New York, NY: The Library of America, 2011. 1-218.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *The Nation* (1926). *University of Illinois*. Web. 13 March 2012.

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/hughes/mountain.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/mountain.htm).

Hughes Langston, and Milton Meltzer. *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1956.

Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1995.

Jarraway, David R. "Tales of the City: Marginality, Community, and the Problem of (Gay) Identity in Wallace Thurman's 'Harlem' Fiction." *College English* 65.1 (2002): 36-52.

Kilson, Martin. "The Washington and Du Bois Leadership Paradigms Reconsidered". *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (2000): 298-313.

Keating, AnnLouise. "'Whiteness,' (De)Constructing 'Race'." *College English* 57.8 (1995): 901-918

Kishimoto, Hisao. "Nigger Heaven: Storm of Controversy". *NII-Electronic Library Service*.

- Soka University: 1981. 31-40.
- Miyakawa, Felicia M. "‘Jazz at Night and the Classics in the Morning’: musical double-consciousness in short fiction by Langston Hughes." *Popular Music* 24.2: 273-278.
- Mosley, Matthew. "The Feminine Representation of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois in Langston Hughes’ Not Without Laughter" (2010). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 1176. <http://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1176>.
- Nash, William R. "Harlem Renaissance." *Oxford University Press*. Oxford University Press, n.d. Web. 13 March 2012.  
[http://www.oup.com/us/pdf/americanlit/h\\_renaissance.pdf](http://www.oup.com/us/pdf/americanlit/h_renaissance.pdf).
- Richards, Phillip M. Rev. of *The Story of an Interracial Friendship. Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964*, ed. Emily Bernard. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 34 (2001-2002): 132-133.
- Rottenberg, Catherine. "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire." *Criticism* 45.4 (2003): 435-452.
- Scott III, Daniel M. "Harlem Shadows: Re-Evaluating Wallace Thurman’s ‘The Blacker the Berry’." *MELUS* 29.3/4 (2004): 323-339.
- Scruggs, Charles. "‘All Dressed Up But No Place To Go’: The Black Writer and His Audience During the Harlem Renaissance." *American Literature*. 48.4 (1977): 543-563.
- Schultz, Elizabeth. "Natural and Unnatural Circumstances in Langston Hughes’ ‘Not without Laughter’." *Callaloo*. 25.4 (2002): 1176-1187.
- Thurman, Wallace. "The Blacker the Berry." *Harlem Renaissance: Five Novels of the 1920s*. Ed. Rafia Zafar. New York, NY: The Library of America, 2011. 687-831.
- Turner, Darwin T. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Theory of a Black Aesthetic." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 7.2 (1974): 1-21.

Hughes, Langston. "Not Without Laughter." *Harlem Renaissance: Four Novels of the 1930s*.

Ed. Rafia Zafar. New York, NY: The Library of America, 2011. 1-218.

Walker, Daniel E. "Exploding the Canon: A Re-Examination of Wallace Thurman's Assault on the Harlem Renaissance." *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 22.3 (1998): 153-158.

Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery*. 1901. *Student Handouts, Inc.* Toledo, Ohio. 2008.

Web. 12 March 2012.

Worth, Robert F. "Nigger Heaven and the Harlem Renaissance." *African American Review* 29.3 (1995): 461-473.