

An Analysis of Colorism and Racial Discrimination in Wallace Thurman's the Blacker the Berry

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ABSTRACT

The Harlem Renaissance is well-known as new negro movement, it is a culture, social and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem, New York. It was termed after the anthology by Alien Locke. The Harlem renaissance is one of the principal African-American involvement and considered to be the rebirth of African-American arts. They used art to prove their humanity and demand for equality. The novel 'The Blacker and the berry', is the story of Negro life. It is connected with Harlem renaissance. It is about the variation in skin tone historically related to European and native American ancestry among African- American and the longest history of slave societies. It is considered to be the groundbreaking work for its exploration of colorism and racial discrimination within the black community whose lighter skin was often favored especially for women. The novel expresses the story of a young black woman Emma Lou Morgan set during Harlem Renaissance. Wallace Thurman has been widely discussed the problems of African American through the character Emma and he expressed the idea that dark skin presented more problem for woman than a man. This paper mainly examines Emma Lou's encounters with colorism and discrimination from lighter-skinned African-Americans, exploring how her skin color affects her quest for self-acceptance and satisfaction in her life.

KEYWORDS: Colorism, Racial Discrimination, Harlem Renaissance, Equality.

INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance, also referred to as the "New Negro Movement," was a significant cultural, social, and artistic arousal that emerged in the 1920s in Harlem, New York. As a center for African-American cultural expression, the Renaissance marked a turning point in Black history, where art, literature, and music were used to showcase African-American identity, humanity, and the fight for equality. Central to this movement was the desire to redefine how Black people were perceived and to challenge the racial stereotypes and discrimination that plagued American society.

One of the notable literary works that encapsulates the complexities of race and identity during this period is Wallace Thurman's 'The Blacker the Berry'. The novel investigates the issues of colorism bias and racial discrimination within the African-American community. It also highlights the preference for lighter skin, particularly among women, and presents a heartbreaking exploration of how such biases evident in social interactions.

In this study, Emma Lou's experiences with colorism and discrimination were explored, particularly the

treatment she endures from lighter-skinned African-Americans. By concentrating on Emma Lou's journey the study uncovers how deeply biases plays within the Black community and impact her search for self-acceptance and happiness. Thurman's portrayal of these issues provides critical insight into the broader context of racial and gender inequalities during the Harlem Renaissance and continues to resonate today in discussions of colorism and Black identity.

Early study shows that colorism and racial discrimination is still present as a relic of colonialism and people with lighter skin tones benefit from superior treatment in education, employment and media representation. This papers discusses about the suffering of Emma Lou Morgan, the protagonist of the novel 'the blacker the berry'. Wallace Thurman has been widely discussed the problems of African American through the character Emma and he expressed the idea that dark skin presented more problem for woman than a man.

OBJECTIVES

- To Analyze the concept of colorism in The Blacker the Berry
- To explore Emma Lou's struggle with colorism and self-Perception
- To examine the social impact of colorism in the Harlem renaissance
- To assess the novel's contribution to the conversation of racial inequality

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

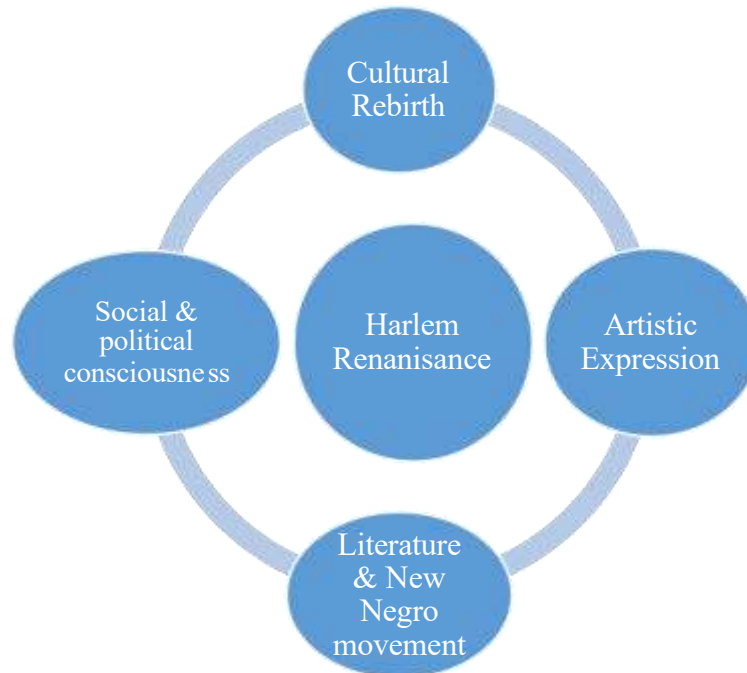
The relevance of the present study on colorism and racial discrimination in 'The Blacker the Berry' lies in its exploration of how these issues persist within the African-American community, even during the Harlem Renaissance. Wallace Thurman's novel highlights on how internalized racism, mainly colorism, exhibits in the social dynamics of black people and their communities. Emma Lou Morgan's struggle with her dark skin highlights the complex intersection of race and identity standards that continue to affect African-Americans, mainly women. By examining these themes, the study contributes in understanding how colorism shapes social movement, self-worth, and identity realization, and provides valuable insight into the historical roots of such bias within the African-American.

Furthermore, the study is relevant in modern discussions about the perseverance of colorism in both African-American and broader societies, where lighter skin is often privileged. By engaging with the novel's depiction of colorism, the study can inform present-day conversations about racial and ethnic identity, providing a historical framework to understand how skin color has influenced power dynamics and social inclusion or exclusion. It also emphasizes the permanent need for equality and acceptance in black communities, making this study valuable for both literary analysis and social critique.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural, social, and artistic movement that occurred during the 1920s and early 1930s, primarily in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. It marked a significant moment in African-American history when Black artists, writers, musicians, and intellectuals produced a wealth of creative works that celebrated Black culture, heritage, and identity. Often referred to as the "New Negro Movement," the Harlem Renaissance was instrumental in challenging racial stereotypes and promoting a more dignified and positive image of African Americans.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE:



Cultural Rebirth: The movement is vital and considered a cultural renaissance or "rebirth" of African-American arts. After years of racism and discrimination, African-American artists, writers, and philosophers sought to redefine their distinctiveness and created a vibrant and prominent cultural presence.

Artistic Expression: The Harlem Renaissance involved with various forms of artistic expression, including literature, music, visual arts, and theater. Writers like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay, musicians like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, and artists like Aaron Douglas emerged as prominent figures and shaped their identity through art.

Literature and the "New Negro": The phrase "New Negro" was popularized by Alain Locke, whose anthology *The New Negro* (1925) captured the intellectual and cultural aspirations of Black Americans. Writers of the Harlem Renaissance often focused on themes such as racial pride, resistance to discrimination, and the exploration of African-American history and folklore.

Social and Political Consciousness: The movement was not just an artistic explosion but also a moment of heightened social and political awareness. The works produced during this time were often used as vehicles to discuss racial oppression, inequality, and the fight for civil rights.

Intellectuals and leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey were influential voices during this era. The Harlem Renaissance laid the foundation for future movements like the Civil Rights Movement and remains to inspire discussions about race, identity, and creativity. It is remembered as one of the most significant cultural movements in American history, providing a platform for African-Americans to express their talents and challenge the oppressive structures of racism and isolation.

AN ANALYSIS OF COLORISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

‘The blacker the berry’ arises with two queries. One regarding the proper role of migration and mobility and the second is about overcoming the constraints that race and color imposed on blacks themselves. One of the most widely read and controversial works of the harem renaissance is “The blacker the berry”

and it is the first novel to explore partiality within the black community. Wallace Thurman's novel has been widely discussed through Emma Lou Morgan, he expressed the idea that dark skin presented more problems for a woman than a man. This pioneering novel found a way beyond the broad age of blackness in American life to truth and new meaning. Emma Lou's dark complexion is a source of sorrow and humiliation, not only to herself but to her lighter skin family and friends and to white community of Boise, Idaho, her home town.

There was no place in the world for a girl as black as she, Emma Lou the protagonist of Wallace Thurman's 1929 *The Blacker the Berry*, miserably laments for her color. Emma Lou is "too black" as she growing up in Bois, Idaho in an African-American community that desperately hopes to get "whiter and whiter every generation". Emma Lou's great misfortune and as a result of her mother's disastrous marriage to a 'full-blooded negro'- she has been born dark. Due to her skin color, whose hue is constantly invoked with disdain, her grandmother and the rest of the blue veins isolate Emma Lou and she in turn eventually rejects her family and sets out on her own.

Thurman's novel traces Emma Lou's various attempt to escape the virulent intra- black racism of her hometown and its psyche effects. Her fights lead her first to Los angles, where she enrolls as a student at the university of southern California. But college life in Los angles turns out not to be as completely different from Boise as Emma Lou hoped a least not in terms of the middle class African American community's color consciousness and radicalized gender hierarchy. She believes that in the "world's greatest colored city" life will be more cosmopolitan and the people more civilized. Harlem does indeed prove to be vastly more heterogeneous but, to her dismay, Emma Lou discovers that through the largest black metropolis is indeed unlike any other space, it is not by means a solution for all her woes. Harlem plays a liberal role in the novel. *The blacker the berry* sensationalizes, how harem opens up additional possibilities for its female protagonist.

The dominant theme is "intra-racial color prejudice". In fact, this was undoubtedly one of the most important concerns of black writers during the Harlem renaissance. During a time where Black culture was being celebrated, and indicated in every art form, Thurman's novel challenged the community to take a very critical look at the complex system often referred to as black culture's "dirty laundry". Indeed, this idea of the mask invokes images of the celebration of the arts, and Thurman intended for his narrator to inverse this celebration as an interrogation of the roles both, main and marginal characters play in the piece of colorism in the Black community and their intersectional effects on the dark-skinned black women.

Thurman's novel has widely discussed through Emma Lou and expressed the idea that dark skin presented more problems for a woman than a man. Emma Lou realizes that she spends her life running, she ran from Boise's color prejudice, she left Los angles for similar reasons, but she decides never to run again, she knows that there are many people like her and that she has to accept herself.

From the research perspective, this exploration has emphasized the multifaceted nature of discrimination. It is not only about the open racism that individuals face in border social context, but also the difficulties understated, often internalized biases that infuse social interactions and self-perceptions. Analyzing Emma Lou's journey has also shown how colorism can function as a powerful, overlooked form of discrimination that misrepresents self- worth and inhibits the ability to thrive in one's own community. This particular study helped to recognize such biases are as indirect as other forms of racial discrimination, perpetuating cycles of division and inequality that must be actively removed.

As we move toward a more inclusive and equitable society it is essential to understand and recognize that discrimination should not be encouraged in any community. The key takeaway from Truman's novel is that true equality and unity can only be achieved when we confront and reject all forms of bias, particularly colorism and also should work towards uplifting and empowering those who have been marginalized by such biases.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this particular study on the novel *The Blacker the Berry* by Thurman has not only deepened the understanding of the complexities of colorism and discrimination but also changed the perspectives on these persistent issues. The experiences which is faced by Emma Lou Morgan reveal the devastating psychological and social consequences of colorism. Thurman's nuanced portrayal of intra-racial prejudices highlights how deeply rooted biases regarding skin colour continue to shape one's identity, opportunities, and sense of belonging that within the both African community and the larger society.

On a particular level, this study reinforced the importance of creating a society where individuals are not judged based on their tone of their skin, but on their character and abilities. Thurman's work not only highlighted the historical context of colorism but also emphasized its continued relevance today.

In reflecting on this study, it is believed that literature like 'The blacker the berry' can be a powerful tool to change and uplift the society. It also holds up a mirror to the society like forcing individuals to reckon with uncomfortable truths and inspiring a vision of a worlds where everyone regardless of colorism can exist and thrive without fear of discrimination.

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