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The Dangling Man in the Twentieth Century
Afro-American Literature: The Case study
of James Weldon Johnson's *The*
Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dearest parents, Metira and Abdel Aziz who are the reason behind my success; I could not deny their love, tenderness and prayers. They provide me with strength and hope. Certainly, this goal would never be accomplished without them.

To all my lovely brothers and sisters

And to my dear friends.

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Abstract

The present study attempts to shed light on the ethnic character in James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). Oppression and racism were the major issues of African American literary works, and the writers were against this issue. Thus, the main concern of their literature is to redeem the face of the black man and his culture from negative to a more positive direction. Also, this research analyzes all forms of oppression and racism the black suffered from in the USA during the twentieth century. Hence, in this research work, Marxist theory is used to explore the main themes of the novel. In fact, the novel is written to oppose the white's unjust laws, such as, Jim Crow Law, lynching, and Ku Klux Klan towards the black, and to demonstrate how African Americans gain their identity and self pride in the new world after being in a dangling situation.

Key-words: race, ethnic character, identity, African American literature.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the American population has passed through several cycles in its evolution until the early 1920's owing to the massive inflow of immigrants (Jarrett, 2010). After this great wave of immigration, racism is widely spread because during that time there is a lot of minorities and ethnic groups. African Americans are one of them; they are the second most numerous ethnic minority. The blacks struggle a lot from the past or the slave era until the emergence of racism which is just another term or synonym of slavery (Pauwels, 2002).

At the turn of the twentieth century, literature helps blacks to establish an African American identity in America (Jarrett, 2010). As a result, many African Americans write between 1880 and 1940 and employ many themes and techniques. Literature helps them to prove their existence. As W. E. B. Du Bois writes about uplifting the black culture and condition, Malcolm X illustrates the sense of violence in his autobiography is that the Blacks didn't land on Plymouth Rock, and he admits that Plymouth Rock landed on the Blacks (Pauwels, 2002). Booker T. Washington in his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) writes about the freed man; Booker T. Washington explains that one of the first things freed slaves did at the end of the Civil War was to exercise their freedom through movement (Moore, 2003). Then, most of African American literature writers write about varied themes, such as sense of living invisibly by Ralph Ellison, and the underground life unacknowledged by the white by Toni Morrison (Knight, 1974).

In this sense, James Weldon Johnson entered the literary scene while serving as a consul in Venezuela with *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man* (1912). J. W.

Johnson's novel has been considered as an archetype of all sorts for its racially composite view of America, also for its modernist presentation (Bader, 2004). On top of that, *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is considered as the first text to provide critical and holistic look at all social strata of African Americans, while taking into account the interrelations among other African Americans and even white Americans. This amount of racial insight makes this text openly accepted by both parties for its candid look into black American culture. The text also provides the complexities of African American people and the world they inhabit (ibid).

J. W. Johnson casts light on the living conditions of the Blacks in the American society through his novel. He attempts to illustrate Blacks' misery and depression. Also he tries to examine how the blacks can change their lives conditions. J. W. Johnson is one of the prominent African American activists and his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is presented for both black and white audiences. Indeed, the problem of blacks in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), at first, presents the conflict between different skins. In addition, the writer's experience in the society includes violence, conflict, and racist oppressions. Most of the characters are taken from his life to express that experience.

This study sheds light on the problem of racism and oppression towards African Americans and its impact on the African American literature, and how the selected novelist tackles this serious issue portraying the black character in the US society.

The objective of this study is to show the suffering of African Americans in USA during the twentieth century and the impact of racism on their lives. The aim behind

conducting this research is to investigate how J. W. Johnson portrays his anonymous main character, the Ex-colored man, using the theoretical model of a thematic character. It also aims to analyze the selected work of J. W. Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), by describing the themes employed by the writer.

The present study intends to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does J. W. Johnson succeeded in portraying his main character, the Ex-colored man, as an activist black man and as a dangling man in the US society?
- How does the Ex-colored man reject the Whites' racist and oppressive system in the novel?

This thematic study is based on the analysis of actions, thoughts and behaviors of the major character in J. W. Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) to express his reactions towards the unjust White's system. Hence, the present research work adopts the qualitative and analytical methods of research since both may be adequate and appropriate for the subject under study.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is about the development of African American literature and the twentieth century's conspicuous literary movements. Accordingly, it demonstrates its impact on African Americans to defend their rights and to spread their case to become universal. In addition, the chapter exposes the African American Civil Rights Movements, beginning with Booker T. Washington movement to the other civil rights movements. Then, the second chapter is intends to show themes and styles of J. W. Johnson in his literary works, and how these themes worked. Furthermore, it gives a general overview about the novel, *The*

Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912). The third chapter is a practical one; it concerns with the analysis of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and it tackles the main themes dealt with in the novel. It casts light on the problem of race and how it is treated in the chosen literary work. Finally, the chapter shows how the Ex-colored man has succeeded to live as a white man.

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Chapter One:

Black American Literature: A General Overview

Introduction

During the twentieth century, African American literature has witnessed great literary movements against White's unjust laws. In Addition, African American writers recount their stories in form of fiction, because it is the only way to face their enemy who is the white's race. In this sense, African American writers give the readers vivid insights about their conditions.

This chapter attempts to draw a clear line to demonstrate the early Africa American literature to identify the beginning of the black America literature. Also, it attempts to demonstrate African American literary movements during the twentieth century, their themes and characteristics.

1.1 Early African American Literature

One of the greatest authors of African American literature is Lucy Terry who is known of her literary piece, *Bars Fight* (1854). Terry wrote the ballad in (1746) after an Indian attack on Deerfield (Beaulieu, 2006). Furthermore, she is enslaved in Deerfield at the time of the attack. The ballad is first published in (1854) with an additional couplet, in *The Springfield Republican* (Williams, 2007).

The poet Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) published her book *Poems on Various Subjects* in (1773), three years before American independence. Besides, Wheatley is not only the

first African American to publish a book; but she is also the first to achieve an international reputation as a writer. Moreover, she drives from black race. Wheatley is captured and sold into slavery at the age of seven (Beaulieu, 2006). She is born in Senegal and brought to America, and she is owned by a Boston merchant. When she was sixteen, she has mastered her new language of English (Gates, 1997). Her poetry is praised by many of the leading figures of the American Revolution, including George Washington, who thanks her for a poem written in his honor. Some whites found it hard to believe that a Black woman could write such refined poetry (Beaulieu, 2006). Wheatley has to defend herself in court to prove that she has written her work. In this sense, some critics cite Wheatley's successful defense as the first recognition of African American literature (Gates, 1997). As a result of the skepticism surrounding her work, *Poems on Various Subjects*, she offers her readers several introductory documents designed to authenticate herself and her poetry, and to substantiate her literary motives (Gates & McKay, 1997).

Another early African American author is Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806). Jupiter Hammon is considered the first publisher among Black writers in America. He has published his poem, *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries* (1761), as a broadside in early (1761) (Seed, 2010). In (1778), he writes an ode to Phillis Wheatley, in which they discuss their shared humanity and common bonds. Jupiter Hammon gives his address to the Negroes of the State of New York in (1786). Above all, his writing at the age of 76 after a lifetime of slavery is amazing; Jupiter Hammon says: “If we should ever get to Heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black or for being slaves” (Quoted in Gates: 1988, p. 322). He has also promoted the idea of a gradual emancipation

as a way to end slavery. In fact, Jupiter Hammon has been a slave until his death. In the 19th century, his speech is reprinted by several abolitionist groups (Gates, 1988).

Gates (1988) reviews that William Wells Brown (1814–1884) and Victor Séjour (1817–1874) produces the earliest works of fiction by African American writers. Accordingly, Victor Séjour is born free in New Orleans and moves to France at the age of 19 (Wallace, 2013). Hence, he has published his short story *Le Mulâtre* (“The Mulatto”) in (1837) (Bader, 2004). *Le Mulâtre* (1837) is considered as the first known fiction writing by an African American. As *Le Mulâtre* is written and published in a French journal, it has apparently no influence on later American literature (ibid).

1.2 Literary Movements of the Twentieth Century African American Literature

Williams (2009) states that African American literature dates back to African slaves' earliest arrival to the New World in (1639). They forge a language and literature of their own. It begins with the works of such late 18th-century writers as Phillis Wheatley. Before the high point of slave narratives, African American literature is dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives. As a result, African American literature reaches early high points with slave narratives of the nineteenth century (Wallace, 2013). Above all, Harlem Renaissance of the (1920) is a time of flowering of literature and arts. Writers of African American literature have been recognized by the highest awards, including the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison (Williams, 2007). In this matter, among the themes and issues explored in this literature, it affects African Americans within the larger American society, African American culture, racism, and social equality (Gates, 1988). In fact,

African American writing has tended to incorporate oral forms, such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues, or rap (Miller, 1993). Afterward, in (1960) and with the assassination of many leaders such as John F. Kennedy in (1963), Malcolm X in (1965) and Martin Luther King Jr. in (1968), the movement turns into Black Power Movement. Consequently, these movements have their great effects in art in general, and in literature in particular (Colin, 2005).

1.2.1 The Harlem Renaissance

In the (1920) black literature begins to increase in Harlem and other regions of New York City. Harlem Renaissance is a literary and cultural movement among Black Americans which flourishes from the 1920th's to the 1930th's. It is also called the New Negro or Black Renaissance. Moreover, the movement put considerable emphasis on the African heritage of American blacks. The prominent figures during that period are Claude McKay, Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes, who wrote novels and poetries. In (1925) Alain Locke published an anthology of work titled *The New Negro* (1925) (Cuddon, 2013).

The beginning of the movement is traced back to 1903 when Du Bois' *Souls of the Black Folk* (1903) is published (Moor, 2003). Additionally, during the movement; art, music, literature, and politics are thrived in cities like Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and Washington. Thus, New York's Harlem, the national cultural capital, becomes the cultural capital of African Americans during 1920 (Mitchell & Taylor, 2009).

Rozakis (1999) illustrates that Harlem Renaissance is considered as a brilliant flowing of African American art and culture in black' world. In (1920), Harlem, the City of Refugee is a place where life begins at night. Accordingly, more than 100 night spots line the ten

blocks of New York City among 125th and 135th streets between Lennox and seventh avenues known as Harlem (Smith, 2003). The most famous Harlem nightspots in the 1920s are *The Apollo Theater* and *The Savory Ballroom*. Besides, the latter establishment where Jazz bands play and dance like *Louis Armstrong*, Duke Ellington and Fats Waller takes up the whole city block between 140 and 141 streets (Williams, 2009).

Many cultural movements of that time include literature, music, and art, are valuable (Rozakis, 1999). Most of the men's and women's works of the writing deal with the same topic that is race. Poets inspect their writing as a way to express the mood of the African American community of that time. Also, the essences of blacks in the USA by contrast to the whites, whose writing deals with more "traditional poetic subjects", are very distinguished (ibid).

The Black writers, such as Hughes, Huston, and Thurman, deem this movement as the cultural harvest by which the Blacks could uplift their conditions (Wintz & Finkelman, 2004). Furthermore, in his book, *The New Negro* (1925), Locke writes almost with uncertainty that the objectives of the New Negroes are changing their own lives. The change starts from old psychology to a new one at present. This change is more of a consensus of emotion rather than of opinion, and of attitude rather than of program (Samuels, 2013).

1.2.2 Black Arts Movement

The Black arts movement is placed in the time period from 1965 through 1976. Its starting point is generally referred to the assassination of Malcolm X on 21 February 1965 (Colin, 2005). Besides, Malcolm X is fierce, proud, and unafraid to name the wrongs done to blacks by whites in America. Above all, he called for black people to defend themselves

against racial tyranny while speaking directly to blacks (Williams, 2011). Black Arts Movement works on advancing the objectives of the Black Power Movement, namely, in relationship with Civil Rights Movement. The vanguards of this movement aim to establish a strong explicit connection between arts and politics (Colin, 2005). Consequently, this connection makes an explicit influential essay by Larry Neal published in the summer (1968) in the Tulane Drama Review. In this essay, Larry Neal exposes the Black Arts movement's manifesto. Neal writes:

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics.

(Quoted in Smith: 2003, p. 36)

Black Arts Movement begins to articulate a new literary aesthetic, which is reflecting the social and political realities of modern African American life (Williams, 2011). Smith claims that African Americans are shocked by the murders of social activists Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Also, they daze by Black Arts' authors, such as Don L. Lee (later known as Haki R. Madhubuti), Ed Bullins, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Mari Evans who decried racial injustice. African Americans demonstrate in their writings an open hostility towards white society and its power structures.

The infrastructure of Black Arts Movement is based on political prospective and discovering new ways to establish their existence. In addition to this, the movement preserves the cultural traditions by previous generations of authors during Harlem Renaissance (Bader, 2004). Williams (2011) states that the artists of the Black Arts Movement made great achievements. One of the greatest fulfillments is that writers appreciate black cultural works. Consequently, Black culture is able to be mass-produced and marketed nowadays with music, visual arts. Furthermore, their achievements start to open for business; and whites start buying African American art. Colin (2004) claims that the notable change attributed to the movement is the alternation of the use of the word (Negro) to (Black) in order to separate blacks from the racism of the past. African Americans become inspired by their African culture and race; and they have chosen to be identified as Blacks.

1.3 Themes Used by Black Writers

African American literature has both been influenced by the great African Diasporas heritage and recent cultures (Williams, 2009). As a result, it has been created within the larger realm of post-colonial literature although scholars make a clear line to distinguish between the two. Also, African American literature differs from most post-colonial literature that it is written by members of a minority who reside within a nation of vast wealth and economic power (Radhika & Gita, 1996).

African American oral culture is rich in poetry, spirituals, gospel music, blues, and rap. This oral poetry also appears in the African American tradition of Christian sermons, which make use of deliberate repetition, cadence and alliteration (Edmonson, 2013). In

addition, African American literature, especially written poetry, has a strong tradition of incorporating all of these forms of oral poetry. These characteristics do not occur in all works of African American writers (Graham, 1998).

Some critics still use Western literary theory to analyze African American literature. Harvard literary scholar, Gates in (1988), says that,

My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions.

(Gates: 1988, p. xix).

One trope common to African American literature is signification. Furthermore, Gates (1988) claims that signification is a trope, and it is subsumed several other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, besides hyperbole and litotes. Also, the signification refers to the way in which African American authors read and critique other African American texts in an act of rhetorical self-definition.

1.4 Civil Rights Movements

The Civil Rights movements make great change in African American History. These movements work for African American freedom and equality, especially in the South. In addition, it serves as a model for social movements among many other groups (women, racial and ethnic minorities). From its beginning, the movement of civil rights relies on a variety of power bases. Above all, the Civil Rights movement has its origins from the legacy of the 19th century Abolitionist Movement (Smith, 2003).

For many critics, the Civil Rights Movements officially began with the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* on May 17, 1954. The Supreme Court rule declares that the separation between blacks and whites is not equal, and opens the doors for school integration, overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). This separation approves school segregation as legal and constitutional for almost 60 years earlier (Lerner et. al, 2006). Also, another important figure of this movement is Emmett Till's lynching in Money, Mississippi, in August 1955 (for allegedly whistling at or saying something to a white woman) which began in December 1955 and lasted 381 days. In fact, both events attract national attention to the movement's early days in USA. The latter event launches Martin Luther King, Jr., as the spokesperson for the nonviolent agenda of the movement (Samuels, 2013).

The origin of the movement can be traced back to the organizing of the National African American League in 1890. On top of that, this organization of the Black intellectual has adopted a six-point Black Agenda for Civil Rights. Also, it includes demands for anti-lynching legislation, equality in funding for public education, for blacks and whites, and put an end to discrimination on railroad cars and in other public accommodations like hotels and theaters (Samuels, 2013).

The African American League and the Niagara movements represented the earliest organized Civil Rights initiative (Junius, 2014). The formation of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) represents the beginnings of a consensus among black intellectuals. Hence, church and civic leaders around the basic goals and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement sketch out the African American League's agenda and the Niagara manifesto (Smith, 2003).

1.4.1 Movement of W. E. B. Du Bois

W. E. B. Du Bois is born in Massachusetts in (1868). He is an American sociologist, historian, civil rights' activist, author and editor. After his graduation from Harvard University, he becomes the first African American to earn a doctorate. Accordingly, he becomes a professor of history, sociology and economics at Atlanta University. Later on, Du Bois is considered as one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People NAACP in 1909 (Moore, 2003). In addition, Du Bois makes a group of African American activists called Niagara Movement. He is the leader of this group, which looks for equal rights for Blacks (Shook, (2005). As a result, Du Bois opposed the Atlanta Compromise made by Booker T. Washington. The latter states that, blacks must work hard and submit to white political rule. Furthermore, Du Bois believes that African Americans need the chances for advanced education to develop their lives conditions. Strongly; Du Bois protests against lynching, Jim Crow Law, discrimination in education and employment. He helps in organizing several Pan-African congresses to fight for independence of African Americans (Seed, 2010).

1.4.2 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Lynching and riots against blacks lead to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It is an organization founded to fight segregation and racial discrimination in vote, employment, education and transportation (Friedman et. al, 2005). It is founded in 1909 by group consisting of Du Bois, Ida Bell Wells-Barnett and Mary White Evington (Gale, 2008). Du Bois is the director of NAACP publications and research, and the founder-editor of the association's official

publication *The Crisis*. This magazine is one of the best sources of information about the black world. Moreover; it becomes the vehicle through which Du Bois could delineate his racial program and political ideals to the black American community (ibid). From 1910 to 1915, Du Bois voices the new aspirations of the American Negro in *The Crisis*. This is a period of increasing influence for the leadership of Du Bois and the NAACP (Colin, 2008).

1.4.3 The Negro Business League

The Negro Business League is organized in 1900 by Booker T. Washington. It takes over business and industry. It is based on a philosophy that people could lead the markets of the world. Thus, the leaders of this movement make better articles and sell the goods cheaper. The philosophy of The Negro Business League is to open the amount of democracy. Therefore, it works for success of business. In fact, this philosophy has been taught by schools of classic political economy and became more spreading in 1900. It is the adaptation of the three theories of political individualism and free competition. The Negro Business League contains a lot of professionals, such as doctors, farmers and craftsman. It includes Negroes small-business owners; its aims at getting African Americans' equality in the United States. In this sense, Booker T. Washington argues that African Americans need to build an economic network and he hopes that this league would be a reason to change Negroes conditions (Alfred, 2009).

Though the league has firstly witnessed a spreading lack of business connections, it adopts a trampled business community for the Negroes. It has also had many essential goals whether direct or indirect network to associate with whites business (Moor, 2013). Many times, white business leaders address the National Business League at their yearly

conventions. Booker T. Washington himself keeps in touch with the members of the whites corporate elite, such as Andrew Carnegie and Julius Rosendale (Alfred, 2009).

1.5 Marxist Literary Theory

For Marxists, economic power is at the center of social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government (Eagleton, 2002). Above all, it governs the superstructure of the social, political, and ideology. Therefore, it always refers to socioeconomic classes rather than economic class (Tyson, 2006). According to Marxist views, social classes are divided according to their religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. Thus, this division draws a real battle between the haves (bourgeoisie) and the have-not (proletariat) (ibid). Dobie (2012) says:

The Marxist analysis has got nothing to do with what happened in Stalin's Russia: it's like blaming Jesus Christ for the Inquisition in Spain.

(Dobie: 2012, p. 79)

Robinson (1983) states that Marx's approach works on the values of literature, in which it can be fully understood with a larger context of social reality. That is, it seems that African American novelists convey a number of social realities which make the realistic sociopolitical trends of their world. In this matter Eagleton (2002) expresses that:

Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies—the ideas, the values and feelings by which men experiences the society at various times. And certain of those ideas, values and feelings are available to us only in literature.

(Eagleton: 2002, p. 12).

Conclusion

African American literary movements have become well-known throughout the world due to its success; and it helps African American repulsive issue to become global. In this sense, African Americans employ generally the same themes in their literary works. They express the bad conditions in their literary style; such as, W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright.

In addition, the civil rights movements play an important role in uplifting the black man conditions and progress from the lower-class to upper class. Thus, civil rights movements gave fruitful results to the blacks to prove their existence within the United States society.

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Chapter Two:

Themes and Styles of James Weldon Johnson

Introduction

African American literature shares the same themes and styles, and most of the writers face the same predicament which is White race. Themes and styles reflect the same tendencies of the twentieth century African American literature. Besides, the literatures of this era resemble each other. For instance, J. W. Johnson resembles Booker T. Washington in using double consciousness characters in his literary work. This chapter focuses on J. W. Johnson's literary works, themes and styles. A critical review of J. W. Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is added to this chapter, in addition to what other critics have already said about it.

2.1 Themes of James Weldon Johnson

Literary works with its entire genres are helping African Americans to struggle for their freedom. J. W. Johnson is one of those literary men who wrote artistic poems and novels that help his community to gain their rights. Also, his different themes and styles show the proliferation of his artistic craft (Edmonson, 2013).

2.1.1 Racism

J. W. Johnson employs many themes in his autobiography *Along This Way* (1933), and one of the main themes is racism. This happens when J. W. Johnson is subjugated many times by the white people because of his skin. J. W. Johnson witnesses black people

tortured; but he could not do anything. The author considers the problem of the skin color is playing a major role in conflict between the white majority and the black minority (Edmonson, 2013). In his autobiography, J. W. Johnson has published several songs in the *Ladies Home Journal*, then the white people look down upon him and laugh at him, so that most of them neglect his work (Larkin, 2015).

2.1.2 Identity and Color Line

Lift Every Voice and Sing's poem is written in (1900) during Jim Crow Law era. Therefore, the poem portrays racial injustice and oppression that J. W. Johnson witnesses in his life. Race is always the problem between Black and White; so the constant struggle always refers back to the color line (Larkin, 2015). Undoubtedly, African Americans are suffering to live their lives as freed men. This theme is used in the poem through depicting blood and tears. For instance in the poem; J. W. Johnson says:

Stony the roads we trod,
Bitter the Chast'ning rod.

(*Lift Every Voice and Sing*: line, 9-10)

The theme of identity and racial misunderstanding is also employed in the autobiography (Larkin, 2015). Therefore, the superior white man is always diminishing the blacks' existence. Though the blacks are living in their homeland in the South, they are not feeling home. J. W. Johnson experiences this when he meets a mulatto woman in the park, and then the white militants catch him and accuse him that he is with a white woman, but then turns out that the woman is black (Edmonson, 2013).

2.1.3 Religion

The Christian theme is employed; the poem of *God's Trombones* (1927) tells the history of African American preachers before and after slavery (Gale, 1998). J. W. Johnson recounts the history of the preachers and concentrates specifically on the church. Above all, he presents the separation between Black and White in the church. He states that this separation would give an opportunity of freedom, leadership, and development of art (Wallace, 2013). In this poem, J. W. Johnson uses a lot of biblical references to indicate the purity of Blacks. Besides, in the version of *The Creation*, the author recounts the history of creation the humanity from the beginning till the Day of Judgment. Also, in the poem, he personifies that God speaks in the Southern dialect to make religious and humanistic impact on the reader (Gale, 1998).

God's Trombones (1927) also contains details of the black's traditions that inhabit the South. This would identify with (Cypress Swamp) in which defines the darkness of the southern states (Gale, 1998). In addition, the word River in the poem is used frequently to express the descendents of the slave cultures. It reflects the slave territories, and indicates the void between slave and non-slave state (Wallace, 2013). The story of *The Creation* found in the Book of *Exodus*, the infant Moses, when he places in the river as slave. Then after, he becomes freed a man. Also, *Genesis* and J. W. Johnson's *The Creation* resemble in many aspects: in the way of creating man, Day of Judgment, worshipping God and the story of oppressed people (Gale, 1998).

Religion plays an important role in African American history, especially their first church in the South and their struggle to keep it (Wallace, 2013). The song exposes how the

African Americans could escape their darkest hour by believing in God (Edmonson, 2013). Above all, J. W. Johnson states in his song, *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (1900), that if the people believe enough, God will help them. He says:

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tear,

(*Lift Every Voice and Sing*: line, 1-2)

2.1.4 Call-and-response Theme

One of the major themes of *God's Trombones* (1927) is call-and-response theme. Thus, this theme is an important part of the collective dialogue in the poem: between the author and the reader, between the text and the reader, and between the narrator and the reader (Gale, 1998). In this vein, the author calls out audiences, and waits for their response, because the author and the reader have the same history and reality (Larkin, 2015). This theme is derived from the ceremonial songs of West African villages. When ships of the slaves traveled across the Atlantic Ocean, the slaves were singing chants as a means of communication. From this manner, the Negro spirituals and gospels developed to poems and songs (Gale, 1998).

In *God's Trombones* (1927) at *Go Down, Death*__Funeral Sermon, call-and-response is vividly portrayed. In the Karamu Theater's 2012 production, spectators and performers are like encouraged Sister Caroline to transition from death to the heavenly gates of glory. He says:

She is not dead

She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.

(*Go Down, Death*: stanza, 1)

2.2 Stylistic Features in James Weldon Johnson's Works

Literary works with its entire genres are helping African Americans to struggle for their freedom. J. W. Johnson one of those literary men who wrote an artistic poems and novels that helped his community to gain their rights. Also, his different themes and styles show the proliferation of his artistic craft (Edmonson, 2013).

2.2.1 Language of Oratory Style

God's Trombones (1927) is one of the major poems in the preface *The Book of American Negro Poetry* in 1922 (Samuels, 2013). This poem praises black preachers, their traditions, and sermons. In this sense, J. W. Johnson composes several sermons that contain multiple themes and styles; the best known poem became *The Creation* (Millar, 1993).

The most attractive features of *God's Trombones* (1927) are the oratorical style of the words. (ibid) In this poem, J. W. Jonson adopts an approach that is used in many books of the holy book; therefore, he borrows poetic techniques from the holy book (Samuels, 2013).

As the story of *The Creation* is taken from the book of *Genesis*, it shows the style of the Negroes Sermon (ibid). However, it exposes the separation between black and white culture and mixed race. As for the white society who looks down upon the Negroes, J. W. Johnson improves the Black preachers in his story of *The Creation*, indicating the Negroes are intelligent and they are capable to do many things like whites (Samuels, 2013).

Ladell Payen, in his book *Themes and Cadences*, writes that in *God's Trombones*:

Johnson clearly suggests Southern Negro church speech...he was as conscious of dialectical nuance as was Twain in writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or Faulkner in writing *The Sound and the Fury*. Johnson's ability to create the effect of dialect without using its typical spelling or illiteracies is one of his greatest skills as an artist.

(Quoted in Samuels: 2013, section 9)

2.2.2 Dialectical Words

Lift Every Voice and Sing (1900) presents the suffering and racial abuse against black man, and depicts the ultimate triumph over diversity. In addition, it is set as unofficial Negro national anthem. Then after, the song entered the congressional record as the official African American national hymn (Edmonson, 2013).

Lift Every Voice and Sing (1900) is a Spiritual and gospel song. However, there is an African American sacred music, what is called Wandering couplets and quatrains employed when a variety of texts is desired, as the Spiritual and performance will determine the added text (Boyer, 1993).

Dialect is maintained in *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (1900) as J. W. Johnson uses it in most of his works (Edmonson, 2013). The difference between J. W. Johnson's style of gospel and spirituals that Negro Spirituals refer to "we" and "us"; on the other hand, gospel songs use first person "I" and "me". Though using the first person, it does not exclude community, first person sent out the individuals' piety out of community (Boyer, 1993).

2.2.3 Straightforward Style

Along This Way (1933) is an autobiographical work that depicts the incidents that J. W. Johnson faced in his life. The autobiography recounts the story of the black man who is subjugated by the white race. He gets in quarrel with them several times (Thompson, 2004). In this autobiography, J. W. Johnson influenced by Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901). J. W. Johnson's autobiography resembles Booker T. Washington's autobiography in many techniques. Both of them are written in simple, straightforward style, and far from rhetoric flourish (Gale, 2016). In *Along This Way* (1991) J. W. Johnson detached himself from the incidents in his work to let a room for the reader to experience his life inside the autobiography. Also, to comment directly on American racial situation. Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) influences J. W. Johnson in the style and themes, both of them aiming to uplift African American conditions (Larkin, 2015).

2.2.4 Varieties of Styles

As *God's Trombones* (1927) is a Sermon poem, the poem's rhythm is mixed with melodies of hymns, spirituals, and even gospel music to integrate the old style with new style (Samual, 2004). The integration of these genres altogether is exquisite. J. W. Johnson mixes these genres to extend his prose and to advance the narrative. In this sense, Vinnette Carroll's integrated new songs into the production, the classic Negro spiritual *Were you There?* He says:

Were you there they crucified my Lord?

Were you there they crucified my Lord?

(*Were you There?* line, 1-2).

Mixing the two genres makes a great impact on the poem and the reader, the old style with new one. Thus, J. W. Johnson tries to relate the history of the old slave generation and the current generation (Samuels, 2013).

2.3 A General Overview *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

J. W. Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) has changed the concerns of literary criticism, and the heterogeneous of J. W. Johnson ambiguous text. Also, his novel has continued to inspire many other writers (Wintz & Paul, 2013).

2.3.1 J. W. Johnson's Major Themes

In his literary work, Johnson uses many themes related to his orientation and his perspective. His idea is that prose should state facts; this enables him to write a realistic novel. He treats themes such as namelessness, racial self-hatred, the black mother's ambiguous role and the white patron/white liberal (Gale, 2016). These themes appear in writing of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, etc. In addition, J. W. Johnson depicts racism in two sides: physical and psychological. For example, J. W. Johnson suggests that *The Autobiography* focuses on two forms of racism, physical and psychological (Jackson, 1978).

2.3.2 Form and Style

James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is considered as one of the first texts to provide critical and holistic look at all social strata of African Americans. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is considered as an

archetype of all sorts for its racially composite view of America (Goldsby, 2016). In this matter, J. W. Johnson's novel told by first person point of view. An omniscient narrator usually knows all the characters thoughts. Furthermore, the author moves from one character to another to let the events being interpreted by multi voices. Thus, the author looks to the story from outside and know all the events precisely (Bader, 2004). On the other hand, the first person narrator, if the people do not tell him about the incidents of the story, he will not know what they are doing. Accordingly, the first person narrator is limited in his understanding of others' feelings. In this sense, when the narrator's father visited his family, the narrator could see his mother; then, he judged all the things by seeing her smile. He views the events from his own perspective, and because the narrator of this novel is particularly unemotional. Critics have frequently commented on the remarkably flat tone of the narrator's voice in this novel (Bader, 2004).

Though *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is told from a first person narrator; the narrator is not speaking of the author. His first-person voice is so effective, that readers may still assume that the narrator is J. W. Johnson describing his own life (Gale, 2016).

2.3.3 Critical Review of the Novel

James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) gains popularity and receives so much attention from the blacks and the whites as well. The novel acquires many appreciation and criticism of writers, critics, and journalists (Goldsby, 2016).

As it gains much criticism, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored man* (1912), critics focus on the issue of whether the text is autobiographical or fictional. This question left hanging in ambiguity, by Van Vechten in his introduction to the Knopf edition:

The Autobiography, of course, in the matter of specific incident, has little enough to do with Mr. Johnson's own life, but it is imbued with his own personality and feeling, his views of the subjects discussed, so that to a person who has no previous knowledge of the author's own history, it reads like real autobiography.

(Goldsby: 2016, p v-vi)

Accordingly, this novel indicates differences and divisions within the black race, gender, and ambivalent people in America (Gale, 2016). Also, J. W. Johnson makes a binary opposition through these factors: class, ethnicity, education, geography, and gradation of color. In addition, he illustrates that the problem of black American is not just race, but by many oppression forms. Jessie Fauset, in her book *The Crisis*, she praises *The Ex-Colored Man* for dealing with practically every phase and complexity of the race question (Goldsby, 2016).

James Weldon Johnson's novel receives many critical views from its publication till now (ibid). Therefore, critics put a set of questions about the notion of race authenticity. In 1997, Samira Kawach affirms that the text deals with race issues (specular image). Donald Goellnicht in 1996 illustrates the distinction between the narrator's aim, passing as white, and the fictional text's passing as an autobiography. Donald Goellnicht argues the text draws clear line of racial boundaries between the Black and the White (Gale, 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter tries to shed light on J. W. Johnson's literary works, main themes and styles. Besides, it gives an overview about the novel of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). The chapter focuses on the variation of the themes employed in his literature. These literary works include different genres: *Along This Way* (1933) and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) are novels; on the other hand, *God's Trombones* and *Lift every Voice and Sing* (1900) are Poetry. It attempts to highlight the theme of race which is used in most of African American literary works.

Chapter Three

Racial Issues in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

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Chapter Three:

Racial Issues in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

Introduction

According to Marxist theory, in America, society is divided into two groups: the bourgeois and the proletariat (Tyson, 2006). In this matter, there is a striking distinction between the two classes and a constant struggle due to the socioeconomic lifestyle. Thus, the proletariats become the homeless who have less material to control, who are uneducated, and who struggle to support their families. On the other hand, the bourgeois, who are educated, control the socioeconomic lifestyle within society and even the proletariats (ibid).

Marxist theory aims to understand the nature of the distinction between classes, sociopolitical lifestyle, the dominant class, and the individual's psychology in society. Hence, Marxist literary criticism analyzes class relation and societal conflict using materialist historical development (Tyson, 2006). Since Marxist theory focuses on the process of change in societies, this chapter is going to explore the process of change of the main character in J. W. Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). Furthermore, the chapter is going to analyze the themes of the novel to find out how the main character, the Ex-colored Man, faces racism and discrimination of the white man.

3.1 Racial Self-awareness

There are no signs of any racial issues at the outset of the novel. The narrator, The Ex-colored Man, is living a normal life in his childhood. Also, the author does not implicate or state any sign of racial inequalities. The narrator just remembers his childhood, and he

thinks of his future, i.e., stories everyone can tell, black or white. J. W. Johnson mentions that:

But to my childish fancy it was an endless territory. I can still recall the thrill of joy, excitement and wonder it gave me to go on an exploring expedition through it, to find the blackberries, both ripe and green, that grew along the edge of the fence.

(The Autobiography, p. 2)

Tyson (2006) implies that the proletariat would be expropriated by the bourgeois and the social order. Thus, J. W. Johnson attempts to illuminate this idea. The author denotes that there is no color line, the two races are equal and they are all the same. Besides, from the beginning the reader does not remark any sign of race or racism. We can find also that the narrator is experienced with music, and he tries to point out that African Americans can do everything like the white race. The narrator ability to thump on the piano alone without a master means that the best Negro can live with white race. The Negroes can do what the white man does. In this manner, W. E. B. Du Bois states in his Autobiography *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901) that the Negroes are free of slave chains; but they are left alone unguided without neither leader nor capital, without land, without skills, and without economic organization to uplift their conditions. Thus, the blacks have to make their own path to make capital, learn skills, and create economic organization to strengthen their condition. Then after, the narrator makes a good friend whose name is Red Head, named according to his physical shape. Though the Red Head is white, he is the best friend to the narrator:

Through all our school days, “Red Head” shared my wit and my quickness and I benefited from his strength and dogged faithfulness.

(The Autobiography, p. 11-12)

Afterwards, the narrator talks about skin color; he says:

There were black and brown boys and girls in the school, and several of them were in my class. One of the boys strongly attracted my attention from the first day I saw him...when he opened his mouth he displayed glistening white teeth. It struck me at once as appropriate to call him "Shiny".

(The Autobiography, p. 12)

Shiny is the best in the school, he is always looked down upon by whites. Not just Shiny, but all the black pupils are called "niggers". In this matter, the domination of white male supremacy becomes a stereotypical ideology. Eagleton (2002) maintains that ideology signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, traditions, and conventions which tie them to their social functions to prevent them from a true knowledge of society. Hence, the narrator does not know what does the Nigger mean; he asks his mother; but she does not answer him. His mother knows that it is an insult word; and she does not tell him because she knows that it would hurt her son.

What is more, the narrator discovers the truth about himself by a whimsical occasion in his class room. Hence, this situation affects him and it is the turning point in his life:

The teacher looked at me, and calling my name said, "You sit down for the present, and rise with the others." I did not quite understand her, and questioned, "Ma'm?" She repeated with a softer tone in her voice, "You sit down now, and rise with the others." I sat down dazed. I saw and heard nothing. When the others were asked to rise I did not know it. When school was dismissed I went out in a kind of stupor. A few of the white boys jeered me, saying, "Oh, you're a nigger too." I heard some black children say, "We knew he was colored."

(The Autobiography, p. 14)

This quotation demonstrates that discovering the reality of the Ex-Colored man is a shifting point in the narrator's life. Therefore, he starts questioning his identity and why the Whites treat him like that. In this sense, the narrator discovers that his potential achievement will be always limited by the class ideology and the white race. On top of that, he asks his mother whether he is black or white, then she answers him indirectly that he is black. Also, the narrator knows the reality of slavery, and he wonders about his origin. Afterwards in chapter two in the novel, the narrator says that the Black is always questioning about why they are diminished and looked down upon. On the other hand, Whites never ask or even care about this question. The problem of racial issue is historical, from the ancient time the slaves are sold as goods. They were used just for work; their masters did not care about them. As a result, the racial issue becomes natural, and the white male supremacy makes this issue normal to easily control Blacks.

With the emersion of Harlem Renaissance, the idea of slavery still exists, but with other forms. Moreover, the authors of Harlem Renaissance oriented their literary works to the world to expose their issues. They think that the reason of subjugating their race is that the blacks do not have access to education (Wintz & Finkelman, 2004). Furthermore, the narrator is affected by reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This book has changed the narrator's life and has revealed many prospective to the narrator's world that he is getting in. The narrator says:

It opened my eyes as to who and what I was and what my country considered me; in fact, it gave me my bearing. But there was no shock; I took the whole revelation in a kind of stoical way.

(*The Autobiography*, p.40)

However, the Negroes are free, but without a leader to guide them. They are free, but not equal. This appears in the novel when the narrator says:

I felt leap within me pride that I was colored; and I began to form wild dreams of bringing glory and honor to the Negro race.

(The Autobiography, p.40)

In this sense, the narrator makes up his mind on the day of his graduation from the grammar school to be a leader. Furthermore, he knows that his community needs a leader to progress them ahead and to gain equality.

3.2 Pursuing Class Ideology

The narrator's musical skill helps him to gain many goals, and after the death of his mother, he has dedicated himself to education at Atlanta University. In Atlanta, it is completely different, there, he could see for the first time a lower class of the black:

The unkempt appearance, the shambling, slouching gait and loud talk and laughter of these people aroused in me a feeling of almost repulsion. Only one thing about them awoke a feeling of interest; that was their dialect.

(The Autobiography, p.53)

In his new world, Atlanta, the narrator is amazed by the life the blacks living there. As the day passed, one day the narrator eats at a restaurant belonging to the black's owner; then, he has discovered that it is the best restaurant in the region, and it is dirty, cheap and disgraceful.

The class ideology destroys blacks' conditions and sinks them into a bad miserable life. The narrator has got a good experience in the first days in Atlanta. Later on, the

narrator is in a big problem when he knows that his money is stolen from his lodging house. This predicament motivates him to be more careful, and to look for a job to recuperate his money.

In his new world, the narrator becomes more acquainted with problem of racial issues and the struggle between the black and white:

It is a struggle; for though the black man fights passively he nevertheless fights; and his passive resistance is more effective at present than active resistance could possibly be. He bears the fury of the storm as does the willow tree.

(The Autobiography, p.72-73)

This quotation reveals that the narrator admits the black' struggle, but it is not a straightforward struggle. Again, the narrator insists on education and learning. If the black wants a highly esteemed position, they have to educate to win this struggle.

In this novel, the narrator divides the blacks into three groups according to their relation with whites. This division results from the narrator's view to blacks and their reactions toward whites. The aim of J. W. Johnson from dividing the blacks into groups is to provide a truthful reality in its revolutionary development with respect to the problem of ideological transformation and the education of the workers in the spirit of socialism (Eagleton, 2002). These groups are the lowest classes, the desperate class, and the independent workmen class due to their high education:

The colored people may be said to be roughly divided into three classes, not so much in respect to themselves as in respect to their relations with the whites. There are those constituting what might be called the desperate class, the men who work in the lumber and turpentine

camps, the ex-convicts, the bar-room loafers are all in this class.

(The Autobiography, p.74)

This class ranking is according to the interaction between black and white, and according to the way blacks see themselves. In this sense, J. W. Johnson brings the class division from Carl Marx doctrine of society: lower class, middle class, and high class. It is obvious that the narrator rejects the racial categorization, because he classifies himself and others by their social statues, and imposes his own class bias upon them. Thus, the narrator dehumanizes the lowest class of blacks because they are unsuccessful to fulfill his respectability.

The second group is in relationship with whites in terms of work and service. They are servants, farmers, waiters, and most of them are religious. This group of Negroes has a good relationship with whites due to the work they are doing.

The third group consists of educated independent workmen. Due to their high education, the whites do not have a good relationship with them. The whites are always afraid of this group of Negroes because they are aware of what they are doing. However, the middle-class ideology of the narrator dedicated him to reveal class bias. He reveals that the lowest-class prompts to the destruction of the upper-class, prevailing racism throughout other classes. He claims that:

The fact that the whites of the south despise and ill treat the desperate class of blacks is not only explainable according to the ancient law of human nature but it is not nearly so serious or important as the fact that as the progressive colored people advance.

(The Autobiography, p.77)

This quotation illustrates the whites' discrimination against the black social class, and it reveals the white racism against the black lower class. The narrator claims the situation of the elite class as follows:

Grows tragic when the effort is made to couple them, whether or not, with the Negroes of the first class I mentioned. This latter class of colored people are well disposed towards the whites.

(The Autobiography, p.78)

This indicates that the narrator belongs to the middle class, and he appreciates both the middle-class and the blacks' upper-class. On the other hand, he considers the lower class as simple and desperate. The narrator praises the humanity of black middle-class and dehumanizes the black lower-class.

3.3 Individual Success in the Black Community

The narrator works in a factory, and after closing this factory, he makes up his mind to leave Atlanta. Then after, he starts a new experience in New York where the narrator finds different languages and styles of colored people. The word nigger is commonly used among the blacks without any complain; but it is not acceptable when the whites address the black:

I noticed that among this class of colored men the word "nigger" was freely used in about the same sense as the word "fellow," and sometimes as a term of almost endearment; but I soon learned that its use was positively and absolutely prohibited to white man.

(The Autobiography, p.89)

At that time, there were a lot of African Americans who inhabit in New York; and all the classes that the narrator mentions before exist there. These classes are the lower-classes who waste their money in gambling and drinking, the working-class who have their passion to work and create the image of the community; and finally the businessmen class, artists and musician. As a good musician, the narrator finds a substantial value in music to revive his cultural heritage. In addition, it depicts the slave traditions. These sentiments revert back to old slave songs as:

I gloated over the immense amount of material I had to work with, not only modern ragtime, but also the old slave songs, material ragtime, but also the old slave songs, material But also the old slave songs, materials which no one had yet touched.

(The Autobiography, p.139-140)

The narrator blames the Negroes because they do not care about these songs, and he says that:

As yet, the Negroes themselves do not fully appreciate these old slave songs. The educated classes are rather ashamed of them, and prefer to sing hymns from books.

(The Autobiography, p.178)

In this sense, the narrator draws a line between the black lower class and the black middle or upper-class. Furthermore, he indicates that uneducated Negroes paves the way for the white man to discriminate the black community. The African American activist, Booker T. Washington, insists on education and learning as a way to uplift the blacks' condition. Negroes have a strong passion to music; as a result, they have developed new styles. The ragtime music was the best kind in African American music, and the narrator says about it:

It was originated in the questionable resorts about Memphis and St. Louis by Negro piano players, who knew no more of the theory of music than they did of the theory of the universe, but were guided by natural musical instinct and talent.

(The Autobiography, p.96)

The white man attempts to ignore ragtime music due to its black origin at that time; but the ragtime becomes a bestseller. The whites try to imitate this style and claim that it belongs to them. White male supremacy does not want a black artist to be as equal as them (Gale, 2016).

3.4 Class Shift in the Black Community

The narrator wants to make money in New York; so he returns back to his past work as a cigar maker. Though his dreams are more than this work, he is keeps waiting for the moment to be a great man. Meanwhile, the narrator gives up the job and begins gambling and playing music as a ragtime player in a local bar. As the narrator is well-performed in music, a millionaire and kind-hearted man offers the narrator an outstanding income to play for him. This job allows the narrator to focus only on music and not to worry about money. In this sense, he is away from observing the life of blacks, and then the narrator travels to Europe with his boss, the millionaire. There, the narrator learns French and German languages, and he becomes “A polished man of the world” (Johnson: 1912, p. 140). In Europe, the narrator finds it easy to live for the colored man, there is no racial class disparities. He goes out alone and none disturbs him. He goes out and spends his time on exploring the cities:

I spent the day nosing about all the curious nooks and corners of Paris; of this I never grew tired. At night I usually went to some theater, but always ended up at the big café on the Grand Boulevards.

(The Autobiography, p.128)

After years, the narrator obsessed by a longing to his homeland; so he expresses his intention to his benefactor to go back to the United States. The narrator feels that he becomes a professional artist, and he tries to display his talent in the United States. Later on, the millionaire tells him that as long as the narrator has the ability of the white man, he could live a superior life as whites do. He says:

My boy, you are by blood, by appearance, by education and by tastes, a white man. Now why do you want to throw your life away amidst the poverty and ignorance, in the hopeless struggle of the black people of the United States? Then look at the terrible handicap you are placing on yourself by going home and working as a Negro composer.

(The Autobiography, p.141)

The narrator is aware of this, but he is still pursuing the quest of his race. In this matter, the narrator or Johnson agrees with Du Bois' contentions that "for blacks to be fully human they must not forsake higher cultural ideals in favor of material success" (Warren, 1995, p. 273). The narrator believes in the Negro race and tries to uplift the Negro cultural heritage.

3.5 Class Ideology and Racial Heritage

The narrator makes up his mind to depart his benefactor and to come back to the United States. After his arrival, the narrator discovers another group of colored people; they are different from those in the South. However, Negroes of the North are educated and they know to live with the white man. The narrator says:

In speech and thought genuine Yankees. The difference was especially noticeable in their speech. There was none of that heavy tongued enunciation which characterizes even the best educated colored people of the South.

(The Autobiography, p.149-150)

The narrator observes the difference between the Negro of the South and the Negro of the North. The Negroes of the South are unaware of their existence. In general, the jobs are always offered to the white man over the black man and many economic and social disadvantages for the black. For instance, the blacks are segregated in medical care, public transport, and education. J. W. Johnson concludes it in his novel with one sentence, "It's no disgrace to be black, but it's often very inconvenient" (*The Autobiography, p.152*). After that, the narrator continues his journey. The narrator is astonished by the Negroes there, because he observes that they can do any conversation with strangers about any topic. When he is in a smoking compartment of a train car, there is a man from Texas who is talking about the inferiority of the Negro race in the South. This man is a cotton planter, and he speaks to them as niggers, inferior, and lesser beings with no right to be equal with the white pure Anglo-Saxon; he says:

If the Anglo-Saxon is the source of everything good and great in the human race from the beginning, why wasn't the German forest the birthplace of civilization?"

(The Autobiography, p.159)

The author illustrates both the ideology of the white man and his ideology. The white man considers the issue of race as a historical matter. Thus, he keeps this ideology and conserves it for a long time; he attempts to keep the black man inferior because of his origin (Robinson, 1983). In fact, the narrator thinks that it is possible to change the white's mentality, because it is not based on the truth. Furthermore, for him, this mentality can be changed by the basic elements of Harlem Renaissance, which are culture, music, literature, and art.

Moreover, as the narrator experiences the life in the South and the North, he claims that the problem of the Negroes is their race, and the whites are discriminating them and treating them harshly. He says:

And yet in this respect how perplexing is Southern character; for in opposition to the above, it may be said that the claim of The Southern whites that they love the Negro better than the Northern whites do.

(The Autobiography, p.167)

3.6 Social Integration

Through his journey in the South, the narrator starts collecting black folk materials and uses them in his music. Then, he decides to start teaching and performing music. However, the novel reaches its climax when the narrator witnesses a public lynching of a

black man; a white mob burns a black man alive. Warren (1995) argues that this making of a man into less than a man and this is the main theme in the novel. The narrator says:

The men who at midnight had been stern and silent were now emitting that terror instilling sound known as the "rebel yell." A space was quickly cleared in the crowd, and a rope placed about his neck; when from somewhere came the suggestion, "Burn him!" It ran like an electric current. Have you ever witnessed the transformation of human beings into savage beasts?

(The Autobiography, p.83)

The violent scene has a great impact on the narrator's life. At that time, he realizes that there is no hope for the Negro race community among the white. This scene illustrates the narrator's fear, and he considers it as a great shame on his country. He wonders that how does a great country like the United States bare such shame like this scene:

Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with and shame for my country, that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should where a human being would be burned alive. My heart turned bitter within me.

(The Autobiography, p. 184)

The narrator focuses on the dehumanization of the victim. The victim represents the degenerate class, in which he is not a man or a human being. The white man is always targeting this Negroes who belongs to the lower class that is why the narrator keeps blaming the blacks instead of the white mob who treat the black with harsh brutality, he says:

There he stood, a man only in form and stature, every sign of degeneracy stamped upon his countenance. His eyes were dull and vacant, indicating not a single ray of thought. Evidently the realization of his fearful fate had robbed him.

(The Autobiography, p.183)

This revelation affects the narrator, especially when he finally realizes that his respectability, class ideology, and cultivation, his social lower class will always confine him to act freely, and confine all the Negroes to free themselves from the chain of slavery. Also, his black identity will always relate himself to the lower degenerate class that he is against.

Ultimately, the narrator makes up his mind to pass as the white man, and turns out his quest for social status over race. The narrator confesses choosing the white identity to protect his community; furthermore, he wants to pursue the white identity to be equal in terms of financial and material success, he says:

I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro, I would avail myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man's success; and that, if it can be summed up in any one word, means "money."

(The Autobiography, p. 189)

At the end, the narrator transgresses the color line and he becomes a successful man. He gets married with a white woman. But after his success, the narrator regrets his decision of chasing class over race. Above all, this illustrates that class-ideology affects the narrator attitude and actions, which leads to destroying his individual identity. The class ideology spots tragic notions in his life; in *The Autobiography* he sadly says:

I feel small and selfish. I am an ordinary successful white man who has made a little money. They are men who are making history and a race. I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious.

(The Autobiography, p. 207)

Conclusion

Chapter three presents an analytical study to *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) in which the process of change of the main character, the Ex-colored man, is taken into consideration from the beginning to the end of the novel. In this regard, Hoppe (2010) regards that the world will turn upside-down and that day when the proletariat will take their rights has to come. Thus, the narrator takes his right through this process and become a successful man.

All in all, in *the Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), J. W. Johnson illustrates the pursuing the social class and racial identity. Furthermore, this pursuing results in the alienation of the narrator from himself and from his community. J. W. Johnson also admits that the engine of society is the economic and political limitations, by which they control the black identity to create a bright future. In this manner, J. W. Johnson reveals that the ultimate tragedy does not lie within the particular discourse that the narrator adopts, but it lies within the very beginning of the tragedy that he must choose (Gale, 2016).

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), James Weldon Johnson depicts one of the major issues during the twentieth century in the United States of America, racism. Racism is the ideology that involves the domination of the white man over the black one. Thus, James Weldon Johnson describes all the forms of racism that were applied against the black. Moreover, he divides the Black of his community into three classes, as Carl Marx divided the society structure. In this matter, J. W. Johnson deems that the blacks must be aware of their existence and they have to uplift their condition to be as equal as the white man.

The present study intends to explore the themes of racism and oppression in J. W. Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and to explore how the Ex-colored man, the narrator, becomes a successful man by the end of the novel. James Weldon Johnson is inspired by the idea of Booker T. Washington of rising up the condition of slavery position. Thus, James Weldon Johnson tries to depict his main character the Ex-colored man as an activist black man.

Therefore, James Weldon Johnson addresses the lower class of his community with an aggressive tone. He argues that if this class remains like that, the white man would not stop to oppress them and look down upon them. Above all, the Ex-colored man rejects this class, and considers it helpless class. James Weldon Johnson describes the binary opposition as equal races, and there is no truth which entails that the white race is superior to black one. Accordingly, by the end of the novel, the narrator gets married with a white

woman, indicating that Blacks and Whites can coexist together peacefully without any discrimination.

African American's historical background affects the literary production of the black writers. Therefore, African American literature is like a mirror that reflects their suffering and their dangling reality during the twentieth century. James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) depicts the great disparities between the Blacks and the Whites. In this matter, the white man makes this idea stereotypical, but James Weldon Johnson rejects the class order since there is no truth which entails this division.

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Résumé

Cette étude est une initiative personnelle de l'auteur qui traite du racisme. Dans le roman de James Weldon Johnson sous titré *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), puisque la ségrégation et le racisme sont les plus apparentes problématiques dans la littérature Américaine, c'est en effet, beaucoup d'écrivains qui se sont engagés pour combattre ce phénomène. C'est ainsi que s'est développée la littérature en Amérique dans le sens de dénoncer la situation que vivaient les noirs et proposer des réformes qui pourraient les libérer de l'esclavage. En plus de cela, cette étude a pour but d'analyser toute forme d'exploitation et de ségrégation que subissait l'homme noir pendant le vingtième siècle aux états unis de l'Amérique. Enfin, à travers cette étude, on a voulu chercher à quel point la théorie Marxiste est retracée dans le roman. En réalité, le roman est écrit pour contraindre les lois rétrogrades des blancs contre la race noire telles que les lois de Jim Crow, et l'exécution sans jugement "lynching" et Ku Klux Klan et expliquer comment les Américains d'Afrique ont arraché leurs droits civils dans le nouveau monde et vivre dans l'égalité.

Mots-clés: race, caractère ethnique, identité, littérature Afro-Américaine.

ملخص :

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على الشخصية العرقية في رواية جيمس ويلدون جونسون بعنوان السيرة الذاتية للرجل البني (*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*) و بما أن الاضطهاد و العنصرية من أهم الإشكاليات في الأدب الأمريكي ,فان الكتاب كانوا ضد هذه الظاهرة .و لهذا كان شأن الأدب الأمريكي هو إصلاح وضعية الرجل الأسود من العبودية إلى الحرية .إضافة إلى هذا ,تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كل أشكال الاضطهاد و العنصرية التي عانى منها الرجل الأسود خلال القرن العشرين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية .و في هذه الدراسة ,ارتأينا للبحث إلى أي مدى طبقت النظرية الماركسية في رواية السيرة الذاتية للرجل البني؟ في حقيقة الأمر كتبت الرواية للاعتراض على قوانين البيض الجائرة ضد العرق الأسود مثل قانون جيم كرو و الإعدام من غير محاكمة قانونية و كو كلاكس كلان,و لتوضيح كيف استرد الأفارقة الأمريكيين هويتهم و عزتهم في العالم الجديد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العرق ,الشخصية العرقية ,الهوية ,الأدب الأفرو أمريكي.