



Racism in Wedding Band: A LOVE/HATE STORY IN BLACK AND WHITE



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Abstract. The present study talks about **Racism** in Wedding Band: A LOVE/HATE STORY IN BLACK AND WHITE by Alice Childress during the world war II. Section One presents the introduction, problem, aims, and hypothesis of the study. Section Two presents an overview about Racism specially in the American society at the time of world war II. The second part presents one of the most important black writers Alice Childress, her life, style, and major works. Also, she is one of the writers who used racism in many of her works. Section Three presents a critical comment about the play and the analysis of the selected texts. Section Four presents the main conclusion which show how the writer used racism in her words.

المخلص. تتحدث الدراسة الحالية عن العنصرية في حفل الزفاف: قصة حب / كراهية في الأسود والأبيض من تأليف أليس تشيلدرس خلال الحرب العالمية الثانية. يعرض المبحث الأول مقدمة الدراسة ومشكلتها وأهدافها وفرضيتها. يقدم المبحث الثاني نظرة عامة حول العنصرية وخاصة في المجتمع الأمريكي في وقت الحرب العالمية الثانية. الجزء الثاني يقدم واحدة من أهم الكتاب السود أليس تشيلدرس، حياتها وأسلوبها وأعمالها الرئيسية. إذ أنها من الكتاب الذين استخدموا العنصرية في كثير من أعمالها. يقدم المبحث الثالث تعليقاً نقدياً للمسرحية وتحليل النصوص المختارة. يقدم المبحث الرابع أهم النتائج التي توضح كيف استخدمت الكاتبة العنصرية في كلماتها.





1. Introduction

1.1. Problem of the study

The present study tries to show the role of racism which is used against black people during II world war. The selected play is attempted to discover the problems that black people especially females face at the time of World War II in America, the beliefs and thoughts that society have against the black and how the black fight to break these traditions.

1.2. Aims of the study

The study aims at:

1. Showing the dominance of white against black in a specific period.
2. 2.How society ignored black people and forbid the interracial marriage.
3. 3.How black people especially female fight to brake social traditions.

1.3. Hypotheses of the study

It is hypothesized that:

- 1.Injustice and oppression are used against all the members of the American society.
- 2.Racism is the most dominant social idea that is used to express the playwright's thoughts and beliefs in the pla.
- 3.The image of women differ in the same society according to their color.

1.4. Procedures

The main procedures of the study are:

- 1.A literature review of racism.
- 2.Choosing a play that talks about the previous theme.
- 3.Analyze the selected texts from the play.
- 4.Showing the conclusions of the study.

1.5. Limits

The study limited itself to the idea of racism which is presented in the selected texts from the play.

1.6. Value of the study





This study is of value to those who are interested literature, feminism, race, class and so on.

2. Racism

Racism is a universal hierarchy of power and inferiority beside the line of human that have been culturally, economically, and politically produced and reproduced for periods by the institutions of the 'patriarchal western-centric capitalist/ Christian-centric modern/colonial world system' (Grosfoguel, 2011). The people who categorized above the line of human are known socially in their humanity as 'human beings' and enjoy entrance to rights 'women rights, civil rights, human rights and/or labor rights), material possessions, and social credit to their subjectivities, identities, epistemologies and spiritualities. The people who are under the line of human are regarded as subhuman or non-human; that is, their humanity is questioned and, as such, negated (Fanon 1967). Racism is an ideology of racial domination (Wilson, 1999: p. 14). While racism is associated with both processes, contemporary racial inequalities and methods of discrimination are not always the immediate consequence of contemporary racism (Pager and Shepherd, 2008). The total subordination of followers of targeted racial groups who have quite little social power in the United States (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, and Asians), by the supporters of the agent racial group who have comparatively more social power "Whites". (Wijeyasinghe, C. L., Griffin, P, and Love, B., 1997: 88-89).

2.1. Inequality between Black and White

Racism purposes as the most important feature of the Wedding Band. It is the idea of racism that leads to ten years of denied love and to Herman's death. Racism is the center of law which prevents black and white from marriage. Julia and Herman are below the injustice racism who damages their life. Racism is very clear in this play and can be seen by with the words (black, colored, and nigger). These words are used by Herman's mother and sister and the white Bell Man who wants to sleep with Julia but she rejects (Hasan, 2021: 133)

2.1.1. The writer

Alice Childress (1916 –1994), an African- American playwright, actress, novelist, short story writer, journalist, essayist stretches and director. She is the only African American woman who have written, produced, and published plays for four decades. Childress has appeared with the American Negro





theatre in the 1940. She has considered herself as a loner and inspired to write about the masses as a result to her own determinations and experiences. She said that " She taught herself to break rules and follow her own thoughts". In her work, she presents themes about slavery, racial discrimination, and the history of her family, all these are the ideas of her own (Mullen & Smethurst,2003:186-187). During her life she wrote about twenty plays and most of her plays focus on social injustice and racial inequities, featuring strong African American female characters. Childress's plays concentrate on the triumphs and struggles of the working classes and black poor. A liberation writer, this is the name that she called herself because she creates strong, compassionate and militants female characters who fought socioeconomic conditions. Julia in Wedding Band and Wiletta in Terrible in Mined were two of her female characters who regarded a rare case in the African American drama of the civil rights period since they were among the few black characters to face white antagonist onstage. She was one of the few African American playwrights to talk about interracial issues because these issues were happening around her (Perkins, 2011: XI). Concerning her light skin color, Childress was very sensitive and stating that lighter skinned African-American often faced special 38 treatment. In one of her meeting she talks about her problem with her skin color. She said that : I'm very light. It has been a painful thing for me. I found it painful because it's a deep subject that I should write about sometime. I will never forget the words, " you are too light to play this part". This is the reason I dropped out of acting, I said I can express myself on a piece of paper and I stayed with it trying to do that. Because I wouldn't let this society cut me off from total expression. (ibid: XX- XXI). In the Wedding Band, Alice Childress presents her black and white Romeo and Juliet who are the modern victims in their society. Alice in this play confirms that racism is not only practiced by whites against blacks but also by blacks against whites. she presents an image of angry women united by their suffering and need of sisterly unity and solidarity. The anger of those women is a positive rather than negative factor as it gives the heroine her freedom from the ties that make her an outcast in her own community. This play argues the destiny of two lovers who face refusal from their families and society and the following anger of the female characters whether in favor or against this romantic relation (Saleh, 2018: 1)

2.1.2. The Main Characters





- 1- Julia Augustine: she is the modern black Juliet, —an attractive brown woman about thirty-five years old|| who is in love with Herman, who is white. (Saleh, 2018: 70)
- 2- Herman: he is a white man and the new copy of Romeo.
- 3- Mattie: she is a very poor black woman.
- 4- Thelma: she is Herman's mother.
- 5- Annabelle: she is Herman's sister (Childress, 1973).

2.1.3. *The Setting*

The Wedding Band occurs in South Carolina in 1918 and over a period of three days near the end of the World war 1. Most of the characters are women and live in poverty which is clear from their homes and circumstances.

2.1.4. *The Plot*

The Wedding Band depicts a tragedy involving an interracial affair. Julia is a black woman in love with a white man, Herman. They would like to escape the south and move to the north where they would be free to marry.

2.1.5. *The themes*

Alienation and Loneliness, Human Rights, Custom and Tradition Freedom Limitations and Opportunities Prejudice and Tolerance. Race and racism functions as the most prominent theme of Wedding Band. It is racism that caused Herman's death and to ten long years of denied love. Racism lies at the heart of a law that prevents whites and blacks from inter-marrying. Wedding Band studies how social custom and legal authority serve as a force to sustain racism within society. There are also examples of other kinds of racism in the play. The characters are intolerant of Germans, Jews, and of one another. The words and actions of the characters reveal that racism is more than white domination of blacks; prejudice can also be found in black Americans' distrust of white Americans. (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/wedding-band>).

3. A critical comment

Text1:

"JULIA. Miss Lula, please don't ... You know it's against the law for black and white to get married , so Gawd nor the tea leaves can help us . My friend is white and that's why I try to stay to myself . (After a





few seconds of silence.).”

(Childress, 1973: 20)

This is a conversation between Julia, Lula and Mattie about Julia's state. They try to find a solution for their problem and Lula tells Julia to let Fanny reads the tree leaves to know what will happen in the future but Julia refuses because only God can help them.

Text2:

“JULIA. I'm your damn daughter-in-law, you old bitch! The Battleship Bitch! The bitch who destroys with her filthy mouth. They could win the war with your killin' mouth. The son-killer, man-killer-bitch. ... She's killin' him 'cause he loved me more than anybody in the world.”

Text3:

“JULIA. The black thing who bought a hot water bottle to put on your sick, white self when rheumatism threw you flat on your back ... who bought flannel gowns to warm your pale, mean body. He never ran up and down King Street shoppin' for you ... I bought what he took home to you JULIA. the lace crutians in your parlor ... the shirt-waist you wearn'—I made them ... JULIA. If I wasn't black with all-a Carolina ginst me I'd be mistress of your house! An-nabelle, you'd be married livin' in Brooklyn, New York ... and I'd be watin' on Frieda ... cookin' your meals...waterin' that damn red- white and blue garden. (p50-51).”

This is collected texts said by Julia to Herman's mother in Julia's house. When the mother comes to see her sick son she argued with Julia as she is the reason behind Herman's sickness and Julia answers her in this unfriendly and hostile way. Julia's answers consist of her struggles along ten years and her refusal of the white and their law.

Text4:

“JULIA. Out! Out! Out! And take the last ten years-a my life with you and ... when he gets better... keep him home. Killers, murderers.. . Kinsmen! Klansmen! Keep him home. (To MATTIE.) Name and protection. ... he can't gimme either one. (To LULA.) I'm gon' get down on my knees and scrub where they walked they touched.. . (To





MATTIE.) . with brown soap... hot lye-water.. . scaldin' hot (She dashes into the house and collects an armful of bedding . . .) Clean! Clean the whiteness outta my house ... clean everything... even the memory. no more love. . . free... Free to hate0cha for the rest of my life (Back to the porch with her arms full.) . When I die I'm gonna keep on hatin'. . . I dont' want any whiteness in my house. Stay out ...out... out (dumps the things in the yard) ... out...out...out...and leave me to my black self!. (p51). ”

This is the last text in scene one act two when Julia rebels and revolts against Herman's mother and the white at all. At this moment, she decides to leave and forget Herman and their love. She is tired from their bad treatment and cannot continue in this sick relationship. Her way in cleaning her house refers to her realization of the situation, that she will never marry Herman in anyway. She even cancels her travel to New York.

Text5:

“HERMAN'S MOTHER. When he wasn't but five years old I had to whip him so he'd study his John C. Calhoun speech. Oh, Cal- houn knew bout niggers. He said, "MEN are not born .. equal, or any other kinda way made"... Yes, indeed, for recitin' that John C. Cal- houn speech (p46-47). ”

“JULIA. Your mama's own words... according to you –I'll never forget them as long as I live. Annabelle, you've got a brother who makes pies and loves a nigger. (p25). ”

“HERMAN'S MOTHER. When he wasn't but five years old I had to whip him so he'd study his John C. Calhoun speech. Oh, Cal- houn knew bout niggers. He said, "MEN are not born .. equal, or any other kinda way made"... Yes, indeed, for recitin' that John C. Cal- houn speech (p46-47). ”

3.1. The Role and Image of Black Women (AfricanAmerican women)

Childress in the Wedding Band shows that her black and white female characters are victims of a patriarchal society that ignores them because of race, class, and gender. Julia: appears in the stage as —an attractive brown woman about thirtyfive years old". At the beginning of the play she utters her first words which show her defiant nature: "*JULIA. Oh, my ... Good mornin' ladies. My name is Julia Augustine. I'm not gonna move*". Childress presented Julia who is powerful than other black women in the play. Julia loves Herman in





spite of his different race and stays with him ten years waiting something to change. She is obliged to leave her place and travels to another one more than one time because all people refuse this forbidden relation. White people and Black refuse this relation, the white thinks that they are better and higher than black while the Black feels afraid from this relation because they know the danger they will face from law, society and the white people. During ten years, Julia faces different kinds of oppression from all races, from white people like Herman's family and black people like Fanny, Lula and Mattie. The Wedding Band represents the image of the angry, powerful, fighter and honest black female who faces the society alone to save her love. She did not gain anything from this relation except the hate of people along ten years and at the end of the play she lost what she struggles for (Herman). Fanny: Fanny is the lady who Julia has rented from her territory. Although she is a black woman, but she also refuses this relation because she is afraid about her image in the society. If someone knows that she rents a room to a black woman who has a love relation with a white man, she will be punished from the police and abandoned from society. At the end of the play when Herman's mother comes to see her sick son, Fanny tells her that she tells Julia not to get a doctor. Fanny was afraid that someone sees them and informs the police about them, in this case Fanny will be punished. So, Fanny represents the image of the black person who wants to live with the white safely, she wants to save herself, her work and to get the satisfaction of the white. FANNY, Miss Thelma, this is not Squeeze-gut Alley. We're just poor, humble, colored people... and every-body knows how to keep their mouth shut.

"HERMAN'S MOTHER. I thank you. FANNY. She wanted to get a doctor. I put my foot down. (p44)"

Mattie and Lula: are black women who suffer a lot in their lives. Mattie has deserted from her first husband and she is living with another man for eleven years and has a daughter from him. She struggles from the law also because she cannot divorce her husband according to the law of South Carolina. She works as a babysitting for the white children and makes candies to gain money. At the end of the play Julia frees her by giving her wedding band and the tickets to go to her love October. Lula: she also suffers from the society, after the death of her husband and son, she adopted a boy and reared him. She is a weak woman tries to save her adopted son Nelson from anyone she thinks might harm him, even apologizing to the white people to protect him. Lula works in making paper flowers to get extra money.





Fanny also represents the race which is the cause of her fear from society. FANNY, Miss Thelma, this is not Squeeze-gut Alley. We're just poor, humble, colored people... and every- body knows how to keep their mouth shut. (p44). Other examples of racism in the play are the hatred between people while they are Jews, Germans or others like Herman's mother when she was afraid from her German origin and changed her German name. This thing is clear when someone wrote cross the side of Herman's home that (German lives here) which leads Annabelle to write (*WE ARE AMERICAN CITIZINS*) and put it on the window. (Hasan, 2021: 129-131)

4. Conclusion

Alice Childress presents the image of the black woman who lives in an interracial society and face different types of oppression only to marry a white man. Julia in the Wedding Band becomes a widow before marriage which leads to her free from suffering. So, the way each character chooses is differ. It is concluded that women of two colors in the same society face oppressions and struggle with social traditions

The image of woman differs in the same society, the black character faces oppression from society because of her color and seeks for her free to marry her love. While the white character faces oppression from the Victorian traditions and tries to get her free from them.

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