



## The Problem of Skin Color in Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the sufferings of a black girl in Wallace Thurman's (1902-1934) *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life* (1929). The novel is an account of the challenges a young black girl faces throughout her life in her attempts to get accepted not only by the whites, but also by the lighter black-skinned African Americans of her society. It falls into an introduction followed by two sections and a conclusion. A few critical views of the novel in general are presented in the introduction. Section one shows how the main character of the novel, Emma Lou is rejected and discriminated by the whites as well as the blacks due to her darker black skin. Section two shows how racism is internalized by Emma Lou and how it transforms into self hatred. The socio-psychological effects on the main character in this section further complicate the problem of skin color to the extent one feels there is no hope for Emma. However, as she is left all alone, she has no choice but to accept her reality and live with it. She, therefore, decides to escape no more, and a self-reconciliation concludes our story. The conclusion illustrates also how the protagonist's chances for acceptance, marriage, and economic independence are virtually non-existent because of her dark skin. It further makes it clear that the problem of darker skin tone could lead to self-hatred once it is internalized. However, there is a glimmer of hope if people realize that a skin color should not be the only criterion through which one is judged.

**Key words:** *Skin Color, rejection, self-hatred, self-reconciliation, African American novel.*

### Introduction

Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life (BTB)*<sup>1</sup> (1929) is considered one of the most controversial novels of the Harlem Renaissance which overtly tackles the problem of internalized racism and prejudice within the black community. The title of the novel is derived from an old African American saying, "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the Juice," which is the epigraph of the novel Thurman utilizes ironically to explore the problem of intra-racial prejudice of the light-skinned black toward the dark-skinned individuals within the black community.

Thurman was "one of the most active, energetic, and multitalented" writers who was courageous to tackle controversial subjects and had a leading role among the young African American writers during the Harlem Renaissance (Howes 2001, p.259). The issue of prejudice and color consciousness<sup>2</sup> within the African American community is the main focus in Thurman's works which is also a reflection of his personal life. He observes that most of the "blacks" hold prejudice against the darker-skinned individuals of their own race. Thurman personally witnesses humiliation by the lighter-skinned people of his own race due to his dark skin color. (Howes p.259).

<sup>1</sup> Henceforth abbreviated as BTB in the research.

<sup>2</sup> Awareness of color; especially the feeling that differences in skin color, or the color of one's own skin, have a special importance or meaning. (Anon., n.d. Web. 10 Feb 2016.)



Many reviews were written after the publication of the novel. Some believe that Thurman is not successful to “dramatize his material, i.e., his less than distinguished effort to give his ‘obsession’ an ‘effective form.’ ” Du Bois states that Thurman links racial issues with “scandalous” aspects of urban life (Howes p.259). Though he praises Thurman for tackling a significant subject such as, intra-racial prejudice, he “finds the novel under-developed, confused between fact and fiction, hovering between depictions of low-down life and racial uplift” (Howes 325-326). Du Bois says, “Indeed, there seems to be no real development in Emma’s character; her sex life never becomes nasty and commercial, and yet nothing in her seems to develop beyond sex” (qtd. in Scott 326). On the other hand, in *The Chicago Defender*, Dewey R Jones celebrates the novel and says, “Here at last is the book for which I have been waiting, and for which you have been waiting, whether you admit it or not” (qtd. in Scott 325).

Linda M. Carter remarks that Thurman tackles a unique subject about the impacts of racism and internalized racism which had never been tackled before. From the publication of the first slave narratives, the main focus of the African American writers had been to portray a protagonist who was either suffering from racism and racial discrimination, or presenting him/her in an ideal image to uplift the African race. However, Thurman was different from his predecessors; “[he] is one of the first black writers to present African American characters who are victims of their own foibles” (p. 390).

Kassahun Checole declares that *The Blacker the Berry* is “an exciting, frank, and timeless novel about the social-psychological framework of the Black community in the 1920s. . . . The novel presents a view of the American socialization process, which results in the internalization of the perspectives of the oppressors by the oppressed.” He adds, Thurman himself as an African American writer was grown in such environment and had witnessed this socialization process (p. 117).

### **1. Rejection and Discrimination**

From her early childhood, Emma Lou witnesses discrimination and rejection not only from the white people of her community in Boise, Idaho, but from her own semi-white family owing to her dark skin color.

Emma Lou’s grandparents are descendants of mulattos. Her grandmother, Maria, is the front-runner and supporter of Boise’s Blue vein society. It is called by this name because “all its members [are] fair skinned enough for their blood to be pulsing purple through the veins of their wrists.” They consider themselves as a “high type of Negro” who are superior to the “pure blooded Negro,” because they are the offspring of the only true aristocrats in the United States and “in their vein [is] some of the best blood of the South” (*BTB* 18).

All the members of the blue vein society have a desperate tendency to produce a white generation so as to promote their social and economic conditions in the United States. The narrator describes how the blue vein society is restricted only to the light-skinned African Americans so as to eliminate all the traces of black race in their grandchildren which eventually make them easily absorbed into the white race and keep them away from the problem of race (*BTB* 19). Emma Lou’s uncle, Joe, describes the motto of the blue vein society:

“Whiter and whiter, every generation. The nearer white you are the more white people will respect you. Therefore all light Negroes marry light Negroes. (*BTB* 31)

However, it is difficult to apply this formula on Emma Lou because she is less desirable for marriage due to her dark skin color. Emma Lou’s grandmother often tells her that “she would never find a husband worth a dime” (*BTB* 26). Her mother also tells Emma Lou’s uncle Joe that “[m]en like any one they can use, but you know as well as I that no professional man is going to marry a woman dark as Emma Lou” (*BTB* 67).



In their article, “*The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy*,” Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith emphasize that both men and women are influenced by colorism within the black community. However, its impact on women’s behavior and psyche is greater than men. Furthermore, Thompson and Keith rely on early studies that show how dark-skinned women have low social status, are less desirable for serious relationships or marriages, and have limited chances for educations and employment besides being more sensitive about the color of their skin than men (p. 338).

As far as marriage opportunities for black women are concerned, the narrator points out, “A wife of dark complexion was considered a handicap unless she was particularly charming, wealthy, or beautiful. An ordinary looking dark woman was no suitable mate for a Negro man of prominence” (*BTB* 59). In this context, Emma Lou is least desirable for marriage because she is “not only very dark complexioned, but also a poor, undistinguished young woman” (Bell, 1987. Print., p. 145).

According to Catherine Rottenberg, *The Blacker the Berry* emphasizes the strong relationship between gender, race, and class, and it also shows how race cannot be detached from gender. She adds that the “[m]ale dominance and privilege as well as the possibility of moving up the class ladder are intimately connected to and informed by the disdain for dark skin” (p. 63). She quotes from the text to illustrate this idea: In Boise, and Los Angeles, “the business men, the doctors, the lawyers, the dentists, [...] in fact all of the Negro leaders and members of the negro upper class, were either light skinned themselves *or else had light skinned wives*” [emphasis added] (*BTB* 59). The word “or” in the sentence, Rottenberg says, refers to the fact that the dark-skinned man could climb up the social ladder and make socioeconomic mobility and his skin color does not stand much as an obstacle in his way. On the other hand, “a dark woman was at an almost insurmountable disadvantage” and would face difficulties to attain social mobility. Emma Lou suffers much from this racialized gender stratification and its social rules within the black community which make her escape her hometown, Boise and Los Angeles (Rottenberg, p. 63). One may say that Emma Lou may have had a chance for upward mobility through marrying a light-skinned black bourgeois, but her dark skin color stands as an obstacle and makes her less desirable for marriage.

The verse which is sung by little black girls at Lafayette theatre in Harlem illustrates the “undesirability of black girls,” (*BTB* 204) in the novel. It shows how the black community in the United States is plagued by colorism. The verse says:

A Yellow gal rides in limousine,  
A brown-skin rides a Ford,  
A black gal rides an old jackass  
But she gets there, yes my Lord. (*BTB* 204)

It is obvious that Emma Lou, as a dark-skinned girl, has never been asked for a serious relationship or marriage. She is either abandoned and disappointed or exploited sexually and financially by different men. The first man in her life, Weldon Taylor, has abandoned her after she has been “lifted into a superlatively perfect emotional and physical state” (*BTB* 65). Emma Lou is left in her sorrow and the old dogmatic saying of her mother and grandmother echoes in her mind that men do not marry a dark-skinned girl, but they “would only use her for their sexual convenience” (*BTB* 69).

In addition, Emma Lou has been exploited financially by Jasper Crane, a jobless young boy from Virginia, who meets her in a motion picture theater in Harlem. Jasper, the narrator comments, is successful in attracting Emma Lou emotionally and borrowing money from her to buy a job at a recruitment agency. Hoping to start a new love story, Emma Lou draws from her small bank account almost what she has to buy a new dress for the romantic meeting promised by Jasper, but, to her disappointment, Jasper never comes back (*BTB* 143-144).

Alva, a light-skinned man, who Emma loves truly at Harlem, manipulates Emma Lou sexually and financially. In a conversation with his roommate, Braxton, Alva admits that he



wants to exploit her sexually for economic gains. He tells Braxton directly, “The only thing a black woman is good for is to make money for a brown-skin papa,” he further goes on to say, “Why not? She’s just as good as the rest, and you know what they say, ‘The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice’” (*BTB* 153).

Moreover, the novel further traces the sufferings and difficulties Emma Lou faces to obtain social acceptance. She never feels that she has a home. Her family never makes her feel welcome; she has always been “the alien member of the family and of the family’s social circle. Her grandmother, . . . made her feel it. Her mother made her feel it. And her Cousin Buddie made her feel it, to say nothing of the ways she was regarded by outsiders” (*BTB* 22-23). Her uncle Joe is the only person who embraces her in her family and treats her kindly (*BTB* 14).

Emma Lou is ostracized not only at home but also at school. At her graduation ceremony in Boise high school, she looks at herself as an “odd and conspicuous figure” among her white and colored colleagues (*BTB* 10). Similarly, in the eye of her colleagues, she is also a very “odd-looking” pupil because she is the only “Negro” pupil in the entire school (*BTB* 11). Emma Lou finds herself helpless and unable to change her physical appearances; therefore she decides to change her location by joining the University of Southern California in Los Angeles aiming to meet educated minorities whom, she thinks, would evaluate her on her personality not her skin color (Allmendinger 2005, p. 53). However, in the University, she is frequently left out and neglected when she joins certain groups of students because she could not express herself in a suitable way or participate in their dialogues during the period of intermissions (*BTB* 51).

The colored female students realize that accompanying such a dark-skinned girl like Emma Lou would ruin their chances for marriage and would “make them the more miserable to attain the threshold only to have the door shut in their face” because men “would not tolerate a dark girl” (*BTB* 59).

Many studies focus on the significance of skin color in the life of individuals and find that color is a key factor through which one’s educational and professional achievement is determined. These studies show that light-skinned blacks are more privileged than the darker-skinned blacks as they have better opportunities to complete their studies, get more respected positions, and have a higher income. According to one study “the effect of skin color on earning of ‘lighter’ and ‘darker’ Blacks is as great as the effect of race on the earnings of whites and all Blacks” (Thompson & Keith, Jun., 2001, p. 337).

Moreover, Ordner W. Taylor argues that *The Blacker the Berry* reflects the system of pigmentocracy<sup>3</sup> in the United States in which the dark-skinned African Americans experience discrimination and face difficulties for upward mobility due to their dark skin color (Taylor 123).

Aloysius McNamara, Emma Lou’s stepfather, wishes he had been white, “he would have been a successful criminal lawyer.” The narrator relates, “but being considered black it [is] impossible for him ever to be anything more advanced than a Pullman car porter or dining car waiter, and acting upon this premise, he hadn’t tried to be anything else” (*BTB* 25). The narrator illustrates that neither college certificate nor a good job opportunity could take Emma

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<sup>3</sup> Pigmentocracy is a society or state of affairs in which skin color determines socioeconomic and/or political status. In theory, any imbalance of power favoring people of one skin tone over another could be considered a pigmentocracy. Historically, pigmentocracy can be traced back to the colonial times. The light-skinned African Americans are socially and economically more privileged than their dark-skinned counterparts; Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Collin Powell, and Jesse Jackson represent the actual implication of this phenomenon. (Moadel, 2013. Google Book Search. Web. 20 September, 2015, p. 3: 1703).



Lou out from the pit of her blackness and “her face,” which is too black, would “be her future identification tag in society” (*BTB* 12). Emma Lou’s feeling at the moment her name is called to receive her high school diploma makes this clear,

Get a Diploma?-What did it mean to her? College?-Perhaps. A Job?- Perhaps again? She was going to have a high school Diploma, but it would mean nothing to her whatsoever. The tragedy of her life was that she was too black. (*BTB* 11-12)

It appears that Emma Lou’s dark skin color makes her a prey to discrimination and successive failures in her attempts to find a prestigious job in Harlem. The first employment agency she visits offers her low paying jobs like “dishwashing” and “day work” while she has ambition to get ““a stenographic position in some colored business or professional office.”” *BTB* 81

In a real estate firm, she is laughed at by a typewriter, who says to her, ““I’m sorry, Miss. Mr. Brown says he has someone else in view for the job.”” In addition, Mrs. Blake, from an employment agency, tells Emma Lou without looking at her face directly that ““lots of our Negro business men have a definite type of girl in mind and will not hire any other”” (*BTB* 98, 101)

Skin tone is one of the primary terms and conditions for employment in the novel. These two job announcements in the novel illustrate the significance of skin color: “Wanted: light colored girl to work as waitress in tearoom. . . .” or “Wanted: Nurse girl, light colored preferred (children are afraid of black folks). . . .” (*BTB* 137).

Emily Bernard also asserts that the dark-skinned people have limited job opportunities in Harlem. She observes that Arline Strange, who is originally white, has a job as an actress and plays the role of mulatto on stage, while black actresses of darker skin color are rejected and hardly get any jobs. As a maid of a white actress, Emma Lou represents all the blacks in Harlem community who cannot achieve their financial independence, but rather make their living from white support, thus more vulnerable to the whites power and prestige (Bernard, “Unlike” 412).

The chief irony lies, Sarah E. Chinn writes, in the scene in which Emma Lou is “deepening the artificial duskiness of her [Arline Strange’s] skin” when she asks her not to “let on to my brother you ain’t been to Small’s before. Act like you know all about it” (*BTB* 116). For Chinn, this scene is not only ironic but burlesque as well; a white working-class actress like Arline darkens her skin by cosmetics so as to improve her career and to act well on stage imitating mulattoes. On the other hand, a dark-skinned middle-class woman like Emma Lou lightens her skin so that she could keep her job (p. 86). In addition, the major characters and actors on the stage are all white in “various shades of blackface,” while the blacks are either taking the role of minor characters or the chorus girls (Chinn, p. 85).

Emma Lou realizes that “color is both causally connected to race and in the excess of it.” She believes that in the hierarchy of human races, color replaces race; for example, if someone is “too black,” he/she is regarded as another race different from “Negro.” Emma Lou’s blackness, instead of being an accepted feature of Negro identity, stands as a visual marker and separates her not only from the white people but from the black members of her own race and family (Chinn, 2000. Print., p. 83).

Notten states that *The Blacker the Berry* is a reflection of America’s social structure and its caste system which is almost based on color. He further sheds light on the historical analyses of Steven L. Carter who argues that this caste system is an outcome of the racial perception of the black middle class who eagerly tried, since its formation, to obtain a good social place in the white American society (Notten, p. 216).



For Blake Allmendinger, the caste system within the segregated African American community has been created as a result of many factors including, white discrimination, intra-racial prejudice, restricted options for women, class repression, and snobbery. He further concludes that “[w]ithout a college degree or extensive career opportunities, Emma Lou has only one means of achieving upward mobility—marriage to a light-skinned man—a goal that remains unattainable” (Allmendinger, p. 55).

## **2. Self-hatred versus Self-reconciliation**

The rejection and discrimination Emma Lou experiences creates a feeling of low self-esteem in her, thus affecting her psychologically, socially, and economically. The narrator points out that it becomes a “custom” of the light-skinned African Americans to ridicule the darker-skinned individuals of their race. They believe that “[a] black cat [is] a harbinger of bad luck, black crape [is] insignia of mourning, and black people [are] either evil niggers with poisonous blue gums or else typical valued darkies” (*BTB* 13). Such culture disdain for blackness passes down from parents to their children, thus creating a whirlpool of hatred reinforced by the African American themselves.

From her childhood, Emma Lou’s semi-white world of her mother’s family and all the white people of her hometown have instilled in her mind hatred toward blackness (Bell, 1987. Print., p. 145). Her mother always complains about having, a feeling of hatred that passes down to Emma Lou. Emma Lou often gets ridiculed by her mulatto friends and her white playmates who label her “crow-like complexion” (*BTB* 221). She further gets ridiculed publically on street; “Man, you know I don’t haul no coal” (*BTB* 108) a dark boy shouts on the street, or a “little inkspitter” (*BTB* 153) as Braxton calls her. In addition, Alva feels ashamed to accompany her publicly or introduce her to his friends because he will be mocked at for having relationship with “dark meat” and they might tell her some offensive expressions like, “black cats must go” (*BTB* 158).

Emma Lou’s birth brings misfortune to her mother because her blackness takes her mother out of the blue vein society. For this reason, Jane asks for divorce and marries “a red-haired Irish Negro” in order to be assimilated back into her social circle, the blue vein society. Nonetheless, Emma Lou remains, in her mother’s perception, a “tragic mistake which could not be stamped out” (*BTB* 22).

Blackness is a metaphor for “evil” in the novel. Chinn observes that Emma Lou’s mother often refers to her as an “evil, black hussy” (*BTB* 208). In addition, her color-blind friend, Gwendolyn, describes her as “common” and “low” specifically when Emma Lou decides to return to Alva and live with him and his child and ends up her relationship with the decent man Benson Brown: “Where is your intelligence and pride? I’m through with you, Emma Lou. [Gwendolyn says] There’s probably something in this stuff about black people being different and lower than other colored people! You’re just a common ordinary nigger!” (*BTB* 245-246). Chinn states that Emma Lou’s mother and Gwendolyn link “blackness as a color with the most negative beliefs about Negro people as a race,” that is to say being “black” means to be “hussy, a nigger, common” (*BTB* 208).

Eventually, Emma Lou herself becomes a snob and practices prejudice on individuals of her race who are darker than her. Bernard W. Bell writes, “The chief irony, however, is that Emma Lou internalizes snobbery and prejudice of those who reject her.” In Emma Lou’s eye, Hazel, a black friend of her, is an inferior and a “barbarian” girl (p. 146) and she “resent[s] being approached by any one so flagrantly inferior, any one so noticeably a typical southern darky, who [has] no business obtruding into the more refined scheme of things” (*BTB* 35-36). Emma Lou calls Hazel a “darky-like clownishness,” (*BTB* 41) and believes that she should be more polite in the presence of white people to give a positive impression about the black people and avoid causing any embarrassment to other people of her race who are more educated than her (*BTB* 41).



From her childhood, Emma Lou's mind has been occupied with the "right sort of people" and of "the people who really mattered" (*BTB* 46). She is used to categorize people accordingly. For her, Hazel Manson does not belong to either group because she is just a "little nigger from down South" (*BTB* 46). She decides to limit her friendship only to the "right sort of people," (*BTB* 46) "superior southerners," and northerners like herself. She feels superior to Hazel and other black people who come from the southern states as she believes that they "knew nothing of the social niceties or polite conventions" (*BTB* 46). Emma Lou doesn't know the exact meaning of the "right sort of people." However, she wishes to make friendship with those colored students on campus, who frequently reject her, as she considers them the "right sort of people" (*BTB* 57). This attests to the fact that Emma Lou has internalized racism and is practicing it on her fellow blacks

In contrast to what is said about blackness, whiteness in the novel is synonym for purity, power, and morality. In a conversation with his friends, who are racially mixed writers, Truman declares, "We are all living in a totally white world, where all the standards are the standards of the white man, and where almost invariably what the white man does is right and what the black man does is wrong, unless it is presented by something a white man has done" (*BTB* 166). Truman further states:

you can't blame light Negroes for being prejudiced against dark ones. All of you know that white is the symbol of everything pure and good, whether that everything be concrete or abstract. Ivory Soap is advertised as being ninety-nine and some fraction per cent pure, and Ivory Soap is white. Moreover, virtue and virginity are always represented as being clothed in white garments. Then, too, the God we, or rather most Negroes worship is a patriarchal with man, seated on white throne, in white-apparelled angles eating white honey and drinking white milk. (*BTB* 165-166)

Truman's viewpoint above shows how the African American people including their elites and the educated ones perceive whiteness and how they have internalized racism and prejudice of the whites believing that they [the whites] are superior to them.

As far as socio-psychological aspect is concerned, many studies conclude that skin color has a great effect on self-esteem, desirability, and quality of life of individuals (Thompson & Keith, Jun., 2001, p. 337). Emma Lou's low self-esteem is clearly shown when she looks at herself in the mirror, "she never faced the mirror without speculating upon how good-looking she might have been had she not been so black" (*BTB* 75).

As regards Emma Lou's internalization of prejudice, Bernard asserts that racism affects Emma Lou and instills within her hatred toward "blackness in herself and others." She hates people with negroid features and wishes to have a light-skinned partner, a thing that makes the readers have little sympathy with her (Bernard, "Unlike" 413). This view is well-exemplified by Emma Lou's perception of her friend, John, whom she thinks, is "too pudgy and dark." His "body and body coloring [are] distasteful to her" (*BTB* 105,139). She rather prefers "intelligent looking, slender, light-brown skinned men" (*BTB* 105). Furthermore, Emma Lou wishes that the skin tone of her first love, Weldon Taylor, "had been colored light brown instead of dark brown." She wishes that she was a wife of a light-skinned man, thus her children would not experience agonies like her (*BTB* 62). Emma Lou "[doesn't] like black men." However, it is not until the end of the novel, Emma Lou realizes that she has practiced the "same discrimination against her men and the people she wished for friends that they had exercised against her-and with less reason" (*BTB* 141, 259).

Emma Lou sinks deeper into self-hatred and wants to escape the "unwelcome black mask from her face" (*BTB* 12) so as to achieve recognition and not to be ridiculed by others.



The narrator says that Emma Lou's desperate desire to transform herself and escape her blackness is so strong that makes her eat many arsenic wafers, which causes her much stomach pain, to get the pallor of her skin increased to lighten her skin color (*BTB* 139). She also uses many bleaching creams, peroxide solution and Black and White ointment. Yet, all attempts are ineffective to her skin; in return they create only blackheads, irritating rashes, and burning (*BTB* 139-140). Emma Lou's impossible efforts to bleach her skin color manifest her submission to the evil of colorism.

The writer provides more examples of self-disdain in the novel. It is not only Emma Lou who suffers from that. Her step father, Aloysius, also sinks into even a deeper self-hate and disdain for his own race because he is not light skin enough to assimilate into the white society. He "was so conscious of the Negro blood in his veins and so bitter because of it, . . . For it was Negroes and not whites whom he blamed for his own, to him life's tragedy. He was not fair enough of skin, despite his mother's and his own hopes, to pass for white" (*BTB* 23-24).

However, Ursula M. Brown asserts that skin color has a greater impact on women than on men, particularly, in the United States where the western standard of beauty is prevalent and standard. She states:

dark-skinned black men frequently have been able to counteract discrimination based on color with special talents, intelligence, and education. This has been much less possible for women who live in a world where the beauty of a woman counts as much as physical prowess, intelligence, or financial security matters in men. With the American beauty ideal being fair skin, blond hair, and blue or green eyes, dark-skinned black women have been especially vulnerable to color prejudice. (p. 30)

Brown exemplifies Emma Lou's suffering and her feeling of discontent about her skin color: "She should have been a boy, then color of skin wouldn't have mattered so much, for wasn't her mother always saying that a Black boy could get along, but that a Black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment? But she wasn't a boy; she was a girl, and color did matter, mattered so much . . ." (*BTB* 10).

Chinn observes that Emma Lou ridicules and hates whatever blackness represents, yet she herself is a real representative of blackness. She abbreviates Emma Lou's problem with blackness pointing out,

Emma Lou's problem is that she sees blackness as both inside and outside her sense of self, both abjected and introjected, as evidence for the thing she rejects (rural poor or urban working-class 'ignorant' blackness) and the thing she represents, the 'evil, black hussy' who has sex outside marriage, gets drunk at rent parties and brings men home (all of which Emma Lou actually does). (91)

Emma Lou believes that she is victimized by the society and her genetics for being too black and lives in an "environment" where "her complexion is viewed as a curse." (Allmendinger, 2005. *Questia*. Web. 10 March, 2015, p. 53). The narrator articulates Emma Lou's depressed feeling about her skin color from the opening paragraph of the novel when referring to her color as a "decided curse." (*BTB* 9).

Color is neither a mask as Emma Lou perceives it, nor a symbol of a real "Negro" identity, poverty, and low class as Arline Strange thinks. Color does not have any "intrinsic" significance outside the context of color prejudice. It is likely an outcome of an old cultural set of beliefs about slavery passed down from slavery days (Chinn, 2000. *Print.*, p. 89).



Despite the fact that blackness is a curse to Emma Lou throughout her social and professional life, there is a glimmer of hope for her self-reconciliation at the end of the novel. Singh points out that Campbell Kitchen, the white writer, possibly Thurman's version of Carl Van Vechten, helps to change Emma Lou's self-hatred into self-love and make her accept herself and her "unchangeable" blackness (p. 111). Singh goes on to say that Emma Lou is greatly affected by Kitchen's doctrine: "[E]very one must find salvation within one's self, that no one in life need to be a total misfit, and that there was some niche for every peg, whether that peg be round or square" (*BTB* 256). Eventually, she confronts her self-hatred and comes to a conclusion that she has to reconcile herself to blackness (*BTB* 257) and to have a new beginning and looking forward "not so much for acceptance by other people, but for acceptance of herself and by herself." She decides that her new doctrine in life would be changed to "find—not seek" and she does not need another Jasper Crane and Alva in her life to exploit her. She decides to free herself from the influence of Alva knowing well that she loses him, but she is sure that she makes a "pyrrhic victory" (*BTB* 258).

Carter states that Thurman, at the end of the novel, conveys a message to African American people who have a feeling of inferiority and disdain for blackness, which is a call for self-reconciliation and salvation (p. 390). Thurman states:

For the first time in her life she felt that she must definitely come to some conclusion about her life and govern herself accordingly. After all she wasn't the only black girl alive. There were thousands on thousands, who, like her, were plain, untalented, ordinary, and who, unlike herself, seemed to live in some degree of comfort. Was she alone to blame for her unhappiness? Although this had been suggested to her by others, she had been too obtuse to accept it. She had ever been eager to shift the entire blame on others when no doubt she herself was the major criminal. (*BTB* 256)

According to Singh, the emphasis on the issue of "blackness" in *The Blacker the Berry* is to show that "a dark skin is a human and [is] as beautiful as any of the myriad shades that are found within the black community and generally in life." Singh believes that literature is the best device to instill this "commonsense notion" within the white and black Americans (Singh, p. 106).

## Conclusion

Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* shows the challenges the darker-skinned African Americans have encountered in the United States. In the novel, not only the African American people are plagued by colorism, but they also internalize the prejudice and racism of the white Americans to the extent that the light-skinned blacks discriminate and reject the darker-skinned individuals of their race; which creates a sense of self-hatred and disdain for blackness among the blacks. Emma Lou's hatred for her blackness makes her try the impossible to whiten her black face because she is discriminated twice; namely, for being a woman and for being too black. In this novel, blackness clearly diminishes the chances of the characters to gain social acceptability and economic development. Contrastively, whiteness, through the lenses of white and black Americans, represents purity, power, and beauty, while blackness is relatively viewed as curse or evil. *The Blacker The Berry* shows the African Americans' futile attempts to eliminate their blackness because skin color is something unchangeable. The novel, thus illustrates that blackness is an obstacle that causes social, economic and psychological suffering for the African American people and it remains a curse as long as the African Americans would not accept their blackness as a characteristic



unchangeable and as long as they are not accepted by the whites too. Despite that, there is a glimmer of hope at the end of the story as there is a call for salvation and self-acceptance. Despite of all the difficulties Emma Lou faces due to her skin color, she finds salvation and reconciles with her blackness. It follows that *The Blacker the Berry* is not altogether a pessimistic account of what African Americans go through in a white-dominated society. It rather is a novel that promotes self-love, self-acceptance, and reconciliation with blackness as skin color is, after all, real and unchangeable.

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## كيشه‌ی رهنگی پيست له رۆمانی سیرمان: رهشتر شیرینتر

پوخته‌ی توێژینه‌وه

ئهم لیکۆلینه‌وه‌یه له‌ژێر ناوێشانی: "کیشه‌ی رهنگی پيست(ه) له رۆمانی سیرمان(۱۹۰۲-۱۹۳۴) به‌ناوێشانی: رهشتر, شیرین تر, رۆمانیک دهرباره‌ی ژيانى ره‌شپيستنیک"(۱۹۲۹). توێژینه‌وه‌که باس له‌و نهلنگارییانه ده‌کات که روبرووی کچه گهنجیکى ئه‌فریقی ئه‌مريکی ده‌بیتته‌وه له‌هه‌وله‌کانی به‌دریژایی ژيانى تاومکو نه‌ک ته‌نها له‌لایهن سپی پيسته‌کانه‌وه به‌لکو له‌لایهن ئه‌م ره‌شپيستانه‌ی کۆمه‌لگاکه‌ی خوی که پيستیيان له‌و کاتره په‌سه‌ند بکړين و له‌کۆمه‌لگادا قبولکړين. لیکۆلینه‌وه‌که پيکديت له پيشه‌کی و دوو بهش و ده‌رنجام. به شيوه‌یه‌کی گشتی له‌پيشه‌کیدا چهند تيروانينیکى ره‌خنه‌گرانه‌ی جياواز دهرباره‌ی رۆمانه‌که خراونه‌ته روو. به‌شى يه‌که‌م باس له‌وه ده‌کات چون ئیما لوو (کارمکنه‌ی سه‌رمکی) له‌لایهن سپی پيست و ره‌شپيسته‌کانه‌وه په‌سه‌ند ناکریت به هوی ئه‌م ره‌نگه ره‌شه توخه‌ی هه‌یه‌تی. به‌شى دووم باس له ره‌گ داکوئانی ره‌گه‌ز په‌رستی ده‌کات له‌ناخی ئیما لوو که ده‌رنجام ده‌گورئ بۆ رق لیبوونه‌وه‌ی خود. کاریه‌گری کۆمه‌لایه‌تی و سايکۆلۆژی ئه‌م کيشه‌یه له‌سه‌ر ئیما لوو بابه‌تی ره‌نگی پيست ئالۆزتر ده‌کات تانه‌ورادده‌یه‌یه‌ی هه‌یچ تروسکایه‌کی هه‌یوا بۆ ئیما لوو نه‌مینئ. به‌لام له‌کاتیکدا له‌په‌ری ته‌نیایدا خوی ده‌بیتته‌وه هه‌یچ چاره‌یه‌کی نیه ته‌نها ئه‌وه نه‌بیت خوی لاپه‌سه‌ند بیت و له‌گه‌ل راستیه‌کاندا بژی. بۆیه بریارده‌دات چيتر هه‌لنه‌یات و له‌گه‌ل خودی خویدا ناشت بیتته‌وه. ده‌رنجامه‌کان هه‌روه‌ها ئه‌وه ده‌ره‌خنه‌ی که‌چانسی ئیما لوو بۆ په‌سه‌ندبوون, هاوسه‌رگیری و بده‌سته‌ینانی توانای سه‌ربه‌خوی ئابووری زۆ لاوازن به‌هوی ره‌نگی پيستییه‌وه. هه‌روه‌ها کيشه‌ره‌شپيستی ده‌بیتته هۆکار بۆ رقلیبوونه‌وه‌ی خود کاتیک له‌ناخدا چيگیر ده‌بیت. سه‌رمه‌رای هه‌موو ئه‌مانه تروسکایه‌ی هه‌یوايه‌ک به‌دی ده‌کریت کاتی مرۆف له‌وره‌ستیه‌یه ده‌گات که نايبت ره‌نگی پيست ببیتته تا‌که پنه‌ری بریاردان له‌سه‌ر که‌سه‌کان.

چه‌مه‌که سه‌ره‌کیه‌کان

ره‌نگی پيست, ره‌نکر دنه‌وه, رق لیبوونه‌وه‌ی خود, ناشتبوونه‌وه, رۆمانی ئه‌مريکی ئه‌فریقی.

### مشكلة اللون في رواية ثيرمان: الأكثر سوادا أحمى

حلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث معاناة فتاة سوداء في رواية ثيرمان (1902 - 1934) بعنوان (الأكثر سواداً أحمى). الرواية هي سرد للتحديات التي تواجهها فتاة شابة طوال حياتها في محاولاتها للحصول على قبول ليس من جانب البيض فحسب ولكن من جانب الامريكيين الأفارقة ذوي البشرة السوداء في مجتمعها. ويتكون البحث من مقدمة تليها جزأين و خاتمة. ويتم عرض بعض الآراء النقدية حول الرواية في المقدمة. يوضح الجزء الأول من البحث معاناة (إيما لو) حيث يتم رفضها من قبل البيض و السود بسبب بشرتها الداكنة السوداء. ويظهر الجزء الثاني تأثير التمييز العنصري على (إيما لو) و كيف يتحول هذا التأثير الى كره الذات. و تظهر أيضاً بأن التأثيرات الاجتماعية و النفسية على الشخصية الرئيسية تزيد من تعقيد مشكلة اللون إلى الحد الذي يشعر المرء انه لا يوجد أمل ل(إيما لو). و بالرغم من ذلك لا يوجد حل ل(إيما لو) إلا التعايش مع مشكلتها. لذلك تختار المصالحة مع نفسها و تجاوز المشكلة. ويظهر الأستنتاج بأن فرص القبول أو الزواج أو الإستقلال الإقتصادي تكاد تكون معدومة ل(إيما لو) بسبب بشرتها الداكنة. كما توضح بأن مشكلة لون البشرة قد تؤدي



الى الكراهية الذاتية ولكن بالرغم من كل ذلك هناك بصيص من الأمل حينما يدرك المرء بأن لون البشرية لايمكن أن يكون المعيار الوحيد للحكم على المرء.

**(المفاهيم الرئيسية):**

لون البشرية ، الرفض ، الكراهية الذاتية ، المصالحة الذاتية ، الرواية الأمريكية الإفريقية.