



AN ABOLITIONIST HETEROGLOSSIA: RACIAL RECONSTRUCTION IN FRANCES E. W. HARPER'S IOLA LEROY, OR, SHADOWS UPLIFTED*

KÖLELİK KARŞITI ÇOK SESLİLİK: FRANCES E. W. HARPER'İN IOLA LEROY, OR, SHADOWS UPLIFTED ADLI ROMANINDA İRKSAL YENİDEN YAPILANMA

Nisa Harika GÜZEL KÖŞKER

Arş. Gör. Dr., Ankara Üniversitesi, Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, nkosker@ankara.edu.tr

Abstract

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* has been widely discussed in relation to the ways in which the novel caters to the popular gender ideologies that deny and devalue black womanhood in both the antebellum and postbellum United States. This article, however, argues that *Iola Leroy* can further be considered a reformist novel that explores the questions of racial identity and slavery as well as diverse constructions of abolitionism in the postbellum United States. Harper's Reconstructionist views challenge the antebellum organization of social spheres and gender norms that support slavery's cruel practices, while engaging with the public discussions that compose an abolitionist heteroglossia. Harper bridges the divide between racial prejudices and an unbiased perception of the black race through heteroglossic dialogues that feature characters' powerful arguments against slaveholders' theories about the black race and slavery. Covering a span of time from the Civil War to the Reconstruction Era, the novel suggests that as long as racial preconceptions and proslavery opinions are not abandoned, national Reconstruction will be dysfunctional and the nation will be unable to reach a harmonious political identity. All of the abolitionist discussions in the novel serve to connect the characters in a dialogic affinity in venues for sociopolitical discussion on slavery and abolitionism as possible means of Reconstruction. Thus, this article analyzes how *Iola Leroy* portrays the abolitionist voices that infiltrate into proslavery arguments in line with critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, and hence examines how Harper emancipates her text from authoritarian views by constructing episodes of dialogic relations among the abolitionist discussions against the backdrop of the monologic arguments of racial slavery.

Öz

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper'ın 1892 tarihli *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* adlı romanı daha çok metnin İç Savaş öncesi ve sonrası siyah kadın kimliğini reddeden ve değersizleştiren popüler toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojileriyle bağdaştığı yönler ile ilgili incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma ise ırksal kimliğin ve köleliğin yanısıra *Iola Leroy*'un savaş sonrası Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde kölelik karşıtlığı kavramının çeşitli yorumlarını irdeleyen yenilikçi bir roman olarak da değerlendirilebileceğini tartışmaktadır. Harper'ın Yeniden Yapılandırmaya (Reconstruction) ilişkin görüşleri köleliğin acımasız uygulamalarını destekleyen toplumsal mekanların toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına göre ayrılmasına meydan okurken, aynı zamanda kölelik karşıtı çok sesliliği oluşturan ve kamusal alanda gerçekleştirilen diyalogların önemini vurgulamaktadır. Harper, ırka dayalı önyargılar ile siyah ırkın önyargısız algılanması arasındaki uçurumu kölelik taraftarlarının savunduğu siyah ırka ve köleliğe ilişkin görüşlere karşı köle karakterlerin ortaya koyduğu çok sesli diyaloglar aracılığıyla kapatır. İç Savaş yıllarından başlayarak Yeniden Yapılanma dönemini resmeden roman, ırkçı düşüncelerin ve köleliği haklı çıkaran fikirlerin terkedilmediği sürece ülkenin yeniden yapılandırılmayacağını ve halklarını birleştirici siyasal bir kimliğe kavuşamayacağını ileri sürer. Yeniden Yapılanmanın olası yöntemleri olarak ileri sürülen bu diyaloglar kölelik ve kölelik karşıtlığı hakkında sosyopolitik tartışmaların yapıldığı mekanlarda karakterleri diyalojik bir ilişkiyle birbirine bağlamaktadır. Metindeki bu diyaloglar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bu çalışma eleştirmen Mikhail M. Bakhtin'in çok seslilik kavramından faydalanarak romanın köleliği savunan düşüncelere nüfus eden kölelik karşıtı fikirleri nasıl betimlediğini ve Harper'ın ırkçılık ve kölelik hakkındaki monolojik savunmalar ile kölelik karşıtı tartışmalar arasında diyaloglar oluşturarak romanını hangi yönlerden otoriter görüşlerden arındırdığını incelemektedir.

Makale Bilgisi

Gönderildiği tarih: 16 Ekim 2016
Kabul edildiği tarih: 18 Kasım 2016
Yayınlanma tarihi: 12 Aralık 2016

Article Info

Date submitted: 16 October 2016
Date accepted: 18 November 2016
Date published: 12 December 2016

Anahtar sözcükler

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Çok seslilik, Diyalojik anlatım, Kölelik karşıtlığı, Kölelik, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Savaş öncesi toplumsal cinsiyet normları, İrksal yeniden yapılanma

Keywords

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Heteroglossia, Dialogic narrative, Abolitionism, Slavery, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Antebellum gender norms, Racial reconstruction

DOI: 10.1501/Dtcfder_0000001479

* This article is produced from the PhD dissertation of the writer.

There is light beyond the darkness,
 Joy beyond the present pain;
 There is hope in God's great justice
 And the negro's rising brain.
 Though the morning seems to linger
 O'er the hill-tops far away,
 Yet the shadows bear the promise
 Of a brighter coming day.
 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1892

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a prominent African American abolitionist, activist, suffragist, writer, poet, orator in the long nineteenth century, places a remarkable emphasis upon the contrast between darkness and light as a powerful symbol of the stormy relation between slavery and abolitionism in her 1892 novel *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted*. As can be observed in her above poem, Harper constructs her novel around this conflict by portraying the metaphor of shadow as a menacing element that persists in both the misfortunes in Iola's life and in other characters' sufferings and miseries caused by slavery. Deployed recurrently in the text, the shadow metaphor signifies darkness that blights an unbiased perception of race and gender. Shadows in characters' lives appear as an inexorable outcome of enslavement in the United States. Slavery, a constant mental and physical agitation felt by the oppressed, is the most relentless shadow of the "American Civilization" (Harper 67). It is a morbid "annoyance" (Harper 67) ceaselessly overspreading one's face, or a shadow falling upon the houses. It is also a "shadow" (Harper 77) falling upon the lives of millions of people, like "shadows of the grave" (Harper 77) or the "shadows of the death" (Harper 87). It is "the deep shadow of sorrow" (Harper 98) and a "shadow of concealment" (Harper 181) under which black people are forced to live. Since Harper's primary purpose is to eradicate these shadows through her narrative, she organizes her novel as a reformist one with a specific focus on Reconstructionist social activism, education, and novel reorganizations of racial, civil, and domestic politics in domestic and social milieus. Harper explores the problem of racial identity and slavery by fashioning public discussions in which black people can freely support their ideas on enslavement, racial prejudice, and possible ways to emancipation and racial reconstruction.

In such a composition of constructive publicity that may assist the formation of an enlightened public opinion and ameliorate the condition of black communities in postbellum American society, Harper adopts a dialogical approach to language,

to borrow critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin's term in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, as an influential instrument in producing a sphere of public discussion on slavery, racism, and the ensuing tribulations which haunt the American nation. Harper accommodates the arguments of characters in scenes that she calls "*conversazione*" (188), scenes that voice a plurality of opinions of characters from different racial backgrounds. Such scenes parallel Bakhtin's belief in dialogism in the plurality of voices and arguments. Harper blends the overall atmosphere of discussion created amidst the characters and their quotidian coded language with the abolitionist discourse of her mixed-blood protagonist Iola Leroy, who is transformed from a pro-slavery young girl into a zealous abolitionist and reformist woman. Through this combination of the dialogized forms of quotidian language and the black vernacular of the southern slaves and Iola's persuasive antislavery arguments, Harper poses, in Bakhtin's terms, "within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's world" (354). This is a struggle that Harper portrays in her novel between the abolitionist arguments and monologic authoritative proslavery opinions. Since dissimilar utterances can neither be uniform nor neutral, Harper prevents her readers from viewing the text as a didactic set of arguments. Furthermore, by constituting a diversity of dialogues in different dialects and bringing together opinions of various characters, Harper renders her text a celebration of an abolitionist heteroglossia against discourses of racism and slavery. With every word and each dialogue spoken out for the freedom and welfare of the black folk, Harper's black characters become defenders of their own race, allowing readers to imagine an amendable world.

Like many other African American novels written in the nineteenth century, as scholar William L. Andrews suggests, Harper's *Iola Leroy* is a text that "came into existence ... in response to a single dominant sociopolitical issue— slavery, and its attendant evils, racism, discrimination based on color" (vii). Addressing the "social concerns of the post-slavery era" and "the cause of antislavery" became an "end in itself for the early African-American novel" (Andrews vii). However, the postwar era still posed many obstacles to the implementation of smooth Reconstructionist reforms for black people. Considering the political and legislative impediments, the era of Reconstruction (1865-1877) was more a failure than a period of the progress of the black race and other oppressed groups in American society. Though President Lincoln declared in the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 that "all persons held as slaves within any State ... in rebellion against the United States, shall be ... henceforward, and forever free" (The Emancipation

Proclamation), it took “more than a century before genuine equality finally may be realized” (Westwood 15). As Andrews outlines, the era following Reconstruction further witnessed deadening impediments presented by the Republican Party and Supreme Court decisions:

By bringing Reconstruction to an end in the South in 1877, the Republican party in the North and its partners in big business and finance served notice of their willingness to bargain away black civil rights in the South in exchange for a white controlled political system receptive to northern investment. Many white supremacists found federal encouragement in the 1883 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared the most far-reaching civil rights legislation passed during Reconstruction to be unconstitutional. During the late 1880s the first laws mandating segregation on railroad transportation swept through the South. The 1890s saw first Mississippi, then South Carolina, and eventually every southern state systematically altering its constitution to deny blacks to vote. When the Supreme Court ruled in 1896 in favor of the South’s ‘separate but equal’ racial doctrine, the federal government put its stamp of approval on state laws requiring cradle-to-grave segregation of the races. An age of reaction, which threatened to reverse all the political and economic advances black America had earned since Emancipation settled over the United States (viii).

All of these historical events did not bring hope despite the earlier optimism of the post-war era. Carla L. Peterson claims that one significant “consequence of Reconstruction for the black community was a deepening of class and gender divisions that had already made themselves felt before the Civil War” (198). Witnessing such catastrophic drawbacks that destroyed the expectations of regaining their self-esteem, selfhood, and long-awaited opportunities to live humanely, black activists, reformists, and authors nurtured a notion of racial uplift as the best and most durable solution to ongoing racial segregation. The phrase racial uplift in *Iola Leroy* refers to the attempts of black people to improve the condition of black race in social and political life through different means such as education, raising racial consciousness, and providing spiritual assistance that proves that race is in essence a “fluid idea” (Edwards xi). In regard to this vision of progress, Harper appoints Iola as her mouthpiece in her strong arguments against the impediments of the time. Iola articulates this fact in her dialogue with Dr.

Gresham, stating, “out of the race must come its own defenders. With them the pen must be mightier than the sword. It is the weapon of civilization, and they must use it in their own defense. We cannot tell what is in them until they express themselves” (Harper 96-97). *Iola Leroy* concerns the story of Iola and her maturation through a series of troubles after her treacherous uncle sells her into slavery on learning that she is a mulatto. Though Iola seems as light-skinned as a white person, the institution of slavery prescribes that the black blood in her veins disqualifies her as black. However, Harper upsets the notion of white supremacy by characterizing Iola as a woman who is proud of her race and identity. Making Iola’s growth and self-discovery central to the plot, Harper focuses on Iola’s character as a capable woman and structures her narrative in accordance with this emphasis. By situating Iola as a woman who favors her black ancestry at the end of the novel, Harper creates the perception in her readers’ mind that remaining on the black side instead of passing for white is to be a decisive act for the black people if they want to reform and reconstruct the condition of their race. In *Iola Leroy*, the words and dialogues that defend black people’s rights appear to be the most resilient means to protect them from sociopolitical inhibitions and to inspire them with positive ideals of their own race.

In line with this textual and contextual objective, Harper establishes in her novel heterogeneity in dialogues, which are comprised of the primacy of speech, reformist organization, and public activism in a blend of Iola’s words, her abolitionist friends’ arguments, and sketches from slaves’ dialogues and lives. Piecing together the third-person narrative voice - in other words the author-narrator-, Iola’s opinions, and other minor and major characters’ speeches in a web of dialogue, Harper develops what Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia* as opposed to all sorts of discrimination and subjugation resulting from slavery and racism by engaging her characters in a constant dialogue with one another. Heteroglossia is a term Bakhtin used for a “vision of a language everywhere traversed by the energies of popular protest and instinctual desire” (Norris 332). Bakhtin argues in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975) that this vision of heteroglossia can best be observed in the novelistic genre that “can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (262). Heteroglossia is an “attempt to disperse the monopoly of meaning” (Lachmann 48), and a “simultaneity of [...] dialogues” as “a particular instance of the larger polyphony of social and discursive forces” (Holquist 67). For Bakhtin, language and novelization are primary effective vehicles with which to

critique the “centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life” (271). It is only through moving away from the central forces that one can achieve heteroglossia in a text and institute “the centrifugal forces of language” that “carry on their uninterrupted work” (Bakhtin 272). In a dialogic world, according to Bakhtin, “alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (272).

This coexistence of centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in social life calls into question the ongoing and never-ending processes of “decentralization and disunification” (Bakhtin 272) that undermine the harsh monologism of restrictive ideologies. “Once realized” this “stratification and heteroglossia” is “not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing” (Bakhtin 272). Heteroglossia is thus essentially dialogic, for it is based on a diversity of languages, dialogues, speeches that not only produce a linguistic variety but also a social and cultural plurality of interactions against the totality of fixed meanings and relations. In the case of the nineteenth-century United States, the contextual relevance of heteroglossia becomes even more remarkable, as the nineteenth century with thousands of enslaved Africans and other ethnic groups hosted a similar plurality of languages and cultures that worked against the fixity of ideologies like racial slavery. Furthermore, as Bakhtin suggests, the heterogeneity of the novelistic genre denormalizes such centripetal forces, creating a context within which both centrifugal and centripetal forces collide in dialogism. As opposed to the monologic stylization of other genres, the novel “orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [raznorecie] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions” (Bakhtin 263). Thus, heteroglossia exists in the novel with the help of such “fundamental compositional unities” as “authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters”, each of which “permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (Bakhtin 263).

This combination of “social diversity of speech types” (Bakhtin 263), “differing individual voices” (Bakhtin 263), and a diversity of their “links and interrelationships” (Bakhtin 263) produces a social heteroglossia which enables the author to create new meanings and discussions in the face of authoritarian and monolithic judgments of despotic social and ideological systems. Thus, as dialogues

relate to social problems, Bakhtin's theory of language as a scheme of dialogic words assumes a more sociological identity. Bakhtin predicates his argument on the idea that language is "heteroglot from top to bottom" (291), and "it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form" (291). Considering this dialogism in the novel in connection with the intersection of history, politics, culture, and other social forces at work, it can be discussed that Bakhtin's term heteroglossia is a functional theoretical frame that parallels Harper's aim to illustrate a multiplicity of abolitionist voices that infiltrate into the most problematic levels of proslavery arguments and monologic ideas. Harper multiplies her characters' speeches as a strategic tool to overcome all tyrannical discourses and social practices that define and dehumanize the oppressed black people. As Bakhtin states, conversations are "the fundamental constitutive element of all novelistic style" (46) and the "novelistic images" (46) are "internally dialogized images—of the languages, styles, world views of another (all of which are inseparable from their concrete linguistic and stylistic embodiment)" (46). Harper turns the novelistic writing into a discourse where social limits and political restrictions are exposed, challenged, and subverted. Her style of novelization becomes a social performance of conjuring up a set of dialogues between both black and white characters of opposing arguments that stage dramas of racial slavery from various perspectives.

This opposition however embraces a multiplicity in the composition of multifarious voices in characters' antislavery and proslavery claims and conversations. In light of Bakhtin's novelistic dialogism, dialogues in *Iola Leroy* consist of various voices in close interrelation with one another. The intersection of voices evokes a plurality rather than a monologic unity that restricts the proliferation of dialogues. Harper embodies this heteroglossia or plurality first with black folks' antislavery arguments, then with Iola's opinions when she grows up and finally with the discussions composed of antislavery and proslavery arguments of various characters in the novel. Iola's personal story is told along with the stories of the black folk related to Iola and with the accounts of the "infirmities of the age" (Harper 15), which are materialized in the text as dehumanization, oppression, racial prejudice and slavery. Harper defines slavery as "a system darkened with the shadow of a million crimes" (75), presenting it as the gloomiest shadow that casts over the lives of the characters. To better foreground the juxtaposition between the

personal and social history of the time, the novel illustrates its arguments against slavery with the help of specific references to slaves' lives, their opinions and discussions about their political condition.

The novel's initial setting features the Civil War and postbellum United States within a historical scope. In this atmosphere, slaves create a new coded language to converse about the war. During the time they spend together in the market place, Thomas Anderson, Robert Johnson, and other unnamed slaves produce a mysterious language that is not decipherable by slaveholders. This enigmatic market speech allows them to denote the victories or defeats in the battlefield by referring to butter, eggs or fish as fresh or stale. Though the slave characters are restless in the general state of affairs and though "surely there was nothing in the primeness of the butter or the freshness of the eggs" (Harper 16), a "unanimous report" (Harper 16) of the good condition of the market raises an unusual interest among them, changing "careless looking faces into such expressions of gratification, or to dull light eyes with such gladness" (Harper 16). Coupled with the news of victory, this language captures the social milieu of the time, giving hopeful slaves the opportunity to speak in terms alien to slavery's terminology. The market place, a public space far away from the plantations and domestic spaces of enslavement, endow slaves with the freedom to discuss the war. Nonetheless, the task is shared in the production of this language that is carried over to the market place from the plantations:

During the dark days of the Rebellion, when the bondman was turning his eyes to the American flag, and learning to hail it as an ensign of deliverance, some of the shrewder slaves, coming in contact with their masters and overhearing their conversations, *invented a phraseology to convey in the most unsuspected manner news to each other from the battle-field.* Fragile women and helpless children were left on the plantations while their natural protectors were at the front, and yet these bondmen refrained from violence. Freedom was coming in the wake of the Union army, and while numbers deserted to join their forces, others remained at home, slept in their cabins by night and attended to their work by day; but *under this apparently careless exterior there was an undercurrent of thought which escaped the cognizance of their masters.* In conveying tidings of the war, if they wished to announce a victory of the Union army, they said the butter was fresh, or that the fish and eggs were in good condition. If defeat

befell them, then the butter and other produce were rancid or stale (Harper 16) [italics mine].

It is this “undercurrent of thought” (Harper 16) and the invented a “phraseology” (Harper 16) that institute a plurality of speech and a plurality of awareness shared commonly by the slave characters. This plurality is thus rooted in the power of language and the shrewdness of slaves that create a specific phraseology and a stream of thought as a method of interaction among those who remained at home and produced a communal language as a means of survival during the period of war instead of resorting to violence. The phraseology of the market speech is further enhanced by other means of figuring out the state of war, as can be observed in illiterate aunt Linda’s reading the battle news from her “ole Missus’ face” (Harper 17). In her conversation with Robert, aunt Linda says that her mistress’s face is “newspaper enough” (Harper 17) for her. Every morning she examines her Missus’ face when she comes into the kitchen, and states: “Ef her face is long an’ she walks kine o’ droopy en I thinks things is gwine wrong for dem. But ef she comes out yere looking mighty pleased, an’ larffin all ober her face, an’ steppin’ so frisky, den I knows de Secesh is gittin’ de bes’ ob de Yankees” (Harper 17). Aunt Linda articulates the conflict between the secessionist Confederate (Southern) States’ efforts to remain autonomous for the perpetuation of slavery and the Union army that was on its way to bring freedom to all states under the same nation. As the Civil War goes on and the Union army gains victories at various fronts, aunt Linda turns the kitchen of the slaveholding house to a public space where she celebrates the triumphs against slavery while her mistress cries because of the successive defeats of the Confederacy. When Roberts reminds aunt Linda that “Dey’ve fired on Fort Sumter, an’ de Norf id boun’ to whip” (Harper 18), the kitchen, as one of the domestic places of enslavement, becomes a space of “prayin’ an’ b’lievin” (Harper 18), a space where political news are read from the slaveholders’ faces, unreservedly discussed and shared. This scene reinforces Aunt Linda’s faith in the abolitionists, as she believes that they “have a heap of friends up there” (Harper 18) in the North. Invention of new phraseologies and analyses of the slaveholders’ manners showcase a heteroglossia, an “internal stratification” (Bakhtin 263) of language in black vernacular and the characters’ abolitionist thoughts. Harper increases the polyphony and dialogism in the text by presenting the black vernacular alongside the Standard English used by other characters. Scholar James Christmann argues that Harper portrays “an internal speech difference, a divide between African-American dialect and standard English spoken

by African Americans” (5), which exposes a variety of speech types among the black folk. For instance, for Christmann, Aunt Linda, is a “prominent folk speaker in the novel” (13) who “continues to speak in the tones of the vernacular culture, suggesting a continuing role for that culture in black life” (13). Thus, black folks’ language does more than reflect the reality of the Civil War: like Aunt Linda’s dialect, it both reveals the richness of speech types and deconstructs the language of slavery by reworking the racist ideologies of the slaveholders. Or, as in the new phraseology created by the slave characters in the market place, the language becomes a protective vehicle of communication that could give slaves the chance to discuss their ideas without inhibition. The market place and the domestic sphere occupied by the slave characters elucidate that each word of each character not only works in a dialogic relation with one another as they present multiple voices but also amounts to a specific antislavery and antiracist discourse conveyed in a complex dialogic power.

Thus, heteroglossia in Harper’s novel takes shape in accordance with the abolitionist activities and ideas developed by characters. Harper subtly harmonizes the characters’ conversations with the public interests of the black folk when “confidential chats” (19) extend to communal prayer meetings in the woods. In order to deflate the opinionated racist realm of slavery, Harper offers meetings among characters who stage a black heteroglossia through the multiplicity of voices that may help ameliorate strict and punitive practices of racism and slavery. This diversity springs to life “by stealth” (Harper 13), but the meetings hold by the slave characters are still communal “gatherings where they could mingle their prayers and tears, and lay plans for escaping to the Union army” (Harper 19). Since “the slaves were denied unrestricted travel, and the holding of meetings without the surveillance of a white man” (Harper 19), they outwit “the vigilance of the patrollers and home guards” (Harper 19-20) and assemble “these meetings miles apart, extending into several States” (Harper 20). Tom, Robert, Aunt Linda, Uncle Daniel meet by stealth again in McCullough’s woods and contemplate the current political climate and problems like the separation of families due to slavery, the fugitive slaves who are returned to their masters as part of contraband of war. Tom Anderson explains that fugitive slaves who have run away from “the Secesh¹ to the Union army” (Harper 22) are called contraband as if they “were an ox or a horse” (Harper 22). Tom Anderson points to the chance of fugitives to escape from bondage

¹ The Secessionists.

and to attain their freedom. Joining the army seems to be the only way to obtain freedom, but there is always the possibility for slaves of getting caught, which can also happen at any moment when any slave is captured from the Union army and given in to the Confederacy or to their masters as if they were lawful prizes of war. Harper's focus on the slaves' discussion of joining the army underlines the fact that some of the slaves are made to believe in the dreadful lie that slavery is good for them just because they are black or on the condition that their masters treat them well. Upon Uncle Daniel's statement that Robert does not need to join the army simply because he has a "good owner" (Harper 23), Robert reminds them of his mistress's sale of his mother to another master, saying that he will never ever forgive his mistress even if she is the "best woman on earth" (Harper 23). Robert unlocks the chain that perplexes slaves' mind by emphasizing that he would rather have his own freedom than belong to his mistress (Harper 23). Similarly, Uncle Daniel is a character who has almost lost all hope for liberty due to his old age, yet still he has expectations for the young generation. Though Uncle Daniel knows quite well that slavery "got all de marrow out ob dese poor ole bones" (Harper 23), he is equally aware that going to the battlefield is of no use for a man of his age. Uncle Daniel believes that praying for those fighting in the army is the only thing he can do for the benefit of his own race. In Robert's case, on the other hand, the reader is reminded once again that slavery is a legalized institution that dehumanizes black people and separates them from their families. On the individual level, slavery destroys a sound sense of selfhood and identity as it takes away one's freedom; on the social level, moreover, it destroys the feeling and consciousness of community of black people. This social heteroglossia forefronts characters' growing sense of urgency of abolitionism, community and awareness that takes precedence over personal interests.

While all these conversations on oppression and servitude are communicatively constructed among the characters, Harper weighs in with her own abolitionist and reformist opinions in the guise of an omniscient narrator who supports the characters' arguments. As Bakhtin argues, heteroglossia is further achieved in a text when a writer enters into the dialogue in the novel and is "far from neutral in his relationship to this image: to a certain extent he even polemicalizes with this language, argues with it, agrees with it (although with conditions), interrogates it, eavesdrops on it, but also ridicules it, parodically exaggerates it and so forth-in other words, the author is in a dialogical relationship" (46) with the characters' language and "the author is actually conversing" (46) with

them. The omniscient narrator's dialogic relationship with the characters' concerns exposes how subtly the narrative voice, in Bakhtin's terms, "elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding the objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogized overtones" (279). The third person narrator, speaking as the spokesperson for Harper's critical views on slavery, weaves the issue of slavery into a heteroglossia of social and national context. In slaves' speeches, hopes of deliverance stand opposite the realities of bondage as they are ritualized in a blend of "prayers and tears" (Harper 19) in their conventions. The ritualistic aspect of the publicized discussions held secretly by slaves in the woods heals their wounds, whilst allowing Harper's novel to become a public space of dialogue where slaves speak freely and equally. The narrator's function in the dialogue is to keep the readers' spirits up as they read along the lines that are more imbued with the pessimism of the war. As the narrator states in simple terms, though this "hope of deliverance" (Harper 20) is "cruelly blighted by hearing of some adventurous soul who, having escaped to the Union army, had been pursued and returned again to bondage" (Harper 20), hope "survived all these disasters which gathered around the fate of their unfortunate brethren, who were remanded to slavery through the undiscerning folly of those who were strengthening the hands which were dealing their deadliest blows at the heart of the Nation" (Harper 20). Not only does the argument of the narrative voice links the dialogue between the text and the readers, but it also situates the characters' discussions within a national scope, adding a more heteroglot perception of slavery as a national question at a time when the American nation is as equally shattered and traumatized as its people. The authorial voice behind the omniscient narrator enters into the dialogue, articulating that slavery "had cast such a glamour over the Nation" (Harper 20) and so cruelly "warped the consciences of men" (Harper 20) that those slaveholders "failed to read aright the legible transcript of Divine retribution which was written upon the shuddering earth, where the blood of God's poor children had been as water freely spilled" (Harper 20). Instead of a governing authorial dominance over the narrative, the multi-layered stratification of characters' voices intersects with one another's and author's voice in polyphonic dialogues.

Structuring her narrative as a series of dialogues rather than placing a specific focus on the plot line, Harper constructs a dialogic set of relations amidst her characters, assembling the social problems and the questions of domesticity and black womanhood within the form of the novel. The abolitionist discourse

developed by minor characters is positioned in close dialogue with Iola's life and abolitionist and reformist discourse. This connection embodies the text not merely as one voice but as a composition of diverse voices. In this respect, though *Iola Leroy* focuses on Iola's life, it does far more than picture Iola's maturation and developing self-consciousness: it exposes Iola's growing awareness of her race as a woman who seems perfectly white with her blue eyes and white skin as well as the dysfunctional quality of popular antebellum cultural tropes such as domesticity and true womanhood. On the surface, *Iola Leroy*, with its "simplistic and sincere mimicry of domestic literary conventions" (Foreman 74), seems to conform to the domestic ideals of the antebellum time. Yet, as scholar Mary Helen Washington contends, Harper's novel is a work "frozen into self-consciousness by the need to defend black women and men against the vicious and prevailing stereotypes that mark nineteenth-century American cultural thought" (73). Harper's treatment of antebellum ideals of domesticity and true womanhood may seem a conformist one at first glance, as she shows that Iola prefers marriage at the end of the novel. However, Harper refutes the hegemony of domesticity and womanhood principles, taking them merely as popular notions only to offer a critical analysis of these dominant literary tropes, whilst also suggesting fresh views of home life and womanhood for black women in the postbellum United States. Introducing an idea of selfhood into her black readers in Iola's personal growth, Harper critiques white ideology that deems only white women to be true women and that disenfranchises black women. This disqualification of black women from any positive association with what was thought to be ideal womanhood reveals Harper's inexhaustible motivation in restoring Iola's true black womanhood. Iola's womanhood is constructed more in alliance with the public sphere as she dedicates herself to the improvement of the black race both as a single and a married woman. Her position in the public sphere firstly as a nurse in the army, secondly as a saleswoman in the North and thirdly as a teacher serves as a model for all black women who were in need of constructing their identities that they lost with the human bondage.

Iola's story begins when she is rescued from "her master's clutches" (Harper 40) by Tom Anderson while serving for the Union army. She is sold into slavery after her father's death, and led the life of a slave that she had not known up to that time though his father was a slave owner who married a mulatto slave. Although she was "born and raised in the midst of slavery" (Harper 121), she has not "the least idea of its barbarous selfishness" (Harper 121) till she is "forced to pass through it" (Harper 121). Iola's transformation into an abolitionist reformer is an exemplary one

in that she is a “Southern girl and a slave-holder’s daughter” (Harper 83), and “always defended slavery when it was under discussion” (Harper 83) as a schoolgirl. Her father and mother’s kind treatment of their slaves caused Iola’s ignorance behind such a proslavery belief. Being sure that her father never mistreated their slaves, Iola, as a little girl who is educated in the North, possesses these ideas because of the domestic happiness of their family house. And, she thinks that she is right because of this domestic contentment and a sphere of free discussion in their house that is also shared with the slaves. In this sense, Iola’s family house, which highlights Iola’s father and mother’s interracial marriage as a harmonious one, becomes a site for dialogue on slavery and possible remedies to abolish it. Characterizing Iola’s mother, Marie as a politically conscious woman of the sociopolitical scene of the time, Harper turns the Leroy family house into a heteroglossic social locale through which to explore the “shadows in the home” (65), the impact and aftermath of slavery, racial discrimination, and racial inferiority. Though Iola’s father Eugene is portrayed as an affectionate husband who cares for his wife, and who gives her every opportunity to claim her rights and individuality, he is shown under the influence of racial prejudices and the “public opinion” (Harper 69) whose “meshes” (Harper 69) he “cannot break” (Harper 69) in the South. However, in an atmosphere of free expression and discussion, he bans any use of “the dialect of slavery” (Harper 65) that would “linger upon” (Harper 65) Marie’s “lips” (Harper 65) by further encouraging her to attend antislavery meetings during their stay in the North, where she “had learned some of the noblest lessons of freedom and justice, and had become imbued with their sentiments” (Harper 66). Nevertheless, not all of the southern houses are as free as the Leroy household, a fact that blights Iola’s childhood vision of slavery. When, in a discussion among her schoolmates, one of her friends asks whether she has ever attended “an anti-slavery meeting” (Harper 83) or whether freedom is essential for those “who are coming North on the Underground Railroad” (Harper 84), or about the reason why the Congress passed “the Fugitive Slave Bill” (Harper 84), Iola responds that her abolitionist friends will be cured of their “Abolitionism” (Harper 84) if they come and witness their domestic life in the South. Nevertheless, Iola comes to realize that this is a terrible lie, and she is proven wrong when her family and she are remanded to slavery after her father’s death. Yet, upon the removal of the ignorance and the arrival of a new shadow of slavery and homelessness in her life after her own racist uncle’s, Alfred Lorraine’s, attempt to sell Iola and her family, Iola embraces the Abolitionist cause more than ever.

Harper embodies a formula of public activism for black women in Iola's speeches and preferences. When Dr. Gresham proposes marriage to Iola while she is working as a nurse for the Union army, she tells him that there is an "insurmountable barrier between us" (Harper 173). Iola takes pains to clarify that romance without rational thought in an age of racial prejudice and discrimination will be of no avail, and that though she looks white enough to pass for white, she has "too much self-respect to enter your [Dr. Gresham's] home under a veil of concealment" (Harper 97). Just like slavery, passing for white is a shadow that would pose much more obstacles in Iola's reformist solutions. Iola strongly rejects Dr. Gresham's offer of passing for white and his proposal of a potential domestic happiness that would be saturated with the Southern racial prejudice. Harper therefore presents racial passing as essentially a question of whether one accepts one's body and identity. If the body is a construction of a series of marks, Iola advocates that these marks should represent her African heritage on the American territories. She thus rejects any disguise or suppression of her African identity, embracing an understanding of a plurality of identities for a vision of a heteroglossic world. Still, Iola's body can also be considered to be an archive, in the Derridean sense, that both conceals and reveals its own truths. By defending her body as her inherent identity and rigorously refusing the act of passing, Iola at the same time holds "the hermeneutic right" (Derrida 10), or in other words, the control of the interpretation of her own body and inheritance in her refusal of Dr. Gresham's marriage proposal. Since passing is dependent on figures of insiders and outsiders, which introduces the question of hermeneutics, Iola's rejection of passing can also be regarded as her will to configure her own individual body strategically and rhetorically as a metonymy for the national body and its secrets. The American national body that is shown as fragmented as the individual bodies conceals its own truths regarding the history of racial colonization and the ensuing racism and slavery as well as the truths related to these facts that are veiled in the individual histories of its people. Iola's willingness to remain true to her inheritance lays bare these realities as self-evident legacies of the American history and national identity.

The text offers this debate on racial passing in Dr. Gresham's house where Iola's racial identity would be "unwelcome" (Harper 97) as a new way to offer further solutions that can ameliorate the lives of black people. Critic Michael Borgstrom indicates that the novel's "thematic rejection of racial passing offers one way to reevaluate its apparent investment in ideologies of racial uplift" (779). It is apparent that Harper connects the problem of racial passing with the improvement of the

condition of the black race. If passing is a state of in-betweenness, Harper turns it into an individual preference and a vehicle for being of help to the black race. Iola is not the only character who rejects racial passing or who claims the truth instead of salvation from her oppressors. Similarly, Robert Johnson, a mulatto lieutenant in the Union army, refuses Captain Sybil's suggestion about passing for white and defecting to the Confederacy in a dialogue where he articulates that his place is where he is most needed (Harper 42) and he will readily remain on the black side. Characters' constant rejection of racial passing points at the crucial connection Harper forms between the critical issue of racial passing and racial uplift. Iola's thoughts and other characters' dialogues show that passing for white will prevent black people from comprehending the value of their own race and from improving it in many aspects of life.

One indispensable element that Iola adheres to for the amelioration of the black race is education. Education, in *Iola Leroy*, appears throughout the text and denotes the fundamental way of attaining racial uplift. It is defined as the "best investment" (Harper 65) to be made in the support of black race. In a conversation with her uncle Robert, Iola develops theories to heal the wounds of slavery by two main methods: the first is to remedy the social ills through advancing education and public awareness, and the second is to wash away "the weakness and inefficiency of women" (Harper 160) by expanding occupational opportunities for them out in the public sphere. Iola's "theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living" (Harper 160) by joining "the great rank of bread winners" (Harper 160) represents the voices of all enslaved black women. In light of Bakhtin's notion on dialogism, it is possible to argue that Iola's individual utterances stand for the opinions and desires of all black women who wish to sever their ties with the domestic sphere. In other words, Iola becomes the spokesperson for all slave women who were oppressed in the houses as enslaved domestics. Iola's words thus aim to break the conventional binary opposition between the public and private spheres, a binarism that lies at the bottom of ideals of domesticity and womanhood. Nonetheless, Iola knows that though slavery is banned, disenfranchisement obstructs her way to complete freedom. Iola confronts this ongoing subjugation most painfully when her coworkers ostracize her in her new post as a saleswoman in the North, the place that is thought to be free from the "cruel prejudice" (Harper 165) of racism, but which is in fact fraught with it. On the revelation of her true identity by one of her coworkers who acts as a "spy" (Harper 161), her coworkers reach a clear-cut consensus. If Iola is "colored, she should be treated accordingly"

(Harper 161). Feeling the “chill in the social atmosphere” (Harper 161), Iola feels determined not to yield to the racist prejudgments and proslavery voices. No matter how much warning she receives from her friends and family about hiding her black lineage, she does not abandon her dogged perseverance in sticking to her genuine identity as a black woman. She rejects any prospect of passing for white and openly admits that she goes to a colored church on Sundays to be with her “own people” (Harper 161), though this causes her dismissal from another post as a saleswoman. The racist voices of Iola’s coworkers emerge in their protests, which are also supported by employers like Mr. Cohen. Uncle Robert’s enunciation of the fact that this brutal prejudice pursues them “through every avenue of life” (Harper 162) and assigns them “the lowest places”(Harper 162) only confirms Iola’s determination to hold on to her “African blood” (Harper 162). Iola once again resists every temptation to deny her identity even if it gives way to social ostracization when she acquires a teaching position in an institution managed by professed Christian women. In the scene where Iola discloses to the friendly matron that she is a colored woman, she is exposed to heartbreaking discrimination upon the matron’s quick and awkward change in her manners. The matron’s words illustrate her approval of segregation, which she expresses in discouraging words, “I must see the board of managers about it” (Harper 163). In respect of Bakhtin’s analysis, the matron’s expressions can be considered to be “populated by intentions” (293) of segregation, tasting “of the context and contexts” of racial seclusion, a context “in which it has lived its socially charged life” (293). The matron’s words lead Iola to face the ultimate door shut “in her face because of the outcast blood in her veins” (Harper 163). She is shunned, seen as a social pathology due to groundless racial biases. Iola, who supported slavery as a child, becomes a woman who is ostracized due to what slaveholders regard as the taint in her blood. Whenever she finds a job, she encounters disapproval and exclusion by white employers and coworkers. It is clear that several important issues appear in Iola’s life when her identity is even more drastically shaken by the fact that racism and racial prejudices persist equally in the North. She leaves her previous “beautiful day-dreams” (Harper 93) when she is “rudely awakened by the fate which had dragged her into the depths of slavery” (Harper 93).

Despite all these words and acts of discrimination, racial passing, for Iola, does seem a promising remedy for the ills of slavery. Iola’s determination to remain loyal to her heritage once again confirms her belief in the power of racial uplift. Iola’s commitment to unravel the shadows of slavery achieves its target in the last

post in which Mr. Cloten employs her. Mr. Cloten's attitude and words are exemplary in that they negate Iola's former employers. He immediately lets his workers know about Iola's heritage, further informing them that he will send them away if they object to working with her. Directing his business in a positive way that may amend public opinion, Mr. Cloten helps the public estimation of black women improve by dealing with "Southern prejudice" (Harper 165), as he is able to afford "the luxury of a good conscience" (Harper 165). Mr. Cloten contributes to the abolitionist heteroglossia in the novel by insisting on the duty of both Northerners and Southerners and the need for them to listen to their consciences, highlighting that the Northerners should "stamp" (Harper 165) themselves on the South, and "not let the South stamp itself on" the Northerners (Harper 165). The North, as described by Mr. Cloten, has so far "learned to treat men according to the complexion of their souls, and not the color of their skins" (Harper 165); and all they need to do now is to give their "best contribution towards the solution of the negro problem" (Harper 165).

The social ostracization to which Iola is subjected epitomizes how "the U.S. race system" is first "conceived in slavery, gestated in racialist science, and bred in Jim Crow segregation," and is later "calcified into a visual epistemology of racial difference based largely on skin color" (Nerad 813). Furthermore, it is possible to observe that Harper's construction of Iola further extends this "visual epistemology of racial difference" (Nerad 813) to a subtle subversion of stereotypical gender norms. *Iola Leroy* frames itself as a response to the ideal norms of womanhood that created and flourished in the antebellum period. Iola's white look does not alter her black identity, and her reformist capabilities enable her to form a new and powerful image of black womanhood. Hence, Iola's decisions destabilize both the stereotypical figure of the tragic mulatto who falls victim to racial discrimination and the cult of true womanhood which is only definitive of white womanhood and which disregards any positive association with black womanhood. Mary Helen Washington in her analysis of the tragic mulatto myth suggests that Harper reverses "the image of the tragic mulatto heroine" (76), conceiving new routes for her heroine "to become [a] political and social activist" (76), and enlisting her fiction "in the battle to counter the negative images of blacks and women" (75). Harper critiques all these fictional traditions of the antebellum time in order to question and critique their applicability and validity for black women both in the antebellum and postbellum periods. Iola fulfills her social duty to recuperate what Laurie Kaiser calls "the situation of double jeopardy for black females" (97). This "double

jeopardy” (Kaiser 97) is the agonizing position in which black women were placed by marginalizing practices and thoughts of racist societies. Harper’s construction of Iola defies this racist attitude of the white supremacist ideology, which banishes black women from American society and national harmony and which evades the possibility of a heteroglossic plurality. Thus, Harper’s criticism of the dichotomy of the public male world against the private female circle and the conventions of domesticity and womanhood extends beyond traditional approaches to such binary oppositions, presenting a more multifarious and complicated cultural levels on which struggles for identity and selfhood are revealed. Accordingly, Harper subverts all racist arguments and popular antebellum ideals about domesticity and true womanhood, proposing true-to-life representations of black women and people instead of stereotypes, and presenting conscious characters that strive for equal rights and racial uplift of black people.

The heteroglossia in *Iola Leroy* exposes a broader range of perspectives on the abolition of slavery, racial bigotry, and potential solutions to social problems resulting from them in the Reconstruction period. In the presentation of such viewpoints, Harper gathers together a multiplicity of perspectives embedded in the contrasts between the main and functional characters’ ideas, incorporating also her own voice through the narrator and the characters’ abolitionist arguments. Organized as a series of episodic dialogues, the novel calls forth the acknowledgment of all these voices in their invaluable contribution to shape a public opinion in the whole nation in the scenes where sketches of proslavery arguments of slaveholders are presented as the centripetal forces of American social life. Such dialogues in the text operate as an effective interaction of similar or counter arguments advocated by different characters, whose voices compose a heteroglossic world in a nation that is depicted as divided into pieces because of the constant devaluation and subjugation of the black race. In this light, the text brings together the characters to discuss the “negro problem” (Harper 171). In the scene where Dr. Gresham, Dr. Latrobe, the Southerner, and Dr. Latimer invite Iola’s pastor Rev. Carmicle and Iola’s uncle Robert as people who can “do justice to the subject” (Harper 171), all efforts are made to convince the bigoted white-supremacist Dr. Latrobe that black race is made an inferior race merely because white people left them “ignorant, poor, and clannish” (Harper 173). However, no matter how convincingly Dr. Gresham pronounces that “ignorance, poverty, and clannishness are more social than racial conditions, which may be outgrown” (Harper 173), Dr. Latrobe considers this to be a possible means for the black race to

rise in the ladders of civilization. His argument grows even more monologic as he heatedly advocates the constituent tenets of racial slavery when he says “Southerners will never submit to negro supremacy” (Harper 172) and that they will “never abandon their Caucasian civilization to an inferior race” (Harper 172). Dr. Latimer’s statements echo Dr. Gresham’s voice as he comes up with the fact that “it was once a crime to teach him [a black person] to read” (Harper 173) in some parts of the United States, underscoring the idea that if a black person is “poor, for ages he was forced to bend to unrequited toil. If he is clannish, society has segregated him to himself” (Harper 173). Dr. Latimer is a young physician who wishes to “labor among the colored people” (Harper 172) in the South and whose abolitionist purposes stand in sharp contrast to Dr. Latrobe’s views on slavery. Dr. Latrobe is representative of millions of slaveholders who believe in the idea that slavery “lifted him [the slave] out of barbarism” (Harper 175) and “given him a language of civilization, and introduced him to the world’s best religion” (Harper 175). Dr. Latrobe’s ideas are so fixed that he sees the South as an unshakable “unit” (Harper 174) that belongs to the “highest race on earth” (Harper 176) whereas black people belong “to the lowest” (Harper 176). Nonetheless, Dr. Gresham contests Dr. Latrobe’s proslavery argument, maintaining that the black race “is not the only branch of the human race which has been low down in the scale of civilization and freedom, and which has outgrown the measure of his chains” (Harper 175). His argument is that “slavery, polygamy, and human sacrifices have been practiced among Europeans in by-gone days; and [...] out of savages unable to count to the number of their fingers and speaking only a language of nouns and verbs, arise at length our Newtons and Shakspeares” (Harper 175). According to Dr. Gresham, it is only the “violence and injustice” (Harper 175) of the slaveholders that caused ages of suffering and bondage, which roused “a spirit of remonstrance” (Harper 175) before the world and which produced shame on the part of the slaveholders. In his appeal to Dr. Latrobe, Rev. Carmicle’s words support these statements when he states that slaveholders “cannot willfully deprive the negro of a single right as a citizen without sending demoralization through your [their] own ranks” (Harper 174). Rev. Carmicle underlines the national principles of “rights of life and liberty” (Harper 174) that are far more precious than the slaveholders’ “rights of property” (Harper 174), and thus voices the fundamental constitutional values that are to be heard nationally. The abolitionist heteroglossia in all these dialogues lies in the way Harper renders her characters’ discussions intelligible, staging the argumentative

force of their humanitarian arguments against the inhumane proslavery theories and practices.

Iola's reformist and abolitionist views and the other characters' antislavery opinions coalesce into a similar vein where they ruminate upon the amelioration of the black race in a harmonious united nation. All characters with an abolitionist vision also address the question of what the American nation should be like so as to embrace its entire people under equal circumstances. A sense of nationhood uniting all its people of different racial or ethnic origin would discard the hegemony of the authoritative Southern "unit" (Harper 174) as the slaveholder Dr. Latrobe calls it. Abolitionist characters like Dr. Latimer, Dr. Gresham, and Rev. Carmicle, whose statements bring to the surface an atmosphere of an abolitionist heteroglossia, are fully committed to promoting social reform. As Rev. Carmicle suggests, it would be the nation's "grand opportunity to help build up a new South, not on the shifting sands of policy and expediency, but on the broad basis of equal justice and universal freedom" (Harper 176). In a similar fashion, Dr. Gresham's theory of Reconstruction lies in the effort "to create a moral sentiment in the nation, which will consider a wrong done to the weakest of them as a wrong done to the whole community" (Harper 178). "For the true reconstruction of the country", further continues Dr. Gresham, "something more was needed than bayonets and bullets, or the schemes of selfish politicians or plotting demagogues" (Harper 183). Dr. Gresham stresses the vital need for education and conscience for building a nation when he clarifies it in other words: "the South needed the surrender of the best brain and heart of the country to build, above the wastes of war, more stately temples of thought and action" (Harper 183). The above dialogues about racial slavery and the means to reconstruct a nation by healing the national wounds make it also quite obvious that Harper's target audience is non-Black readers who may help change the public opinion about black people. Similarly, Harper aims to raise awareness by involving also the readers in a dialogic relation with the characters' thoughts, which subtly extends the heteroglossia in the novel to the reader to create a heteroglossic imagined community of readers and a figure of a new national identity based on a plurality of visions and a diversity of identities. In this respect, the text "encourages non-Black readers to extend their own literary and activist horizons by resisting (pseudo) scientific and (extra) legal encroachments against nonwhites, encroachments that the broader American populace and Anglo progressive community were finding increasingly easy to either support or ignore" (Foreman 74-75). In a similar scene of "*conversazione*" (Harper 188), abolitionist

characters that are “deeply interested in the welfare of the race” (Harper 191) are in the act of formulating novel ways of thinking about Reconstruction and racial uplift. Iola, Dr. Latimer, Professor Gradnor of North Carolina, Mr. Forest of New York, Hon. Dugdale, Rev. Carmicle, Rev. Cantnor, Bishop Tunster, Professor Langhorne of Georgia, Mrs. Watson, Miss Brown and others convene in Mr. Stillman’s house and have their say about Reconstruction. In light of the paper on “Negro Emigration” prepared by Bishop Turner, they discuss whether “self-exilement is the true remedy for the wrongs of the negro” (Harper 191). Professor Gradnor explains that there is no reason for black people to expatriate themselves due to racially biased people (Harper 191). Professor Langhorne encourages his friends, affirming that this prejudice influences them all (Harper 192) and gives them “a common cause” (Harper 192) and brings their intellect “in contact with the less favored of” (Harper 192) the black race. As Mr. Stillman clarifies, there is also this need in the entire nation “for the best heart and brain to work in unison for justice and righteousness” (Harper 191). Iola reiterates the belief in the arrival of “a brighter day” (Harper 193) if they are able to lift the shadows “not by answering hate with hate, or giving scorn for scorn, but by striving to be more generous, noble, and just” (Harper 193). Miss Delany, like Iola, introduces means of reparation by reminding them of the pains of being “aliens and outcasts in the land of” birth (Harper 194) for ages and by telling how she teaches her “pupils to do all in their power to make this country worthy of their deepest devotion and loftiest patriotism” (Harper 194). All of these constructive conversations aim to let other characters and the reader alike discern the shadows in American sociopolitical life from distinct perspectives. These dialogues, which take place in scenes of “*conversazione*” (Harper 188), bring together both the abolitionist and anti-abolitionist characters in a dialogic affinity that challenges the strict monologism of slavery. The progress made from secret conversations held by slaves in the “lonely woods and gloomy swamps” (Harper 202) to *conversaciones* in houses that are open to free discussion paves novel inroads for both characters and the reader in better understanding the plights that darken the American nation and in better identifying the ways to disperse the monopoly of racist ideas.

The abolitionist heteroglossia that characters develop in their conversations is sustained by Iola’s unwavering belief in racial progress. Iola envisions education and constructive means of reparation in sociocultural practices and domains as the primary purpose of Reconstruction. The text on the whole disseminates the consciousness of “good education” (Harper 72) as the best “investment on which the

law can place no attachment” (Harper 72). Education will evade the threats of wars, or Christ-like sacrifices made in the name of survival. Education is also a fundamental means to provide the black people with homes and the essential process that will allow the progress of the black race. Since homelessness means deprivation just like the rights of citizenship that black people lack constitutionally, Harper places a convincing emphasis on the urgent need for true domestic life for black people. Harper defines black people in her essay “Enlightened Motherhood” (1982) as a “homeless race” that are to be “gathered into homes of peaceful security and to be instructed how to plant around their firesides the strongest batteries against sins that degrade and the race vices that demoralize” (Harper, “Enlightened Motherhood”). Harper presents this painful condition of homelessness in Tom Anderson’s final scene of death and Iola’s homelessness and search for her scattered family with her uncle Robert after she is released from slavery. When Tom Anderson is seriously wounded at the battlefield, he considers his death a sacrifice, saying “someone must die to get us out of this” (Harper 49), and “I’se ’most home” (Harper 49). As slavery provides no home, the only place to be called home for Tom Anderson is the heaven. Tom’s words point to the urgency of bringing the nation together through concrete Reconstructionist missions. It is shown in the novel that the other way to build up a harmonious nation is to reattach the remnants of the scattered family ties. Iola and her uncle Robert achieve their “earnest purpose” (Harper 120) to bring the family back together that binds “anew the ties which slavery had broken” (Harper 120). Furthermore, education will raise racial consciousness that will lead mulattoes to remain on the black side, and help all black people build up new homes and new lives. Likewise, Harper’s focus on Iola’s refusal to take sides with her white heritage attributes to Iola a significant quality of self-representation without the peril of self-dispossession. It is this agency that empowers Iola’s activities of racial uplift for both black women and men. Iola’s resistance to Dr. Gresham’s successive marriage proposals lets her struggle continue against the racist supremacy of the white and the ideological formulations of cult of womanhood. Iola willingly changes this state of in-betweenness (into which her biracial identity pushed her) into a conscious preference where race becomes a clearer definition of identity, not of inferiority or shame. Iola’s insistence on staying in the South and educating the black folk instead of escaping to the North (which she would have preferred if she had married Dr. Gresham) signals her determination to establish blissful domestic lives for the black community through education. Harper confirms that Iola’s willingness to marry the abolitionist Dr.

Latimer is rooted in their common purpose to do service for the prosperity of their own people.

As Washington contends, “because Iola is black and a race leader, Harper felt greater urgency to allow Iola freedom from the restrictions placed on women in fiction” (77). In this respect, *Iola Leroy* poses questions as to alternative reconfigurations of black selfhood and black womanhood that defy the dehumanization of the black race and idealized white womanhood norms. Conveying the private lives of black people into public discussions on racial slavery and abolitionism and subverting the binarisms around domesticity and womanhood in the context of slavery, Harper remodels Iola as an African American woman who works actively in the public sphere and who takes an active part in the abolitionist activism. Against all legal and social restrictions, Iola’s acts and ideas promote pedagogical instruction and inspiration for social activism, the two key elements that shape the Reconstructionist purpose of the novel. If slavery is “a fearful cancer eating into the nation’s heart, sapping its vitality, and undermining its life” (Harper 168), as Iola asserts, *Iola Leroy* illustrates that an abolitionist heteroglossia can govern the stratification of racist meanings and open up new opportunities for the elevation of black race as part of national consciousness. The dialogic power of the words ensures a dynamics of thoughts in public discussions or conversaciones where characters reflect on and articulate the possible means of reparation for injustices. Harper’s preference for the genre of the novel and its heteroglossic quality furthermore help readers view the novel as an archival resource with which to observe the Civil War period and the postbellum United States within a historical scope. In the final “Note”, Harper states that her work is a combination of fact and fiction (219), a work that is fed upon historical facts and their novelistic representation. Accordingly, the novel illustrates that literature and fiction are effective tools of social action that heighten awareness and response to the construction and perception of black American identity and the representation of black female self. By virtue of Harper’s heteroglossic idea of the novel and the optimistic dialogues on abolitionism, the metaphor of shadow comes to serve ultimately as a precursor to the possibility of removal of the hardships of enslavement and cruel racial prejudices. Thus, Harper’s abolitionist heteroglossia evinces that plurality of public discussions and different views are powerful dialogic means that could eliminate the shadows of misconceptions and mistreatments in the American social life.

WORKS CITED

- Andrews, William L. "Introduction." *The African-American Novel in the Age of Reaction: Three Classics*. New York: Mentor Book, 1992. vii-xx.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Borgstrom, Michael. "Face Value: Ambivalent Citizenship in *Iola Leroy*." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 779-793. JSTOR. Web. 10 March 2013.
- Christmann, James. "Raising Voices, Lifting Shadows: Competing Voice-Paradigms in Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*." *African American Review* 34.1 (2000): 5-18. JSTOR. Web. 8 April 2013.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." Eds. Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz. *Diacritics* 25. 2. (1995). 9-63. JSTOR. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.
- Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. 2003.
- Foreman, P. Gabrielle. *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009.
- Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1988.
- . "Enlightened Motherhood: An Address." *American Memory from the Library of Congress*. Lib. Of Cong. Web. 27 Nov. 2014.
- Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Kaiser, Laurie. "The Black Madonna: Notions of True Womanhood from Jacobs to Hurston." *South Atlantic Review* 60.1 (1995): 97-109. JSTOR. Web. 16 March 2014.
- Lachmann, Renate. "Rhetoric, the Dialogical Principle and the Fantastic in Bakhtin's Thought." *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture Meaning in Language, Art and New Media*. Eds. Finn Bostad, Craig Brandist, Lars Evensen, and Hege Charlotte Faber. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 46-61.

- Lincoln, Abraham. "The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863." *National Archives*. 6 October 2015. Web. 15 June 2014.
- Nerad, Julie C. "Slippery Language and False Dilemmas: The Passing Novels of Child, Howells, and Harper." *American Literature* 75.4 (2003): 813-841. *Project Muse*. Web. 15 June 2014.
- Norris, Christopher. "Heteroglossia." *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. Eds. Michael Payne and Jessica Rae Barbera. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 331-332.
- Peterson, Carla L. *African-American Women Speakers and Writers of the North (1830-1880)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Washington, Mary Helen. *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women: 1860-1960*. New York: Anchor Books, 1987.
- Westwood, Howard C. *Black Troops, White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992.