

ABSTRACT

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THE SOCIAL MEANING OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S VOICES IN CHARLES W.

CHESNUTT'S *THE HOUSE BEHIND THE CEDARS* AND ZORA NEALE

HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

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Language and voice are studied in fiction to understand how characters' masculinity and femininity are depicted. This study examines the meaning of men's and women's voices in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*. Both authors portray their characters with realistic emotions that reflect American and African-American culture. Janie struggles to discover her own voice and womanhood after two unsuccessful marriages; however, in her third marriage, Janie begins to use her voice and establish herself as a woman. Similarly, Rena neglects her black identity and finds difficulty in adjusting to white society. However, she uses her voice to illustrate her strength and accepts her blackness. This study analyzes the significance of idiolects and physiological meanings that help depict men's and women's voices in the novels. The research demonstrates the importance of men's and women's voices and how they contribute to characters' maturation.

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HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* portray two culturally different environments where men and women receive differential respect and authority. Both authors highlight the significance of femininity and masculinity through the reflection of men's and women's voices. Women characters struggle to define themselves within the boundaries of a male-dominated society, which, often times, diminishes their individuality and constrains their voices. Male characters struggle with themselves and other people because they have to project their masculinity whether through their voices or accomplishments. Hurston and Chesnutt not only depict the relationship between fiction and reality, and how one mirrors the other, they also reflect the social meaning of men's and women's voices in 19th and 20th century American life.

Hurston, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, presents the story of a young African American woman growing up in an all-black town, Eatonville, Florida and struggling to discover and nurture her womanhood. A very important part of her womanhood that needs to grow is her voice, which her cultural environment constrains by virtue of her gender or femininity. Her voice goes through different levels of growth and maturation from her relationships with the men in her life. Her first husband, Logan Killicks, is traditional and unromantic; therefore, their relationship presents no opportunity for her to

develop her voice and personality as a self-reliant and self-determining woman. The second husband, Joe Starks, has the ambition of acquiring a “big voice” in his community and succeeding professionally. He succeeds in getting a big voice (someone to be listened to and respected) by becoming a relatively affluent business and property owner; however, he stifles his wife’s independence and affords her no opportunity to grow and prosper. But Janie, after two decades of marriage, finds the courage to confront her husband and to demand respect and autonomy. However, it is through her third husband, Tea Cake, that she finally develops her voice and independence. Janie and Tea Cake nurture each other in the context of love and harmony, and occasional scuffles, as they both acknowledge each other’s individuality and eat and play together.

Chesnutt’s *The House Behind the Cedars* is a story about two mulattoes, John and Rena Walden, who attempt to pass for white in the post-Civil War South. Passing for white becomes a means by which the characters seek to acquire a white voice that would give them power and privilege. John Walden, the older brother, is able to acquire the voice and a new name. After taking the name John Warwick, he begins his life as a white man and enters the legal profession as an apprentice lawyer in Judge Straight’s office. He manages the plantation of a wealthy Southerner who left his wife behind to serve in the Confederate army. When the plantation owner dies in battle, John marries the daughter and becomes successful beyond his wildest imagination. Thus, his white voice and his white skin both work in concert to endow him with authority and privilege.

His sister, Rena Walden, acquires her own white voice only to reject it eventually in preference for her black identity. Although she has a white skin like her brother, Rena

chooses to identify with the black identity, which then limits her potentiality for success. Similarly, Chesnutt through the use of the Black vernacular portrays the struggles of Black characters that lack the opportunity to pass as white. Through his depiction of both a successful and an unsuccessful attempt at “passing,” Chesnutt reveals how voice combined with racism and miscegenation frequently delimits economic opportunities in antebellum and reconstruction eras in American history.

The two novels used in this study share similarities and differences that allow the reader to discover the social meaning of men’s and women’s voices. A character’s speech or voice shows how language is used in a variety of ways that may also define a character’s personality. For instance, idiolects often reflect individual identity since they are peculiar to each individual. Dialects, on the other hand, reflect the voice and folklore of a group of people. Through a dialect, it is possible to construct or reconstruct the identity or worldview of a group of people. Different dialects reflect different cultures and backgrounds of different societies. Dialect as a representation of a group’s ideology or worldview is also true in fiction, including Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Chesnutt’s *The House Behind the Cedars*.

Social inequalities can also be examined in fiction through language and gender otherness. In other words, differences in language and gender contribute to the disparateness that readers find in men and women characters in fiction. In Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the author manipulates southern dialect to illustrate how language and gender contribute to the protagonist’s illustration of strength and expansion. Her quest for inclusiveness in a male-dominated society demonstrates the difficulties that

female characters face in their struggle of becoming who they really want to be.

Similarly, in Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the main character also resides in a male-dominated society where Rena Walden chooses not to continue to pass for white in contravention of her brother's request. Through Rena's story, Chesnutt suggests that female characters can find their voice and speak their preference into existence, and they can be strong even in a predominately male-populated society.

Voices in Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* highlight the importance of the social meaning of men's and women's voices. Voices in both novels also highlight the difference between men and women characters in the novel, underlining their differing roles in the fictionalized societies of the novels. In Hurston's novel, Hurston depicts voice in the establishment of character's personalities and the elaboration of their life's struggles. In Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, on the other hand, Chesnutt illustrates voice through the strength and bravery of characters in their journey to pass for white, which also means that the characters must adopt or acquire a new voice to intensify their passing.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the relationship between gender and language reveals the significance of characters' voices. The speech of male and female characters highlights the sociobiological, physiological, and sociopolitical meaning of voices through which masculinity and femininity, and power and control are reflected. Throughout the novel, the male characters are identified as the more aggressive characters because of their occupational status and the topics of their conversations. Male

characters hold powerful positions as mayors and store owners which reflect their power in the community. Moreover, male characters in Hurston's novel have more dialogue than female characters; this shows how male characters talk more than the female characters and are usually the ones leading the conversations. Using their voices, male characters establish their masculinity through their status and dominance, both of which contribute to the portrayal of the patriarchal society in the novel.

In the examination of language and voice in *The House Behind the Cedars*, Chesnutt illustrates the evolution of a society that rejects black identity and embraces only white identity. Chesnutt tries to examine how characters adjust to the different social experiences in a white society. Chesnutt also depicts racial differences and textual miscegenation by creating a plot that involves comedy and tragedy, which are also important in the development of voice and character. The characters can be analyzed even further in terms of gender and dialect as well as the racism that Chesnutt illustrates throughout the novel. He highlights physical and psychological alterations that occur in the characters' development which are essential to understanding the social meaning of men's and women's voices.

Depiction of black life in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reflects a realism that is unique to Hurston's art. The male dominated community plays a significant role in the development of men's and women's voices as well as the silencing of voices. Hurston uses the power of male characters to demonstrate the growth of female characters, a growth that occurs when women claim their voices sometimes at the expense of men's

voices. As Hurston reveals in her novel, the growth may be long and gradual, but it never diminishes; it often leads to a state of maturation.

Both authors demonstrate their perception of men's and women's voices through their fiction, which is important when considering the influence of both Hurston and Chesnutt in American and African American literature. The two writers represent real people in a fictionalized world. They portray impulses and obsessions that motivate people's actions and propel their struggles. The language of their characters reflects the characters' gender and social identity. Further, the writers create cultural and social environments in which their characters achieve genuine personhood and authenticity in their struggles.

The portrayal of gender differences in the works of Chesnutt and Hurston also reveal conflicts that arise from the interactions of men's and women's voices and the consequences of those conflicts. In Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the author depicts his characters within the backdrop of American life after the Civil War. As both protagonists are passing for white, their struggles unveil psychological conflicts, as well as family conflicts, that eventually overwhelm one of the main characters. There is also conflict with the society at large. All these conflicts, which arise as male and female characters express their views and actualize their visions, reveal how blacks have attempted to advance their status in America after the Civil War.

Furthermore, Chesnutt uses language and social dialects to distinguish the role of black and white men, and black and white women during that time. Throughout the novel, Chesnutt implies that some black men and women may have a chance of

succeeding in life if they pass for white. In the case of John and Rena Walden, both characters succeed in passing for white. Chesnutt highlights the voices of his characters through gender differences between men and women and how they each use their voice to advance in society. Black characters use ‘proper’ dialect to communicate with one another and other white characters in the novel in order to conform to the norms and expectations of white American society.

Similarly, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston depicts African American culture by illustrating the role of black men and women in 20th century American life. Through voice and southern dialect, Hurston suggests that the community is male dominated which distinguishes the men as aggressors in the fictionalized society, while women function as the nurturers to delineate aspects of black culture in the novel. Male characters are always seen in leadership roles or giving orders to female characters. Gender differences in Hurston’s novel also reflect gender roles that illustrate the voice of men and women characters in southern black culture during the 20th century.

A study of voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The House Behind the Cedars* allows the reader to experience the strengths and weaknesses of the characters and the development of their voices. By examining the use of voice in the novels, the reader learns that Hurston creates the voice of the main character through the depiction of her unsuccessful relationships with men, how she develops her voice, becomes a woman, and gains respect. Similarly, Chesnutt’s depictions of passing for white helps the reader understand how John Warwick and Rena Walden use their voices for their chance to advance in life. By examining the two fictionalized works selected for this study, *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God and *The House Behind The Cedars*, it becomes clear that both authors portray men's and women's voices through relationships, occupations or status, masculinity and femininity to show how voices in fiction can reflect the social meaning of actual voices of men and women in many societies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The representation of voice in fiction can reveal a great deal about a literary work, including the culture of the fictionalized community. The author's narrative voice and the voices of the author's characters reflect a certain degree of authenticity that enhances the quality of the work of fiction. William L. Andrews, in "The Novelization of Voice in Early American Narrative," makes a similar argument in his discussion of voice in early African American slave narratives. Andrews notes that by 1850, the most sophisticated black writers were engaged in a quest for authorization: that is, the desire to sound authentic in a fictional work. Andrews also mentions three things that early black writers realized they must have in their narratives in order to sound authentic to an audience that was largely white: the stories must be factual; they must be credible; and the voice in the stories must sound truthful (23). The first two elements, which may not apply in contemporary fiction in their literal sense, unless the work is biographical or autobiographical, made sense at a time when early black writers were writing mostly slave narratives; so being factual and credible in their account of slavery might compel readers to believe the narratives. However, the third element, which is voice, is important in contemporary literary criticism because it enhances a work of fiction in many ways and can reveal many things about the work itself. Zora Neal Hurston, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, uses black vernacular to emphasize the depiction of an all-black society,

where men and women also reflect their gender differences, including their experiences, hardships, and triumphs. On the other hand, in *The House Behind the Cedars*, Charles Chesnutt includes both Black English and Standard English to show how black and white characters use their voices to reflect the differences in their socioeconomic status and their struggles. Both authors make characters use their voices to reflect gender differences and the unmistakable peculiarities of American life and culture in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

On how voice can reflect gender differences in very fundamental ways, David Graddol and Joan Swann, authors of *Gender Voices*, argue that, “Sex differences in our ancestors’ voices, according to the evolutionary explanations, reflected and helped maintain their primitive pattern of labour and sexual relationships” (30). In terms of society, Graddol and Swann suggest that the differences in men’s and women’s voices correspond to their environment and gender role, demonstrating how speech and tone of men’s voices reflect their aggression and masculinity, while women’s speech demonstrates submissiveness and femininity. Graddol and Swann continue to elaborate on the sociobiological differences of voice authority by illustrating how the speech and tone of men’s and women’s voices are determined by the expectations of society. Men’s and women’s voices in fiction are important in the examination of gender differences because they reflect how men and women use language to express who they are. Those differences, according to Graddol and Swann, include “the use of different words, grammatical differences, and pronunciation differences. In some cases such differences are categorical—men use one form and women another” (42). Within male

and female speech, there are some words that women can say that men may not be able to say and get away with, and vice versa with women. Graddol and Swann further clarify that “Male forms are used by males speaking to other males or males speaking to females, whereas female forms are used by females speaking to other females, or females speaking to males” (42). The assumption behind gender voices suggests that male and female forms of speech are significant in the study of fictional works because they show the differences in how men and women use language to negotiate power and authority. Fictional works often elaborate on the language and grammatical forms of words unique to a particular sex to reflect the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of a character’s gender. In other words, men’s and women’s voices can reflect characteristics that are peculiar to men and women, as well as those that reflect their social and cultural status or condition, all of which are relevant to Chesnut’s and Hurston’s portrayal of men and women in their fiction.

Graddol and Swann further observe, in *Gender Voices*, that language experts suggest that “language sometimes serves as a tool of sex dominance. Possibly the reduced female forms constitute a conventionalized or ceremonious status of women in the community. Men, in dealing with men, speak fully and deliberately...” (45). Language as an instrument of sex dominance also works in fiction. That is, the depiction of voice and characters may reveal the dynamics of sex dominance and authority, and the networks of power distribution among the sexes in the fictionalized society. Graddol and Swann continue to focus on the differences between the communication of men and women, elaborating on the difference in their conversations. The authors suggest that “the

difference in voice between men-men conversations and women-women conversations reveal the masculinity and femininity of the speakers” (49). Both authors believe that the voices of men and women sometimes correspond to their roles in society.

According to Andrea Panzeca, an editor of the *Bayou Magazine* at the University of New Orleans, language is relevant to a story’s setting, a character’s voice, and sexual identity. Panzeca notes that “In central and southern Florida, Hurston found a setting that was close enough to the violence of slavery to give Janie a place from which to flee, but far enough from that violence (due to its wilderness and resulting low population) to give Janie a clean slate” (3). Panzeca believes that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston uses the setting of the story to examine Janie Crawford’s character through a lens of African American life in the 1960s. Panzeca elaborates on the significance of Hurston’s fictionalized setting and how the society helps illustrate Janie’s growth as a character and her voice development. She argues that Zora Neale Hurston has clearly adopted the use of language for the codification of gender characteristics (7). Panzeca suggests that the setting of Hurston’s novel reflects Janie’s struggle to maintain her identity which is important in examining her voice in the novel because it shows how Janie’s voice transitions in her quest for love. Panzeca further examines the setting of Hurston’s novel, arguing that

Hurston opens the novel with a deterministic declaration that men seek horizons and women do what they must to follow their dreams. Thus, in following horizon-seeking men to lakes and rivers across the Florida peninsula, Janie not only

escapes the violent legacy of the panhandle, but also realizes her dream of marriage, as presented to her under the pear tree. (2)

Panzeca's remarks point to the importance of language or voice in a character's growth and struggles.

Dora Davis, author of "'De Talkin' Game': The Creation of Psychic Space in Selected Short Fictions of Zora Neale Hurston," elaborates on how in many of Hurston's works, including short stories, Hurston's idea of voice gives the female characters spirit and possibility. Davis argues that "Hurston's [works are] a recording and promoting of the beauty of the black voice and particularly that of the female voice. Her task was to give these characters a means to voice their lives..." (277). Davis then compares the voices of other female protagonists in Hurston's short stories such as "Mules and Men" and "Big Sweet" to the voice of Janie Crawford, demonstrating the growth of the female characters and their ability to become assertive and confident when using their voices. She suggests that the voice of female characters plays a significant role in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because it establishes their persona and femininity.

According to Renee Hausman, author of "Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale Hurston", "The rich dialect of [*Their Eyes Were Watching God*] invites probing into the relation between dialect, thought, and culture. The highly metaphorical style reinforces the characterization of spirited, imaginative people" (157). Hausman suggests that African American dialect helps portray black voice throughout Hurston's novel. She further examines how dialect contributes to the development of voice and

characterization in the novel. Hausman also suggests that Janie Crawford battles with knowing and understanding her own identity because of her lack of voice. She explains how southern dialect and regional speech shows Janie's lack of voice when communicating with male and female characters. In Hausman's view, Hurston's use of language, along with other characters' use of southern black dialect, allows the reader to understand Janie's voice and character in a realistic way (157).

Sally Ann Ferguson, professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, explains the purpose for the feminism and male chauvinism conflict through growth and folkloric tales which are important in the depiction of men's and women's voices in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Ferguson remarks, "In order to reflect fully the powerful influence of patriarchal values in this process, Hurston plots Janie's growth within the context of marriages to three different men. More significantly, Hurston also characterizes each husband in terms of a strikingly familiar well-documented folkloric motif" (187). Ferguson highlights Hurston's male-dominated society arguing that the power of male characters in the novel establishes a patriarchal society and shows how women characters go against the norms of society and use their voices freely. Ferguson believes that because women characters rebel against the norms of society, they display their strength, power, and femininity, and the rebellion partly describes how Hurston depicts the female characters' voices in her novel.

Sally Johnson and Frank Finlay, authors of *Language and Masculinity*, indicate that men and women gossip and often do so more frequently with the same sex due to the exclusion process of the opposite sex. The authors state, "But whereas Jones sees

women's gossip as a result of their exclusion by men from other forms of expression, men's [talk] can be interpreted as an active manifestation of that exclusion process" (137). Both authors suggest that language and gossip can be examined in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through conversation and in terms of inclusion and exclusion between men and women characters. Johnson and Finlay believe that there are similarities that exist between male and female conversations, suggesting that men gossip more frequently than women although it is said to be a woman's natural hobby.

Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue, authors of *Pedagogy: Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture*, attempt to correct a predominantly male-dominated critical perspective with a feminist consciousness. The authors believe that the feminist advancement in literary criticism supports many themes illustrated in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through men's and women's voices. A large number of works are generally told from a male's point of view which does not give readers the opportunity to be open minded to different types of story explications. The authors further suggest that this form of criticism places literature in a social context and employs a broad range of disciplines, such as history, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, to create a perspective that considers feminist issues.

Additionally, both Rizzi and Salvatori believe that feminist theories also attempt to understand representation from a woman's point of view and analyze women's writing strategies in the context of their social conditions. Zora Neale Hurston tells the story of Janie Crawford from a woman's point of view, elaborating in full detail and examples of what Janie experiences in her life as a woman of the rural south. Hurston uses

symbolism, personification, imagery, and paradoxes to emphasize the setting and the moral behind the novel. The feminist approach truly explicates the significance of the female voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Hurston gives courage and character to the female voice in a dynamic way.

Salvatori and Donahue further notes, in *Pedagogy: Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture*, that the concern for moral and intellectual criticism is not only to discover meaning, but also to determine whether works of literature are both credible and significant. The value that is portrayed within the stories is the importance of the Black American culture. The dialect of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* allows the reader to experience the southern culture through Hurston's perspective. Salvatori and Donahue also explain that to study literature from the moral and intellectual perspective is therefore to determine whether a work conveys a lesson or a message, and whether it can help the readers lead better lives and improve their understanding of the world. There are many morals and lessons taught throughout both novels one of which is to keep one's eyes on God. The significance of the experiences that take place in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* allows the reader to witness how each character grows as an individual similar to how Janie grows as a character. The growth of the characters is revealed through their voices. As the characters mature, their voices reveal concerns for a variety of issues: authority, power, fear, submissiveness, status, and hierarchy.

The various critical approaches discussed in this chapter further highlight possible perspectives for interpretation of fictional texts. The perspectives apply to the study of language in Hurston's and Chesnutt's novels, and they allow the reader the opportunity to

analyze the stories in different ways, including focusing on voice characterization and gender differences. The two novels selected for this study, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The House Behind the Cedars*, reveal interesting features about men's and women's voices and their social meaning within the context of both novels.

According to Deborah Clarke, an associate Professor of English and Women's Studies and Director of the American Studies Program at Penn State University, voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* helps to distinguish the identity and the humanity of the characters. Clarke suggests that voice in Hurston's novel gives the character a purpose to withstand sexism between men and women, as well as racism between blacks and whites. She compares Hurston's use of voice to other African American writers' use of voice claiming that "Hurston invokes new avenues into an African American tradition that has privileged voice as its empowering trope. From Phillis Wheatley, to Fredrick Douglass and Charles Chesnutt, voice has prevailed as the primary medium through which African American writers have asserted identity and humanity" (599). Deborah Clarke believes that Hurston's use of voice gives the characters a purpose and a meaning. She suggests that Hurston creatively depicts the characters in the novel to establish their significance as black men and women.

Additionally, voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also helps to celebrate black identity. Clarke observes, "For Hurston, the construction of African American identity requires a voice that can make you see, a voice that celebrates the visible presence of black bodies" (600). In reference to male and female characters in the novel,

Janie uses her voice to establish herself as a woman which is demonstrated through her storytelling.

Jody Starks, on the other hand, uses his voice to establish his power. Deborah Clark posits that voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* contributes to the difference between men and women characters because Hurston uses voice to allow the reader to see the difference in how male and female characters use their voices to display their masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, Clarke notes that Hurston's use of voice in the novel helps understand black life and the black experience depicted in the story. She states that "Hurston opens different ways of conceptualizing the African American experience by offering the possibility of reclaiming the visual as a means of black expression and black power" (607). Clarke believes that Hurston depicts voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to highlight the importance of the black identity of men and women characters and to allow the reader to understand the visual significance of the identity in its entirety.

According to Margaret Toth, voice in Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* relies heavily on the visual linguistic system that focuses on the written, the visual, and the representation of self-image. She argues that "African American novelists creatively integrate these methods of representation in their texts, strategically dismantling racist visual iconography by developing an ocular language that invites consumers of their fiction not just to read their works but also to see the images those words conjured" (69). Toth suggests that language and visual representation are important in understanding Chesnutt's novel when considering the importance of passing

in the characters' lives. She highlights Chesnutt's idea of creating a novel that underlines the turn of the century African American visual discourse to establish the importance behind the passing of his characters. Toth further explains Chesnutt's deployment of voice in *The House Behind the Cedars*, suggesting that the author uses voice to understand the purpose of race in the novel: "For one, Chesnutt's depictions of protagonists John and Rena Walden, African Americans who pass for white, challenge the reliability of the body as evidence of race, for we are reminded at every turn that visual discourse requires us ultimately to move beyond the materiality of the body in our understanding of race" (72). That is, Chesnutt, in his novel, uses the voice of male and female characters racially to identify or mask the characters' races.

Additionally, Toth claims that to understand the voice of male and female characters, it is important for the reader to consider the race science development in the novel. Race science refers to the representation of the physical body to explore issues of race in a text (75). Toth considers how Chesnutt uses language based on the bodies of his characters and their description. She observes that "*The House Behind the Cedars* contains carefully worded descriptions of the passing body, language that stands as an example of early work done to revise racist visual imagery and challenge race science" (75). Toth explains how Chesnutt constructs Rena's and John's appearance based on their skin, hair, and attractiveness. She suggests that the importance of voice in the novel relies heavily on race science and how Chesnutt creatively develops the characters through their physical appearance. The reader must "visualize" the characters' appearance based on Chesnutt's language. Race science helps the reader understand the importance of voice in

the novel because it contributes to the idea of passing depicted in the novel. Toth includes paragraphs from the novel that highlight how Chesnutt uses voices of male and female characters to illustrate how race science works to distinguish characters as black or white; however, because both protagonists are passing, Toth suggests that Chesnutt creates the characters' voices to allow the reader to make their own assumption in determining the race of their characters. Overall, Toth argues that the voice of the male and female characters in *The House Behind the Cedars* is used to represent the importance of passing in the novel.

Gender differences in *The House Behind the Cedars* are evaluated in the different experiences of both protagonists, John and Rena. According to Melissa Ryan, as a white male, John does not experience any difficulties in his passing as a white man: "John experiences no such tragic outcome, and no such responsibility to a people or an identity. He is his own man, the American Adam with the whole world before him" (40). Ryan believes that John's experience in passing for a white man grants him more opportunity and greater success. She notes that Chesnutt uses gender differences to show how the characters, John in this instance, become successful and prevail in the journey to passing as a white man.

Furthermore, Ryan highlights how John demonstrates his success through his occupation and status in the white community, which Ryan suggests is Chesnutt's depiction of gender privilege in the novel. While Rena struggles to identify herself as a white woman, John remains unbothered by any plights as a white man. Ryan notes, "Beneath the surface text of the sentimental novel lies a framing of gender difference that

penetrates more deeply into the problem of race that Chesnutt seeks to interrogate. John and Rena present two ways of thinking about identity and the assertion of whiteness: "Rena is her body, while John is his name" (46). Ryan highlights the fact that gender differences in *The House Behind the Cedars* are demonstrated in how Rena and John identify themselves within the white race. Most importantly, Ryan suggests that gender differences reflect more than how characters identify themselves racially, but also how they make alterations to their appearance (Rena) and how they change their names to make themselves appear more white (John).

Critics have shown thus far that voice in fiction can be an important narrative tool in the way a writer constructs his or her work. Voice can be represented in various ways and for various purposes and functions. Both Chesnutt and Hurston have deliberately constructed the voices of their characters to reflect the relative importance of the Characters' voices in their fictionalized communities. The voices also reflect who they are and what they wish to become.

CHAPTER III

CHESNUTT'S *THE HOUSE BEHIND THE CEDARS*

In Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the author depicts voice through men's and women's occupations, social statuses, and gender identities to reveal the cultural and gender dynamics of 19th century American society. In the novel, many of the male characters have careers as lawyers, judges, and doctors, thus they project power and masculinity. On the other hand, many of the female characters have domestic jobs as housewives or maids, and a few have the interest to simply flaunt their beauty. The depiction of voice in the novel is evaluated through the characters' occupations, through which the author reveals their masculinity or femininity.

Chesnutt uses occupation to depict the power and masculinity of his white and black characters. Although some male characters have jobs as copper workers or messenger boys, their social status is affected by their struggles to maintain their manliness which, often times, affects their voice. In addition, the social status of female characters reflects their race and their voice. Black female characters have to change their speech and dress to heighten their social status among white female characters in order to progress socially or to pass.

Furthermore, Chesnutt's focus on passing as white implicates institutional racism as one limitation that determines the power and the voices of his characters. Initially, as John Warwick struggles to cultivate himself, he abandons elements of his own black

identity to advance his social and economic status in a white society. Upon his arrival to Patesville, South Carolina, John Warwick recognizes his old house behind the cedars which reminds him of the black life he left behind as a child. His memories of the place remain positive, but his desire to acquire status by passing for a white man is greater than any loyalty to his place of origin. In his conversations with his mother, Molly Walden, John's voice sounds middle class, and his mother's voice is similar because it is not dialectal or southern. His mother says, "You've grown so tall, John, and are such a fine gentleman! And you are a gentleman now, John, ain't you—sure enough? Nobody knows the old story?" (11) John replies his mother: "Well, mother, I've taken a man's chance in life, and have tried to make the most of it; and I haven't felt under any obligation to spoil it by raking up old stories that are best forgotten. There are the dear old books: have they been read since I went away?" (11) The mother says only Rena has been reading them but not with the same passion that John had for them. The conversations between mother and son reveal that John's family probably has a decent education and exists on a little higher on the socioeconomic ladder than most of their black neighbors in Patesville. It seems, therefore, that John's relatively less indigent background and his white color have allowed him to successfully pass for a white man.

Unlike John, however, many other black characters are not able to pass for white easily because of their voices and appearance, which are markedly dialectal and ethnic. When Rena was getting ready to leave Patesville and accompany his brother to Clarence, Frank, a friend of the family who runs errands for their mother, visits to express his disappointment that Rena will be leaving their neighborhood. Frank asks Rena for how

long she will be away: ““you ain’t gwine ter be gone long, is you, Miss Rena?”” (19) Rena replies: ““Oh, no, Frank, I reckon not. I’m supposed to be just going on a short visit. My brother has lost his wife, and wishes me to come and stay with him awhile, and look after his little boy.”” (19) Frank’s and Rena’s conversation further reveals differences in their educational background:

‘You would n’ never hafter do dat, Miss Rena,’ returned Frank, with a disconsolate smile. ‘Ef you ever wanter come home, an’ can’t git back no other way, js’ let ME know, an’ I’ll take my mule an’ my kyart an’ fetch you back, ef it’s from de een’ er de worl’.

‘Thank you, Frank, I believe you would,’ said the girl kindly. ‘You’re a true friend, Frank, and I’ll not forget you while I’m gone.’

The idea of her beautiful daughter riding home from the end of the world with Frank, in a cart, behind a one-eyed mule, struck Mis’ Molly as the height of the ridiculous. . . (19)

Frank’s voice is markedly different from Rena’s and reflects a disadvantaged background in terms of education and social status. Frank’s dialectal voice can be found also in the conversations of uneducated white men and women; however, the latter have the advantage of having a white skin so they have no need to pass for white. However, Rena’s voice and her white skin, just like her brother’s, guarantee that she can pass for a white woman as well. It is not a surprise then when John, in their mother’s presence, convinces Rena to leave behind her black identity and come with him to Clarence, South Caroline, to pass for white. In the portrayal of men’s voices in *The House Behind the*

Cedars, John's voice and self-confidence illustrate the pleasure he discovers in his white identity, albeit immorally constructed, compared to the indifference he frequently shows towards his native black identity.

Gender identity is also used in the novel to show how men's and women's voices are reflected in different ways. Men's voices in *The House Behind the Cedars* often reflect a stereotypical thinking about gender roles and responsibilities. Men are more concerned about social status, careers and success in established professions. On the other hand, they believe that women should concern themselves more with the ambition of becoming a lady and showing off their beauty. John Warwick exemplifies this thinking in his conversation with his mother, and his sister Rena. During his visit back home in Patesville, South Carolina, after a long sojourn away from home passing as a white man in Clarence, South Carolina, John explains his success and good fortune to his mother as he reflects on his occupation and the new success of his life as a white lawyer:

I suppose that I have got along at the bar, as elsewhere, owing to the lack of better men. Many of the good lawyers were killed in the war, and most of the remainder were disqualified; while I had the advantage of being alive, and of never having been in arms against the government. People had to have lawyers, and they gave me their business in preference to the carpet-baggers. Fortune, you know, favors the available man. (13)

After ten years of passing for white, John feels lucky to live his life as a white man and a lawyer. He states, "I have had my chance and haven't thrown it away" (13). Although John acknowledges the source of his good fortune as the result of providence, he does not

expect the same for his sister. He does not think his sister should pursue a profession and hope for the hand of providence to push her along as it has done for him. Instead, he thinks his sister should use her beauty to get a man who will provide for her. At a race event that Clarence Social Club organized, Rena, John's sister, meets one of John's white friends and clients, George Tryon, who happens to like her. Upon Rena's first encounter with George Tryon, she becomes attracted to the noble knight: "Rena's eyes were fastened on her knight so that she might lose no single one of his movements. He was a tall, fair young man, with grey eyes, and a frank, open face. He wore a slight mustache, and when he smiled, showed a set of white and even teeth. He displayed a marked skill in horsemanship" (24). In the depiction of men's voices in *The House Behind the Cedars*, Chesnutt portrays George Tryon's strength through his occupation and his attractiveness. After he wins the race tournament, George crowns Rena Walden as the Queen of Love and Beauty which establishes the beginning of their relationship.

Immediately, John advises his sister to count herself lucky because George, one of the most eligible well-to-do bachelors in town, likes her and has chosen her as his Queen of Love and Beauty and will celebrate with her at the evening ball. John tells Rena:

'Well, Rena, you have arrived. Your debut into society is a little more spectacular than I should have wished, but we must rise to the occasion and make the most of it. You are winning the first fruits of your opportunity. You are the most envied woman in Clarence at this particular moment, and unless I am mistaken, will be the most admired at the ball to-night.' (26)

According to John, Rena has unmistakably succeeded in becoming a part of the high society in South Carolina. In his opinion, opportunity for Rena is not about being chosen for an award or recognition because of her abilities or intelligence; it is about being at the center of a man's affections. Therefore, Rena should rise to the occasion and make George Tryon fall in love with her completely. To make George love her, she must strive to meet men's expectations of gentleness and femininity for an attractive and elegant woman. This is the job John imagines for his sister.

To his advantage, John Warwick, a black man passing for white, is able to use his masculine voice to convince his mother that his sister Rena will become more successful if she passes for white. To his mother, John states, "Of course [Rena] will have no chance here, where our story is known...Here she must forever be --nobody! With me she might have got out into the world; with her beauty she might have made a good marriage...she has sense as well as beauty" (14). John Warwick sees his success in passing as a white man as an opportunity for Rena to also live a better life if she passes as a white woman. He condemns Rena's domestic life and describes the life she can have if she were to follow to him to Clarence, South Carolina. John Warwick's new voice is displayed through his excitement and his happiness because of his new life as a white man. John believes that living as a white man offers him the greatest opportunity for success and can do the same for Rena.

Through passing as a white man, John Warwick illustrates the strength and the advantage that a white voice has given him in the novel. John Warwick's choice to mask his black identity allows him to have his dream job as a lawyer and improves his social

status among white Americans. John Warwick makes the choice as a young man to live through his white identity and his actions as an adult demonstrate his strength and determination. Although he completely neglects his black identity by keeping it a secret for over ten years and changes his name from John Walden to John Warwick, the lawyer takes a chance to live his life through a white identity. He sacrifices himself and his family to the white-male dominated society because he believes that passing for white grants him more advantages and opportunities than living through his black identity, which demonstrates how he uses his voice in the novel.

Further in the novel, Chesnutt's depiction of men's voices helps to portray their personalities and characteristics. After winning the race tournament, George Tryon, John Warwick's white friend, becomes well respected in Clarence, South Carolina for his notability and his attractiveness. George Tryon's handsomeness and his skills as a knight are admired by many characters including John Warwick, for he believes that George Tryon will make a wonderful knight and husband for his sister, Rena Walden. To Rena, now referred to publicly by John as Rowena to elevate her status to his friends, John points out, "That, my dear Rowena, is my dear friend and client, George Tryon of North Carolina...If George were but masked and you were veiled, we should have a romantic situation—you the damsel in distress, he the unknown champion" (26). John believes that George Tryon's status and respect will offer Rena the same happiness, success, and opportunity his wife granted him through his own transition to the white society.

In chapter three titled "Old Judge Straight," Chesnutt introduces Judge Straight, who plays a significant role as a voice of wisdom in the novel, for he foreshadows the

future problems of John and his sister concerning their passing. Reflecting on John Warwick's life, Judge Straight thinks his former office boy should have gone farther north to pass as a white man. Judge Straight thinks South Carolina is too close to home for John to pass. He states, "By one standard my old office boy should never have been born. Yet he is a son of Adam, and in equity he would seem to be entitled to his chance in life; it might have been wiser, though for him to seek it farther than South Carolina. It was too near home even though the laws were with him" (18). Initially, Judge Straight accepts John Warwick even though he knows that John is a mulatto; however, after learning that Rena Walden now passes for white, Judge Straight fears that their secret may become discovered.

Judge Straight, in chapter 13, hints again about John's and Rena's secret after he discovers a letter addressed to George Tryon from Rena where he learns that the two are lovers. He thinks Rena is pressing her luck too far by falling in love with a white man in the same state where she was born. He fears for Rena that "If he made the discovery here, the facts would probably leak out in the town. It is something that a man might do in secret, but only a hero or a fool would do openly" (49). Throughout the novel, Judge Straight uses his voice through asides to inform the reader of the dramatic irony that will expose John's and Rena's real identity, which is important in Chesnut's portrayal of men's voices to show that voices can actually be constructed and used for artificial or dishonest purposes.

Furthermore, Judge Straight's occupation justifies Chesnut's idea of establishing a fictionalized patriarchal society that allows the reader to see how the story is dominated by white males. According to David Graddol and Joan Swann,

Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought, and reality. Historically, it has been the structures, the categories, and the meanings which have then been invented by males—though not of course by all males—and they have been validated by reference to other males. Language, in various ways, reflects the interests of more powerful social groups, and men can be seen to have power relative to women in our society. (132)

In Chesnut's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the male characters constitute the dominant group that Graddol and Swann talk about, and they create the language, thought and reality of their community. They help the reader understand the significance of their voices through their status and occupations. John Warwick, the lawyer, George Tryon, the knight, and Judge Straight, the judge, all contribute to the depiction of the patriarchal society in the novel. They project the interest of their group. Chesnut implies each character's profession as an establishment of their masculinity. He establishes a society dominated by white men and white privilege.

Even among male characters in general, white men dominate the conversations; this is demonstrated in the relationship between Dr. Green and Dave. In chapter seven the reader meets Dr. Green, the white doctor of Patesville, and Dave, the doctor's office assistant. In his remark on Dave's tardiness in delivering a message, Dr. Green complains about Dave and blames the society for making the tardiness possible since the less

privileged members of society have gotten more freedom. Dr. Green says: “The niggers are getting trifling since they’ve been freed. Before the war, [Dave] would have been around there and back before you could say Jack Robinson; now, the lazy rascal takes his time just like a white man” (45). It is obvious that Dr. Green holds more power in his relationship with Dave. Furthermore, the doctor’s feelings towards the blacks are obvious enough. Through the relationship between Dr. Green and Dave, Chesnutt suggests that white male characters indeed hold more power in the society depicted in the novel. He portrays Dr. Green as judgmental and prejudiced towards indigent members of society.

Additionally, the relationship between Peter and his son Frank, workers of the copper shop and family friends of Rena and her mother, also shows how men’s voices are portrayed. In chapter four, the audience learns about Peter’s frustration with Frank’s services to Rena and her mother. The reader also discovers Frank’s deeply rooted admiration for Rena. Peter refers to Frank’s kind gestures as a dog eating a bone out of Rena’s hand. Peter encourages Frank to believe that he will never have a chance with a young woman like Rena because of her superior social status which is further developed in chapter 15. Peter notes, “Now’s de time, boy, fer you ter be lookin’ roun’ fer some nice gal er yo’ own color, w’at’ll ‘preciate you, an won’t be ‘shamed er you. You wastin’ time boy, wastin’ time, shootin’ at a mark outer yo’ range” (51). Peter’s voice identifies him as a working class black character. Similar to Dr. Green’s bigotry towards black characters, Peter reflects the same prejudice towards whites, even though Rena is biracial. Rather than a father-son relationship between Peter and Frank, the author portrays a master-slave relationship between the two which also resembles the relationship

previously examined between Dave and Dr. Green. Chesnutt depicts the relationship between Peter and Frank to illustrate how black males use their socially insignificant voices against each other in the context of a white-male dominated society.

The social significance of women's voices in *The House Behind the Cedars* comes across through the submissiveness of the women characters. When John Warwick returns home in his new identity as a white man, he tells Rena and his mother wonderful stories about his life as a white man. Molly is not happy with the idea of losing both of her children to the white society, but her female voice is not strong enough to force Rena to stay at home. Molly pleads, "Oh John, don't take her away from me! Don't take her John, darlin' for it'd break my heart to lose her! They're all I've got and cos' me all I've had. When the last one's gone, I'll want to go too, for I'll be all alone in the world. How would you like to lose yo'r one child?" (14). Molly begs John not to take her daughter away from her, but her failure illustrates her lack of a strong voice in the novel. Her voice is not strong enough to stop Rena from leaving because she is a woman. This is part of Chesnutt's message: the idea that women, regardless of their status, have less privileged voices compared to men in early 20th century American life.

Molly understands that Rena's future may be better by passing for a white woman, so she does not prevent Rena from leaving Patesville. Her easy acquiescence to John's request to take Rena away can also suggest that she does not put enough strength in her voice to insist on what she wants. Molly's voice and character is examined in her plea to John and Rena. In the novel, Chesnutt establishes Molly's faint voice and character through her question to John: "How would you like to lose your one child?"

Molly's speech suggests a level of consideration that occurs more frequently in women's speech than men's speech. Molly's voice suggests that she lacks authority in her dealings with her children. Instead of giving her children her opinion or instructions to express her preference, she asks them questions. Chesnut's depiction of Molly's voice and character illustrates her submissiveness and her weakness both as a female character and a mother.

Chesnut further captures the voice of female characters through their choice of occupations. Upon Rena's arrival in Clarence, South Carolina, she presents herself as a white woman and is crowned The Queen of Love and Beauty by George Tryon, her white lover. Rena's occupation becomes the Queen of Love and Beauty which trivializes her worth but expresses her femininity. Upon her crowning, as a beauty queen, Rena is introduced to Mrs. Newberry who assists and encourages her in her new position as Queen of Love and Beauty. Mrs. Newberry offers this advice, "Now my dear, the first thing to do is to get your robe ready. It simply means a gown with a long train. You have a lovely white waist. Get right into my buggy, and we'll go down town to [prepare you for Tryon's arrival]" (26). Mrs. Newberry becomes Rena's first white friend to teach her how to not only be a queen but also how to be a white woman. Rena's voice does not change drastically because she already speaks a middle class dialect. She only becomes more feminine and behaves more like a white woman in her new position as the Queen of Love and Beauty. During the celebration of her queenship, Rena wears elegant garments that heighten her appearance and her new social status. However, her voice is limited; she acts the part of a queen and speaks less:

‘You’re doing splendidly, my dear,’ said Mrs. Newberry, who had constituted herself Rena’s chaperone.

‘I trust your Gracious Majesty is pleased with the homage of your devoted subjects,’ said Tryon, who spent much of his time by her side and kept up the Character of knight in his speech and manner.

‘Very much,’ replied the Queen of Love and Beauty, with a somewhat tired smile. It was pleasant, but she would be glad, she thought, when it was all over.

‘Keep up your courage,’ whispered her brother, ‘You are not only queen, but the belle of the ball. I am proud of you. A dozen women here would give a year off the latter end of life to be in your shoes to-night.’ (27)

From the entire conversation above, one finds that three people (Mrs. Newberry, George Tryon, and Rena’s brother, John) actually speak to Rena, as they commend her for playing the part of a queen well and encourage her to endure the stress. Rena herself manages to speak only two words during the entire conversation, “Very much,” which suggests that even as a queen she must speak less. In the portrayal of women’s voices, Chesnutt creates female characters whose beauty and femininity do not necessarily expand their voice.

Gender identity also magnifies the differences in men’s and women’s voices in *The House Behind the Cedars*. Gender difference is central not only to the plot but also to the larger question of identity that Chesnutt explores in the novel. Initially, Rena passes for white and becomes successful in her queenship and her relationship with George Tryon. However, in chapter eight, Rena begins to have second thoughts about her choice to pass

for white after George Tryon asks for her hand in marriage. Rena thinks aloud: “I think a man might love me for myself and if he loved me truly, that he would marry me. If he would not marry me, then it would be because he didn’t love me. I’ll tell George my secret. If he leaves me, then he does not love me” (33). Rena goes back and forth with herself on whether or not she will tell her lover of her blackness. She begins to realize that keeping her identity a secret from George Tryon is not something that she wants to continue indefinitely.

John Warwick seeks his own happiness in keeping his identity a secret, but Rena finds no sacrifice too great for the sake of her brother John Warwick and her lover George Tryon. Therefore, Rena is willing to pass as a white woman at the expense of her own internal happiness and for her relationship with George Tryon. However, Rena is still unsure about keeping her black identity a secret from George Tryon. The doubt that Rena exudes suggests that she has the strength to remain true to her identity as much as she is passing for white. Her desire to display her femininity highlights the relationship between voice and gender in Chesnut’s novel. For women, voice reflects a socially perceived weaker sex even though they have the internal strength to survive their oppression.

As Chesnut’s story unfolds, Rena struggles to maintain her social status as a white woman which causes her to experience an imbalanced psychological state of mind that ruins her life. Rena’s success in her initial decision to move with John Warwick and pass for white brings her good fortune and great opportunity. She decides to go to school and become better with reading and writing and also falls in love with George Tryon after

becoming the Queen of Love and Beauty. As a white woman, Rena obtains access to education, money, and love which appears to reflect the opportunities that John Warwick assures her in their early conversation, although he was more concerned with Rena using her beauty and femininity to succeed. However, Rena begins to realize that living as a white woman is not acceptable for herself as a black woman.

Rena, in chapter 10, begins to have dreams of her mother's illness and becomes remorseful for rejecting her black identity:

For a few months after leaving Patesville with her brother, Rena had suffered tortures of homesickness. The severance of old ties had been abrupt and complete. At the school where her brother had taken her, there had been nothing to relieve the strangeness of her surroundings—no schoolmate from her own town, no relative or family friend nearby. (38)

Rena suffers alone as a result of the inner turmoil she has endured and the lie she propagated. The unfamiliarity she experiences as a white woman does not compare to the security she feels as a black woman when she is at home with family and friends in Patesville. Rena's battle with identity illustrates her maturation and her ability to redefine herself as a black woman and return to Patesville.

Returning to Patesville places Rena on a lower socio-economic status, for she is no longer a privileged white woman. In contrast to Rena's decline in status, however, upon the discovery of John Warwick's passing, John's life remains relatively unaffected. The family bond is severed only because John will not compromise his deception of passing for the possibility of losing his place in society. Rena's ability to revert back to

her black identity illustrates the social significance of her voice and strength, even more so than being a white Queen of Love and Beauty. At Patesville, Rena becomes an elementary school teacher, and on one particular day a middle-aged white woman visits the school. Curious about Rena's background, the woman asks her about her race:

‘Are you really colored?’ asked the lady, when the children had withdrawn. A year and a half earlier, Rena would have met the question by some display of self-consciousness. Now, she replied simply and directly.

‘Yes, ma’am, I am colored.’

‘Well, it’s a shame. No one would ever think it. If you chose to conceal it, no one would ever be wiser. What is your name, child, and where were you brought up? You must have a romantic history.’ (92)

Chesnutt explains that Rena, speaking with confidence, provides her name and tells the white woman where she grew up. Although Rena initially follows John Warwick's suggestion and passes as a white woman, her conscious decision to return home displays the ultimate strength of her voice and the development of her character. At the end of the novel, Rena suffers a delirium when Tryon comes back to Patesville looking for her. She runs away from Tryon and dies after collapsing from her delirium; however, she dies with a sense of identity and a voice that Chesnutt finally elevates through the strength and sacrifice of her character.

The sociobiological importance of men's and women's voices at the time Chesnutt was writing his story suggests that men are expected to be stronger in voice and stature while women are expected to be smaller in voice and appearance. Through

speech, gender voices establish the differences that exist between men and women. Further, men's voices have a different and more powerful tone to project male dominance hierarchy (Graddol and Swann 28). In other words, male authority and dominance establish the social significance of everyone's status and voices. In *The House Behind the Cedars*, the reader realizes Dr. Green's authority and power when he addresses Dave's tardiness and also when he talks about his feelings towards blacks. Additionally, in his depiction of the male-dominated society, Chesnutt establishes John Warwick in a powerful occupation as a lawyer through which John displays his eagerness and happiness as a white man, including the power he gained in his upgraded life as a white man. Conversely, one sees Rena as being always unsure, tentative, and ambivalent, which is supposed to be the typical role of a woman, albeit a very stereotypical one, and her identity.

A psychological explanation of men's and women's voices might suggest that masculinity and femininity can be also revealed through speech and the topics of conversation. In Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the topics of conversation between male and female characters reveal their masculinity and femininity. John Warwick, for example, likes to show off his intelligence. When Mrs. Newberry, a white lady attending the race event in Clarendon, South Carolina, initiates a conversation with John to introduce herself to him, John turns the conversation into an academic treatise in which he lectures the Mrs. Newberry:

‘It is my first tournament,’ observed a lady near the front of the grand stand, leaning over and addressing John Warwick, who was seated in the second row, in

company with a very handsome girl. 'It is somewhat different from Ashby-de-la-Zouch.'

'It is the renaissance of chivalry, Mrs. Newberry,' replied the young lawyer, 'and like any other renaissance, it must adapt itself to new times and circumstances. For instance, when we build a Greek portico, having no Pentelic marble near at hand, we use a pine-tree, one of nature's columns, which Grecian art at its best could only copy and idealize. . . It is a South Carolina renaissance which has points of advantage over the tournaments of the older time.'

'I'm afraid, Mr. Warwick,' said the lady, 'that you're the least bit heretical about our chivalry—or else you're a little too deep for me.' (22)

John Warwick seems callous to advertise his masculinity publicly to a lady through a public exhibition of his intelligence, which he probably assumes to be a byproduct of his white identity. According to Bettina Carbonell:

John's youthful optimism regarding his choice of race and therefore his choice of life is challenged, however, by acts of discernment on the parts of other characters. These actions imitate the wider world of late nineteenth-century and anticipated twentieth-century race-relations involving stereotypes, category mistakes, and misperceptions of human worth. (549).

On the other hand, Mrs. Newberry reveals her femininity through her assistance in helping Rena become a successful queen and a beautiful white woman, not through a public competition for intelligence with John Warwick. Both Rena and Mrs. Newberry display submissiveness and sexuality which reflect their social statuses as white women.

Further in the story, Rena begins to express her desire to return home to her black heritage: “I must return home to my mother at once” (38). She leaves John Warwick and George Tryon behind in Clarence, South Carolina and returns home to provide care to her sickly mother. Through Rena’s decision to reject a life of privilege and return home, Chesnutt suggests that she possesses honor and virtue and that she uses her womanly voice to establish her strength and freedom. Unlike her mother Molly Walden, Rena uses her voice to make decisions and stake a claim for autonomy and personal preferences. She uses her voice to speak herself into a new existence: returning home and taking care of her mother.

The beauty of Chesnutt’s aesthetics in *The House Behind the Cedars* rests in part on his careful depiction of gender differences through the voices of his characters. Male characters show their masculinity through their strong voices, their topics of conversation, and a dose of confidence. Both John Warwick and George Tryon exemplify the male persona that Chesnutt presents as examples of masculinity. Chesnutt’s female characters, on the other hand, are known for their tentativeness and ambivalence. Their voices reveal their socially-constrained personalities. Rena Walden and Mrs. Newsberry are prototypical examples of southern white women who are hesitant and demure; however, Rena’s return to her native identity does present a complication that disrupts the reader’s expectations. The reader can no longer see Rena as a white woman, for Chesnutt returns her to her black identity with a confident black female voice. Rena demonstrates this confidence in her final acceptance of her black heritage when, towards the end of the novel, a white lady enquires about her race; Rena answers unequivocally: “Yes, ma’am, I

am colored” (92). Her acceptance of her black heritage is the final and unequivocal expression of her identity.

CHAPTER IV

HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

One of the narrative strategies in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that is important to character and plot development involves men's and women's voices. The portrayal of men's voices is shown through their masculinity, social status, and power. On the other hand, female characters portray their voices through their submissiveness, growth, and womanliness. Women's voices in the novel are more than just speech and tone; they also establish strength and reflect the courage and bravery of women as they withstand abuse and pain. Women characters have friendships with other men outside of their spouses and have jobs outside of catering to their families. Female characters use their voices in rebellious ways to establish their individuality in a patriarchal society, whereas men's voices in Hurston's novel reflect dominance and power although the only power they have is within their black community.

The voices of men characters are portrayed through their expectations and the advantages they hope to gain from other characters in the novel. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is set in a community where all of the characters are black. Both men and women characters are free to use their voices in an environment that allows them to feel comfortable enough to be themselves. Often times, male and female characters use their voice in a variety of ways that show that their voices are dynamic in the novel.

In Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, women characters display submissiveness through repressed voices. In chapter two, Janie's meekness is demonstrated through her relationship with her nanny. After witnessing Janie kiss a boy underneath a pear tree, Janie's nanny says, "Janie, youse uh 'oman now. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see yuh married right away" (12). Janie attempts to use her voice to rebel against her grandmother by saying, "Naw, Nanny, no ma'am! Is dat whut [Logan] been hangin round her for? He look like some old skullhead in de grave yard" (13); however, her inability to tell Nanny of her fears of marrying Logan Killicks leaves her "hunched" and almost voiceless. Janie's grandmother ignores her plea, claiming, "Ah'm ole now. Ah can't always be guidin yo feet from harm and danger. Ah wants to see you married right away" (13). It is obvious that Janie's nanny is in complete control of Janie's life. She takes care of Janie after her mother dies, and she even forces Janie to marry a man twice her age. Janie's almost lack of voice in her relationship with her grandmother portrays her repressed state and her powerlessness.

Janie's voice in her relationship with Nanny continues to show some weakness because Nanny 'silences' Janie's voice through her sermons. Nanny takes Janie's voice away from her by forcing her to agree to marry Logan Killicks. As Janie's grandmother, Nanny's voice is much stronger, and she enhances the strength of her voice with some measure of violence intended to force Janie to conform: "She slapped the girl's face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle. With her hand uplifted for the second blow she saw the huge tear that welled up from Janie's hearty and

stood in each eye” (14). As soon as Nanny sees the sadness in Janie’s eyes after her violence toward Janie, Nanny calls Janie to comfort her: “Come to yo’ Grandma, honey. Set in her lap lak yo’ use tuh. Yo’ Nanny wouldn’t harm a hair uh yo’ head....De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fuh as Ah can see. Ah been prayin’ fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!” (14). Nanny uses her voice to nurture Janie, and to socialize her into becoming a strong black woman. As Nanny reflects on her life as a young woman working for Mr. and Mrs. Washburn, Nanny explains, “Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah’d take a broom and a cook pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her” (16). Nanny only wants the best for Janie because she knows she is getting old, and Janie is not strong enough to take care of herself. Therefore, Nanny forces Janie to marry a man who can take care of her. Nanny says, “You ain’t got no papa, you might jus as well say no mamma, for de good she do yuh. You ain’t got nobdy but me. Neither can you stand alone by yo’self” (18).

Janie, in her relationship with her first husband, Logan Killicks, displays some immaturity. Because she is forced into this marriage with Logan, Janie is trying to figure out how to be a woman and who she is as a person. In chapter three, Janie’s unhappiness controls her voice in her relationship: “It was a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been. [Their] house was absent of flavor too” (24). Initially, Janie believes her relationship with Logan Killicks will be filled with love and glamour; however, once she moves in with him, Janie realizes there is no love shared between her and her husband.

Killicks begins to make Janie do labor work inside and outside of the house. Janie does not know how to go against anything her husband commands which illustrates her feebleness and lack of strength as a female character. Janie explains her reason for serving her husband as follows, “Ah don’t mean to chop de first chip but Ah’ll cut de’m fuh yuh” (27). Janie struggles to cultivate herself in her marriage with Logan Killicks, but the relationship reflects the feebleness and submissiveness of her voice. Logan Killicks, on the other hand, displays his masculinity through his voice by controlling Janie. He commands Janie to do all of the chores around the house. He also makes an effort to ensure that Janie does everything he tells her to do as if Janie has no opinion or place in their marriage: “You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick” (31). Logan Killicks belittles Janie and makes her believe she is nothing without him. He yells at her arguing that he is too much and too good of a man for Janie. Men’s voices in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are portrayed through the power and control they exercise over the female characters. Rather than treating Janie like his wife, Logan Killicks dictates Janie’s every move.

Women characters in the novel display their tentativeness and their willingness to cooperate with male characters. Janie complies with every request Logan makes, even when he wants her to plant potatoes. Eventually, after getting tired of all the command and control, Janie threatens to leave him: “Janie had put words in his held-in fears. The thought had put a terrible ache in Logan’s body, but he thought it best to put on scorn” (Hurston 30). Janie challenges Logan, but he still manages to control Janie and rob her of

her voice. The chapter ends with Janie leaving her marriage with Logan Killicks still voiceless and powerless.

In the beginning of her marriage with Jody Starks, Janie appears to become more aware of her femininity. Janie realizes that she is beautiful and worth something more than working in the fields for a man. Upon marrying Jody, she laughs and flirts with him, which generates a feeling she has never experienced with Logan Killicks: “Every day they managed to meet in the scrub oaks across the road and talk about when he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits” (29). Janie’s initial conversations with Jody Starks illustrate her transition into womanhood. She begins to trust Jody Starks and revels in his status and masculinity: “Janie took a lot of looks at him and she was proud of what she saw” (34). In her marriage with Jody Starks, Janie becomes more mature and more aware of the woman she is becoming. Because Jody makes her feel important by telling her of her beauty and keeping her in the house rather than in the fields, Janie’s confidence begins to increase and she becomes happier within herself; however, once Jody Starks begins to demonstrate controlling behavior similar to Logan Killicks, their relationship changes for the worse.

The change in the relationship further illustrates that male characters in the novel use their voices to establish their authority, which leaves Janie still without a voice. In her marriage with Jody Starks, Jody becomes the voice for his wife, himself, and the people of Eatonville. Upon their arrival to Greencove Springs, Jody Starks covertly makes himself the mayor of the town and begins to make changes around the city. He expresses his mission in the following words: “Ah’m buyin’ here, and buyin’ big. Soon’s we find

some place to sleep tonight us mensfolks got to call people together and form a committee. Then we can get things movin' round here” (35). After Jody Starks becomes the mayor, the community begins to feel underappreciated because of Jody’s selfish acquisition of power. Similarly, Janie begins to feel Jody’s control of her voice and freedom; she feels unappreciated and remains voiceless.

Jody further displays his controlling behavior by speaking for Janie. On one occasion when a stranger compliments Janie for making a good speech on an important issue, Jody rejects the compliments and does not allow his wife to speak for herself: “Thank yuh fuh yo compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothing bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothing lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home” (43). Janie is not happy with the fact that Jody speaks for her. She attempts to tell Jody how she feels, saying, “You’s always off talkin and fixin things, and Ah feels lak Ah’m jus markin time. Hope it soon gits over” (46). Jody ignores Janie’s personal concerns and continues to speak for her. He orders her to work in their store, and he makes her wear overalls and a hair scarf to hide her beauty. Jody demonstrates his overbearing presence in his position as a town mayor and in his relationship with Janie.

Despite Jody’s lack of consideration for Janie’s ability to think for herself and speak intelligently, Janie supports her husband in every way possible. She assists in the shop that Jody runs as a business owner and a mayor. One of Jody’s customers, Steve Mixon, comes to the store one day to buy some chewing tobacco. Janie attends to him and cuts him some tobacco. When Jody sees the cut tobacco, he flares up in anger and condemns Janie for cutting the tobacco wrongly. He takes it back from Mixon, cuts it

again, and admonishes Janie for not learning on the job fast enough. Mixon even tries to minimize the gravity of Janie's error and raises the tobacco up to make a joke about it:

‘Look heah, Brother Mayor, whut yo’ wife done took and done.’ It was cut comical, so everybody laughed at it. ‘Uh woman and uh knife—no kind uh knife, don’t b’long tuhgether.’

There was some more good-natured laughter at the expense of women.

Jody didn’t laugh. He hurried across from the post office side and took the plug of tobacco away from Mixon and cut it again. Cut it exactly on the mark and glared at Janie.

‘I god amighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can’t cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don’t stand dere rollin’ yo’ pop eyes at me wid yo’ rump hangin’ nearly to yo’ knees!’ (78)

In addition to Jody’s disrespectful criticism of his wife in front of everyone, Janie had to suffer public humiliation also from everyone present in the store since they were all laughing at her for her mistake. Nobody, not even her husband, gave her the opportunity to explain her side of the story. They all see her as an object of ridicule. This is one more example of how Janie suffers abuse from Jody, Mixon, and all other men present in the store, while her voice is ignored and suppressed. The abuse that Janie suffers from Jody and his male friends also illustrate a phenomenon that Johnson and Finlay refer to in their book, *Language and Masculinity*, as the exclusion process, through which men use their voice or speech to exclude women from participation as equal partners. (137)

However, Hurston shows a response from Janie to indicate that she is getting tired of Jody's control through his voice and his behavior in the presence of his friends. Janie's response highlights the beginning of the end for Janie's voiceless state or condition in her marriage with Jody Starks. The response also marks the beginning of Janie's emancipation and freedom from a restrictive relationship, and the freeing of her voice. Janie fires back at Jody: "Stop mixin' up mah doings wid mah looks, Jody. When you git through tellin' me how tuh cu uh plug uh tobacco, then you kin tell me whether mah behind is on straight or not" (78). Surprised at Janie's boldness in talking back at him, Jody also fired back: "Wha—whut's dat you say, Janie? You must be out yo' head" (79). Janie refuses to back down from her challenge of Jody's authority, and she ignores her husband's attempt to intimidate her. Janie disagrees with Jody's characterization of her mental state and expresses the disagreement more forcefully: "Naw, Ah ain't out amah head neither. You must be. Talkin' any such language as dat. You de one started talkin' under people's clothes. Not me" (79). Unable to match Janie's strong voice with his own, Jody begins to engage in personal, referring to Janie's age and how he expects more from a woman as old as Janie is and also disappointed in Janie for caring about anyone insulting her looks. The next dialogue reflects Janie's increased confidence and brings out the vigor in her voice:

'Whut's de matter wid you, nohow? You ain't no young girl to be getting' all insulted 'bout yo' looks. You ain't no young courtin' gal. You'se uh ole woman, nearly forty.'

‘Naw Ah aint no young gal no mo but den Ah aint no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah’m uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat’s uh whole lot more’n you kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out of brag, but ‘tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voive. Humph! Talkin bout meold! When you pull yo’ britches down you look lak de change uh life.’ (79)

After being controlled for so long by Jody Starks, Janie uses her voice to stand up for herself: “Janie went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place” (87). Janie becomes completely aware that she has a voice and begins to speak for herself which displays her womanliness and maturation as a character.

Many characters also refer to Jody as “Big Voice” in the novel because of how much he talks over and for people, including Janie. Through this naming strategy of calling Jody “Big Voice,” Hurston shows the importance of voice in her novel. Men have the big voices, while women have little or no voices. This strategy reveals Hurston as a brilliant storyteller. She cleverly portrays men’s authority and masculinity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through their voice while depicting women’s voicelessness to evidence their timidity and lack of authority. The novel brilliantly displays the gender dynamics of the nineteenth century American South.

Janie’s newfound voice illustrates how Janie finally becomes a woman unafraid to speak and express herself, which reveals the new confidence to her new relationship with Tea Cake. In her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie exhibits poise, power, and independence. She shares porch talk with other men in Eatonville, and she laughs more

and has more fun than what she ever has in her previous relationships with Logan Killicks and Jody Starks. Consequently, Janie loves Tea Cake: “Janie awoke the next morning by feeling Tea Cake almost kissing her breath away. Holding her and caressing her as if he feared she might escape his grasp and fly away. Tea Cake was a glance from God” (Hurston 107). Janie’s voice in her relationship with Tea Cake demonstrates her ability to share love and romance with someone. Although Tea Cake makes Janie feel safe enough to display her femininity, he too abuses Janie through his masculinity and his desire for control.

Unlike the control that Logan Killicks and Jody Starks display in their character and their relationships with Janie, Tea Cake shows much more love toward Janie than the other husbands. Believing in Janie’s voice and intelligence, Tea Cake teaches her to play checkers. He enjoys listening to her tell stories. Although not all men in the novel show the desire to have control, Janie’s husbands have the desire. Even the more considerate Tea Cake sometimes lies and steals from Janie. The masculinity within Tea Cake makes him go astray occasionally to reassure himself he was still the man: “Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (147). When Tea Cake talks with his friends about women, he even brags about having control over Janie, saying, “Janie is where eva Ah wants ha tuh beh” (148). With Tea cake, his need to show his masculinity is the result of his fear of losing control. The three men in

Janie's life show how male characters use their voice differently in the novel. Men's voices are displayed through the power they have or their fear of losing it.

Hurston also depicts Janie's voyage to self-discovery and womanhood through her relationships. Hurston emphasizes the controlling behavior of male characters in the novel to show how they use their voices. According to David Graddol and Joan Swann, "Women are often stereotyped as the 'overtalkative' sex. In contrast to the stereotype, many studies have now been carried out in Britain and the USA which show that, in a variety of contexts, it is men who talk more" (70). In Janie's courtship with Jody Starks, the reader is able to identify Jody's masculinity through his comments when Janie chooses to sit on the porch and socialize with the people of the community. Jody does not expect Janie to participate in men's conversations. Only he should have a big voice in the family and in the community. Jody's "big voice" underlines Hurston's depiction of masculinity in male characters. Although Jody Starks belittles Janie, she responds with a quick remark that leaves Jody feeling shocked by her courage. Janie's remark validates the discovery of her voice; it also embodies her ability to reject the embarrassment Jody Starks attempts to impose upon her.

Hurston's most prevailing illustration of Janie's strength is portrayed through her final marriage with Tea Cake. Her relationship shows how Janie uses her voice to illustrate her strength. Hurston also uses Tea Cake and Janie's courtship to illustrate how Janie evolves as a character by using her voice and displaying her dominant abilities. Tracy L. Bealer argues that "The story arc of Janie and Tea Cake's courtship and marriage suggests that Tea Cake is both Janie's 'great and selfless love'" (315). Although

Janie and Tea Cake's relationship consists of 'ups and downs', Janie manages to find nourishment and fulfillment in her courtship which describes her resiliency. On one occasion, Janie hears someone playing guitar and singing outside the door, she asks the person outside the door if he is Tea Cake. She wants to confirm what she assumes, and Tea Cake confirms her assumption that it was him. Their conversation shows a degree of warmth and care that was always missing between Janie and her previous husbands. It shows that Tea Cake is not taking Janie as his housemaid; he is excited to tell his wife where he has been all day:

'Tea cake, is dat you?'

'You know so well it's me, Janie. How come you don't open de door?'

'Don't need tuh ast me where Ah been all dis time, 'cause it's mah all day job tuh tell yuh.'

'Tea Cake, Ah—'

'Good Lawd, Janie, whut you doin' settin' on de floor?' (120-121)

The mutual respect that has gradually developed between Janie and Cup Cake is reflected in the dialogue. Unlike with her previous husbands, Tea Cake is happy to be home and have a conversation with Janie, which shows he values his wife's voice and company.

The male presence in Janie's world plays a significant role in the development of her voice. According to Sally Ann Ferguson, "In order to reflect fully the powerful influence of patriarchal values in this process, Hurston plots Janie's growth within the context of marriages to three different men" (186). The power of the male figure in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is used to mold Janie's individuality and ultimately helps to

establish her voice. In Janie's first marriage to Logan Killicks, Janie is encouraged to leave him because of the lack of love in their relationship. In her second marriage to Jody Starks, Janie learns to speak up for herself after being cast down by the mayor's big voice. In Janie's third marriage to Tea Cake, she becomes a woman and manages to kill the man she loves for her safety. Hurston's male characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* highlight the destructive patriarchal environment of society. However, it is in the environment that Janie discovers her voice.

The sociobiological explanation of male and female voices also reveals male dominance and gender inequalities. The men in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are stronger and have bigger voices to portray strength and power similar to how Hurston depicts Jody Starks as having as a businessman and a mayor. Starks is known to have a "big voice" because of his position as mayor of the community. The perpetual reference to his "big voice" contributes to the idea of males establishing their authority through a marker of existence, which can be a biological characteristic among many features.

Janie's character may be described as having some masculine qualities of her own, which aided her fight to reclaim her suppressed voice. In Janie's relationship with Jody Starks, some sparkles of masculinity unfold the moment she responds aggressively to Jody's negative insult. Janie demonstrates the masculine qualities that Coleman mentions by projecting her voice. Janie speaks with more aggressive speech and language to display her authoritativeness. The social and psychological significance of men's and women's voices explains the stereotype that men are more masculine because of their

designated speech or voice and women are more feminine because of theirs as well, but in reality speech alone does not always determine the level of masculinity and femininity. The psychology of gender contributes to the social and psychological meaning of men's and women's voices because it demonstrates how males and females may reflect the characteristics of authority and docility prevailing in their community (Cameron 35).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie lives in a male-dominated society where she does not have a voice of her own. Hurston highlights the fact that although women's speech and language are different from men, the difference also reflects a lack of authority that culture and tradition have nurtured and supported. However, when Janie discovers her voice in her marriage with Tea Cake, she becomes an authoritative character in the relationship. Hurston illustrates how Janie discovers her voice and becomes more liberated and developed in her womanhood. Hurston also illustrates the social significance of men's and women's voices through the relationships that she establishes between male and female characters, and the portrayal helps to contribute to the development of the story and the plot. The novel shows how men and women use their voices to display their masculinity and femininity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The depiction of voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* reveals how characters think and feel. The depiction also reveals the personality, vision, and goals of the characters. The characters not only communicate with one another but also communicate what goes on within and around them. The characters' voices reveal their emotions, perceptions, and motivations that set a single character aside from other characters. Focusing on men's and women's voices in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* reveals the narrative strategies of both authors in the way they have fictionalized the lives of black and white Americans in 19th and 20th century America. The portrayal of men's and women's voices produces speech patterns that can be seen as examples of masculinity and femininity. The speech patterns highlight gender differences that exist in Chesnutt's and Hurston's fictionalized societies to help distinguish the separate roles that men and women play in the novels. For instance, male speech styles tend to be aggressive and threatening, which help to illustrate the status and the power that men represent in the novels. Women's speech, in contrast, projects a quality that is less aggressive and less assertive. The quality of being sweet and pleasant marks the quality of women's voice, and in both novels, even women have the same expectation of

sweetness and pleasantness from other women. In other words, they project on themselves men's expectations of weakness and docility through their voice.

Janie's character in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* later uses her voice to project strength and independence, similar to how male characters use their voices in the novel to project power and authority. Many times, women characters struggle to establish their voices to defend their womanhood and to gain respect from other characters. It may be recalled, for instance, that Janie uses her voice to rebel against her grandmother, even as a young girl. She does not want to be married off to the old Logan Killicks, so she tells her grandmother "No!" when the grandmother initially mentions the proposal, although she eventually capitulates to her. Additionally, Janie stands up to her second husband Jody Starks by embarrassing him in front of his friends and having porch talk with people in the community. Because of the violence and abuse that take place in the novel, women characters have to be more assertive and use their voice to establish themselves as powerful characters to counterbalance men's power and authority, and how male characters use their voices to project their masculinity. The novel takes place in a patriarchal society within which men characters have all the power and control, and women characters are expected to play the domestic role and take orders from their men counterparts and conduct daily chores around the house. Although initially Janie displays submissiveness through her domestic roles with Logan Killicks and to a lesser extent with Jody Starks, eventually she begins to portray strength through her voice by rebelling against the expectations of the male-dominated society. A careful examination of her

voice in the novel reveals how she exposes her inner strength to prove that women are just as important as men characters in the fictionalized patriarchal society.

In Chesnutt's portrayal of men's and women's voices in *The House Behind the Cedars*, male characters often depict their voices through their occupational status, relationships, and ambition. Some of the male characters are lawyers, doctors, and business men and are often seen in the story making executive decisions for their families and their communities. Some of the male characters in the novel consciously reflect on their social status and their white supremacy, and they expect to establish their positions over other members of their society. Additionally, the voices of male characters have been examined through father and son relationships and black-male and white-male relationships where black males often take on the more submissive role in conversations, compared to their white male counterparts because of the social standards of the fictionalized society. White male characters express their voices in the novel through their masculinity and powerful positions.

In *The House Behind the Cedars*, Chesnutt further reveals voice through a white-male dominated patriarchal society that rejects black identity. He highlights the idea of passing for white to illustrate how social identity contributes to the projection of men's and women's voices. Through John Warwick's journey in passing for a white man, his voice allows him to become successful in various ways including his occupation as a lawyer and his heightened social status among the white class. John believes that because of his advancement and his achievements as a white man, his sister Rena Walden may

also reap the benefits of economic opportunities if she travels to Clarence with him and passes for white. To interrogate the social significance of passing after the Civil War, Chesnutt demonstrates the struggle Rena has to endure to use her voice to cultivate acceptance in the white society. The racial issues developed in the novel unfold through the lack of acceptance and acknowledgement of the identity of black characters. Chesnutt manipulates passing to illustrate how the dismissal of blackness highlights the insignificant status of black characters' voices in the novel.

Chesnutt further unveils the status of men's and women's voices through his depiction of alienation and rejection. Through the development of various relationships, Chesnutt focuses on how the characters choose to hide behind the cedars or hide their black identity to live a successful life. Chesnutt implies that voice becomes the basis for sustaining John Warwick's and Rena Walden's hidden identities. Although John Warwick masks his black identity, he uses his acquired voice to climb the social ladder and establish himself as a white man, which illustrates the special status that white men have in the fictionalized society. Similarly, Rena Walden chooses to keep her black identity a secret to pass for a white woman, and for as long as the passing lasted she enjoys the respect and deference accorded white women in the society. In order for Rena to unveil her real voice, she later decides to unveil her identity as a black woman, also demonstrating her strength and her courage as a character. Chesnutt further reveals that the masking of black identity can lead to alienation, so he allows his characters to use their voices in ways that reveal their strength or the lack of it in dealing with their

alienation. The characters highlight their bravery and courage through the use of their voices to create better lives for themselves and to stand proud of their own identity.

The study of voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* allows the reader to hear the voices of only black characters, in an all-black city, with black customs, black traditions, and black dialect. The reader discovers the differences and similarities between men's and women's voices and how similar their voices are to the speech of real men and women in a real black community. To interrogate voice, the reader may strongly consider the fact that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is written by a female author which highlights the idea that characters are depicted from a woman's perspective. Through the examination of language in the novel, the reader finds that Hurston depicts women characters in a more compassionate way, illustrating their growth and femininity through their independence and self-discovery.

Similar to how voice is portrayed in Hurston's novel, the reader also finds that speech or language reveals a great deal about characters, distinguishes the social meaning of men's and women's voices in *The House Behind the Cedars*. The novel, written by a male author, depicts a male-dominated society where black people are trying to pass for white. In the universe of Chesnut's story, black identity is rejected and frowned upon even after the Civil War. Black characters struggle to maintain their identity and acquire a respectable status in a society that rejects them, which contributes to the reader's understanding of the social meaning of black characters' voices in the novel. Chesnut's

construction of language allows the reader to view Chesnutt's depiction of male and female characters, including the significance or status of the characters' voices.

In both Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, the voices of male and female characters are portrayed through their occupations, social statuses, relationships, and gender. Not only does the portrayal of voice establish character, it also distinguishes the difference between men and women in the fictionalized societies. Both authors use voice similarly, showing how characters use their voices to be accepted in society. Furthermore, in both novels, characters use their voices to reveal individual challenges and preferences, as well as revealing their social, economic and racial struggles. Readers discover differences and similarities in the way the authors depict men's and women's voices in patriarchal societies that elevate men's voices more than women's voices. Both Chesnutt and Hurston also show how voices can represent the struggles and the relationships between men and women in their fight for survival or against domination.

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