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童妮・摩里森《爵士樂》與《樂園》中黑白混血兒人物與種族歧視

Mulatto Characters and Racism in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise*

郭詠琳

Yung-ling Kuo

指導教授：劉亮雅 博士

Advisor: Liang-ya Liou, Ph.D.

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黑白混血兒人物與種族歧視

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in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise*

本論文係郭詠琳君（R10122002）在國立臺灣大學外國語文學系暨研究所完成之碩士學位論文，於民國 113 年 10 月 31 日承下列考試委員審查通過及口試及格，特此證明

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Abstract

This thesis examines the racial identity of American light-skinned mulatto characters in relation to racism in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*(1992) and *Paradise*(1998). These mulattos straddle white Americans and dark-skinned African Americans, and they thus constantly face racial discrimination from both communities. Under such harsh circumstances, some mulattos pass for white, whether consciously or not, and lead a comparatively privileged life. In *Jazz*, Golden Gray is raised in a white household and therefore unintentionally passes for white. It is the dark-skinned African Americans whom he encounters on his way to perform patricide that prepare him to recognize his African American ancestry. In comparison, Patricia Best and her daughter do not pass for white in *Paradise*. Maintaining a light-skinned mulatto identity provides Patricia Best the emotional distance to write the genealogy of Ruby, a town which practices gender and racial exclusion. The light-skinned mulatto identity, nevertheless, also intensifies and complicates Patricia's mother-daughter relationships. As much as these light-skinned mulatto characters are discriminated against, they gradually develop a more sophisticated understanding of their identity.

I maintain that *Jazz* and *Paradise* problematize American light skinned-mulattos' situations in the society by depicting their developing awareness of the self and trans-generational mother-child conflicts. In the introduction, I offer a literature review section on the two novels, and the conventional tragic mulatto trope to provide a social, historical perspective. I also explain how Jacques Lacan's object of desire, Julia Kristeva's abject, Nadine Ehler's racial performativity, and discourses on home facilitate an understanding of mulattos' mental turbulence and constantly changing

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racial awareness in the novels. In the first chapter, I trace Golden Gray's inner change and his treatment from others in *Jazz* in light of psychoanalysis and racial performativity. I contend that when Gray negotiates his own sense of self in different locations, he increasingly acknowledges the fact that he shares blood with dark-skinned African Americans. Although Gray disappears in the end of the novel, he no longer passes for white unwittingly and accepts himself as a light-skinned mulatto. The second chapter addresses the precarious social, sexual position mulattos occupy in a town where reversed racism prevails in *Paradise*. I argue that the novel explores mulattos' participation in the formation of reversed racism and its impacts, and that the light-skinned mulatto identity creates tension in their mother-child relationships. This chapter begins with scholars' investigation on racism in relation to African American migration, to my analysis of the Disallowing and the ways racism circulates in the town. Then, I interrogate the mulatto mother-daughter relationships among Delia Best, Patricia Best, and Billie Delia Cato to point out mulatto mothers' difficulties when parenting involves the pressure to conform to the mainstream behavior codes. By magnifying the self-doubts and racial discriminations mulattos face as well as the trans-generational conflicts in the two novels, I hope to provide an alternative way to conceptualize American mulattos in literary works.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, mulatto, identity, racism, mother-child relationship

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摘要

本論文檢視童妮・摩里森的《爵士樂》與《樂園》中，美國淺皮膚黑白混血兒的種族身份與歧視間的關係。小說中的黑白混血兒遊走於美國白人與深皮膚非裔美國人間，並時常遭受來自兩方的種族歧視。面臨此困境，部分黑白混血兒有意識或無意間偽裝(passing)為白人，生活條件較具優勢。在《爵士樂》中，戈登・格雷在白人家庭中成長，而無意間偽裝為白人。在他尋父以弒父的路程中，他所遇見的深皮膚非裔美國人促使他正視自己的非裔美籍血統。在《樂園》裡，派翠西雅・貝斯特與她女兒並未偽裝成白人。維持淺皮膚黑白混血兒的身份使她擁有情感疏離感，以完成 Ruby——一個實施性別、種族排擠的城鎮——的族譜。然而，此身份同時強化與複雜化其母女關係。儘管這些淺皮膚黑白混血兒飽受歧視，他們逐漸發展出對自我身份更成熟、全面的認知。

我主張，《爵士樂》與《樂園》藉描繪美國淺皮膚黑白混血兒逐步發展的自我意識及跨世代母親、小孩間衝突，點出他們在社會處境的不尋常之處。在緒論裡，我提供關於兩本小說的文獻回顧及文學典型中黑白混血兒角色(tragic mulatto trope)的解釋。我也說明將如何運用拉岡的慾望的對象(object of desire)、克莉絲蒂娃的賤斥體(abject)、厄勒的族裔展演(racial performativity) 、與家的相關論述，以更加了解兩書中黑白混血兒的內心衝突與不斷改變的種族認知。在第一章中，我藉由精神分析與族裔展演概念，追尋並探究格雷的心理發展及遭受的待遇。我認為，格雷在不同空間裡深化自我認知，並漸漸正視自己的非裔美國血統。縱使他在小說尾聲裡消失了，他不再無意識偽裝成白人，並認同自己的淺皮膚黑白混血兒身份。第二章節裏，我討論《樂園》裡黑白混血兒身處逆種族歧視(reversed racism)的城鎮中，對其社會、性別角色所造成的危機。我主張，《樂園》探索美國黑白混血兒造成逆種族歧視的過程與其結果，及此身份

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導致母女關係衝突。我提供了學者對小說裡種族歧視與非裔美國人大遷徙的分析，再詮釋小說中的「不承認」事件(Disallowing)、探究種族歧視在鎮裡的散佈方式。我也檢視派翠西雅與其母親、女兒的母女關係，並點出黑白混血兒母親為依循主流文化規範而面臨的困境。在這篇論文中，我藉由放大檢視兩書中美國淺皮膚黑白混血兒的自我懷疑、種族歧視與跨世代衝突，企圖提供另一種文學中想像黑白混血兒的方式。

關鍵字：童妮・摩里森，黑白混血兒，身份，種族歧視，母親-小孩關係

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Introduction

The Light-Skinned Mulattos in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise*

Toni Morrison's two novels, *Jazz*(1992) and *Paradise*(1998), incorporate the history of African American Great Migration and post Reconstruction into the narratives to uncover the silenced African American presence in the American history. Both novels highlight African Americans' migrations and how they develop through these migration experiences. In *Jazz*, the narration constantly shifts between African Americans' new lives in Harlem and their previous living conditions in the American South. The relocation and its accompanying memories reveal that such new urban life is simultaneously liberating and imprisoning for African Americans. In *Paradise*, Morrison traces the African American presence from Ruby, an invented black-privileged town, to their earlier migrations in the post-Reconstruction period. This trajectory gradually unveils that Rubyites' discrimination against light-skinned mulattos is in fact a result of the humiliating experiences they once received from white Americans and mulattos. The two novels successfully portray the turmoil African Americans confront while seeking for a more economically-secured, physically and psychologically safe space to dwell in. Morrison herself also explains that one of her goals is to "suggest ways of addressing the Afro-American presence in American literature" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 162). African Americans' lives, therefore, are placed at the heart of most of her novels to illustrate the tormenting discrimination they confront, the rich meanings of their spoken language, and the solidarity within communities.

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While critics have probed into various aspects of Morrison's portrayals of African Americans, their discussion on mulattos' presence seems scant even though mulatto figures are present in both novels and American history. I argue that Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise* problematize American light skinned-mulattos' situations in the society by depicting their developing awareness of the self and trans-generational conflicts. These light-skinned mulattos constantly face racist treatments from dark-skinned African Americans and/or white Americans because of their skin color, but these challenges propel them to acquire better self-understanding. Moreover, these two novels also present the complicated nature of mother-child relationships engaging mulattos. *Jazz* portrays the twisted and even absent maternal love that obscures the mulatto child's understanding of the self, whereas *Paradise* illustrates strict parenting strategies which require mulatto children to behave in conformity with the dominating values.

In fact, the word "mulatto" itself is a term difficult to grasp with and often considered derogatory, outdated nowadays. Since the word bears a long cultural and literary history, it is necessary to examine how its connotations shift. In etymology, the word has Spanish and Portuguese roots[1] with an emphasis on the union of two races. In the American context, some of the earliest mulatto characters in the 19th century abolitionist narratives "appealed to the emotional, prejudiced masses" (Bullock 78), as shown in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The

[1] It may derive from the Spanish or Portuguese word *mulato*, a young mule (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology 684 and Merriam Webster Dictionary). The word "mulatto" first appeared in the 1590s with loose definitions, including a person "having one white and one black parent" (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology 684) and "the offspring of a European and a black African" (Online Etymology Dictionary).

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Harlem Renaissance witnesses a blooming flowering of poems, plays, and novels picturing mulattos who suffer from identity recognition, as in Langston Hughes' poem *Cross*(1926), and those who reflect upon racial passing, as in Nella Larsen's novels *Quicksand*(1928) and *Passing*(1929). The novels engaging racial passing often portray that mulatto characters perform passing to pursue advantages, and that they subsequently gain epiphany on their identity or the society (Watson 3). In this thesis, with an awareness of its connotations of animals and the African American slavery history, I adopt the term "mulatto" because of these rich literary and historical significances it carries.

I suggest that an investigation of mulattos' social and sexual positions can enhance our understanding of racism from a different perspective. Whereas dark-skinned African Americans are treated as the inferior by the white, light-skinned mulattos are discriminated against as they are often regarded as the tainted, mixed race. In *Jazz*, Golden Gray's white grandparents resent Gray, whereas True Belle, Honor, and Henry LesTroy's attitudes toward him vary. In *Paradise*, Patricia Best and her daughter, Billie Delia Cato, are discriminated against within Ruby, an African American-privileged town as Rubyites were once excluded from a mulatto community themselves. Analyzing the treatment mulattos receive thus may help tease out the underlying motives for the hatred, anxiety, and even envy white Americans and dark-skinned African Americans display.

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Secondly, this thesis seeks to facilitate a better understanding of the two special cases of mulattos in Toni Morrison's novels. I follow the long-standing literary and social conventions which consider mulattos as African Americans[2], but I also wish to scrutinize the problems brought up by mulattos with light skin complexion. In *Jazz*, Golden Gray is raised in a white household by his white mother and black mammy. His upbringing makes him unwittingly pass for white and thus become misrecognized as white. It is the African Americans he encounters that prepare him to recognize the other side of his light-skinned mulatto identity. Unlike Gray, Patricia in *Paradise* does not and cannot pass for either race. This particular light-skinned mulatto identity provides her with the emotional distance to write the genealogy, but it also hinders her relationship with her daughter, Billie Delia Cato.

In this thesis, I begin with Annamarie Christiansen's comments on the ways Morrison's mulatto characters differ from the tragic mulatto trope. The tragic mulatto trope, prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth American literature, refers to representations of mulattos with easily predictable fate (Christiansen 78), and characterizations of mulattos who are confined to either passing for the white, or grieving for their intermediate positions (Spencer 35-36). In fact, Morrison's depiction of mulattos not only complicates the conventional tragic mulatto trope; her mulatto characters become even more sophisticated and experimental as she publishes new novels. In Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*(1970), mulatto characters such

[2] I use the term mulatto to describe the descendant of a white parent and a black parent. For the clarity of discussion, I use the word "mulattos" instead of "African Americans" in this thesis, but this does not mean that I propose to see mulattos as non-African Americans.

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as Maureen Peal and Geraldine are typical mulattos in a white-dominated world. In other words, they possess economic and social privilege brought by light complexion (60-71; 84-91). Moreover, Geraldine's awareness that "the watch[of the line between colored and niggers] had to be constant" (85) bespeaks her fear of having contact with dark-skinned African Americans. As for *Jazz*, Christiansen suggests that Morrison "skews the typical mulatto identity" with Golden Gray's black father and white mother (Christiansen 86). Following Christiansen's argument, I investigate Gray's childhood and his racial performative acts—his behavior towards others. Compared to *Jazz, Paradise* is an even more ambitious project since Morrison invents a black-privileged town. Patricia does not pass for white, nor does she leave Ruby. Her distinctive status disrupts the racial purity of Ruby but also fashions her as the one who "understands how racism circulates in the town" (Christiansen 92). I will expand Christiansen's assertion by interrogating the oppression revealed by Patricia's genealogy as well as discussing the interplay between the light-skinned mulatto identity and the mulatto mother-daughter relationships. From *The Bluest Eye*, to *Jazz* and *Paradise*, it can be seen that Morrison's conceptualization of mulattos goes beyond the tragic mulatto trope and is endowed with psychological, gender, and trans-generational complexities.

To gain a more comprehensive knowledge of mulattos in Morrison's novels, I aim to answer the following research questions with this thesis:

1. In *Jazz* and *Paradise*, what are the similar and/ or different roles mulattos play in racism when compared to other characters in these two novels?

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2. Why do nurturing mulatto parental relationships rarely exist in Morrison's novels?
3. If Morrison's writing project highlights African American presence, how does it veil and/or unveil light-skinned mulattos' experiences? In what ways does Morrison's portrayal of mulattos in *Jazz* differ from that in *Paradise*?

By answering these research questions, this thesis aims to unpack how mulattos are different from dark-skinned African Americans and white Americans, how they understand their racial identity, and how Morrison's mulattos break away from the tragic mulatto image and are represented in a new fashion in *Jazz* and *Paradise*.

Literature Review

As the discussion on Morrison's mulatto characters remains insufficient, I mainly provide literary criticism on *Jazz* and *Paradise* in this section.

After Toni Morrison published *Jazz*, researchers before 2000 focused on (lack of) motherhood, trauma healing, identity, and narrative strategies in the novel. Both interrogating the lack of motherhood, Andrea O'Reilly reads *Jazz* as "a story about the wounding and healing of unmothered children" (368), and Aoi Mori suggests that such lack prohibits children's subjectivity formation and leads to urban insecurity (321-22). Richard Hardack and Carolyn M. Jones, on the other hand, examine individual identity alongside music in *Jazz*. Hardack indicates that African Americans, similar to jazz music itself, possess the "reified and personified hunger of double-

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consciousness" (454), whereas Jones focuses on their capability of negotiating, managing, and creating identity (481-95).

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, narrative and identity remain major themes in scholarly discussions on *Jazz*, with an emerging interest in the unreliable narrator. Drawing from Vikki Bell's argument, Christa Albrecht-Crane indicates that the narrator's own recognition that identity markers are not sufficient (*Jazz* 160; Crane 68) bespeaks that race identity is *performative* (Crane 59; italics mine). Likewise, Caroline Brown sees the narrator as unreliable and extends her discussion to the non-hermeneutic characteristic of both the narrator and Golden Gray. According to Brown, *Jazz* relies heavily on the "constantly shifting (often unidentified) points of view, discourses, and narrative strategies" (632). Albrecht-Crane's argument demonstrates the unreliability of identity markers, and Brown's assertion shows that the readers' interpretation will be challenged and revised as they read along. The academia after the 2010s problematizes identity and racial concerns in *Jazz* through a variety of topics. Reading *Jazz* alongside modal jazz, a variation of jazz which no longer relies on a certain tonal center, Chad Jewett proposes that both jazz and *Jazz* "[resist] the traditional novel form" (445). The authority of white Americans and dominant narratives has thus been challenged from African Americans' perspectives.

Considered the third novel in Morrison's trilogy following *Jazz*, *Paradise* has brought in a lively discussion on historiography and African American exceptionalism in the scholarly circle. Rob Davidson looks into the power structure and succinctly indicates that the communal historiography is "predicated on the subordination of the

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individual to the group" (356). Katrine Dalsgård deals specifically with African American exceptionalism in the novel, arguing that by creating an imaginary, all-black town and deconstructing its beliefs, Morrison does not envision American Exceptionalism but rather demonstrates "the mechanisms of violence and marginalization" which "[work] in the service of a separate black nation" (246; 237).

In addition to the afore-mentioned topics, home is another popular theme among scholars in the discussion on the Convent women in *Paradise*. In the novel, the women who fail to abide by the values of the mainstream society gather and find solace in others' accompany in a place named the Convent. Before Morrison published *Paradise*, she delivered a speech that amplifies her search for a safe home. Morrison depicts her concern for what she calls "borderlessness" ("Home" 9), a space offering psychical and physical safety. Afterwards, scholars probe the novel from postethnic, postcolonial viewpoints. Seongho Yoon asserts that Morrison's portrayal of the Convent women illustrates "a new vision of home" which is "a more mobile and less stabilizing place rather than as an anchor and source of origin" (66; 72). Morrison's reconceptualization of home is also, according to Yoon, a postethnicity one when Morrison emphasizes on the "inclusive solidarity [of the Convent] than the exclusive collectivity of Ruby" (Yoon 78). Borrowing postcolonial vocabulary, Cynthia Dobbs argues that the Convent transforms from "a white male design for violent self-protection and objectified sexuality" into "a haven from the excesses of black patriarchy" (113). In so doing, *Paradise* "amplifies and extends [Homi]

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Bhabha's perspective, giving the theme of an 'unhomely[3]' domestic space [Morrison's] own African Americanist, feminist, and womanist twist" (111).

Methodology

Although I follow many of Christiansen's concepts, her analysis on the mulatto characters is mostly restricted to how Morrison reverses the tragic mulatto images by complicating their individual characterizations. In this thesis, I propose that mulattos allow us to understand the racial formations as well as the fractures light-skinned mulattos bring about within different communities. To first understand the leading mulatto characters in these two novels, I plan to draw on Jacques Lacan's object of desire and Julia Kristeva's abject. Secondly, I will continue Nadine Ehlers's investigation on racial performativity to explore Gray's certain behaviors. Thirdly, I follow the discourses on home, looking into the disjunctions that drive mulattos to search for a psychologically and physically safe but not confined space for them. Finally, I explore the ways the light-skinned mulatto identity produces tension and intense affection in mother-child relationships.

To interrogate one's inner self requires an understanding of how this individual is treated and perceived by others, especially so for mulattos as they are prone to build their subjectivity upon the ways others behave toward them. Lacan's object of desire may illustrate how mulattos become the desired objects for some

[3] In "The World and the Home," Bhabha writes that "[t]he unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychical history to the wider disjunctions of political existence." He takes the character Beloved and 124 Bluestone Road from Morrison's novel *Beloved*(1987) as an example. He asserts that Beloved is a "belated repetition of the violent history of black infant deaths, during slavery, in many parts of the South" (144).

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African Americans. Lacan does not address directly object of desire but implies through object petit *a* in his object-desire relation. In Lacan's tenth seminar, he states that "the object *a* — which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire — is to be conceived of as the cause of desire. To take up my earlier metaphor, the object lies behind desire" (101). Further clarifying Lacan's theory, Slavoj Žižek explains that object of desire is different from object petit *a*, or "the cause of desire which can never be attained" (67). Extending object of desire to the racial contexts in *Jazz*, I see Gray sometimes as the object of desire for dark-skinned African Americans. More significantly, through an investigation of mulattos' position as object of desire, we may be able to probe into the object petit *a* they embody.

Light-skinned mulattos, on the other hand, also encounter racial discriminations freqnetly. Kristeva's abjection helps indicate why mulattos sometimes are discriminated against in the black and the white communities. They become what Kristeva terms the *abject* – a position that is neither the subject, nor the object. In mulattos' circumstance, they are the abject—being simultaneously part of but also excluded from—African American and white American community. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, Kristeva asserts that the abject arises when the identity, system, and order are disturbed (4). In this light, mulattos disrupt the white supremacy when the white are not able to maintain their own "clean," distinct identity borders. Compared to the white, the black's attitude toward the mulattos diversifies and thus calls for a more thorough inspection.

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Equally important to the understanding of mulattos is an investigation of their racial performative acts. I begin with Ehlers's assertion that mulattos who pass for white validate the assumption that racial norms are constructed by the individuals' repetitive performative acts. Citing from Judith Butler's gender performativity, Ehlers contends that "[mulattos] are compelled to recite [racial] norms (of blackness or whiteness) in order to survive as a discursively and tenable racial subject" (70). To put it differently, mulattos need to display the black or white conventions in order to survive in the communities. I intend to complicate Ehlers's concept by considering Golden Gray's case—being raised as white and his internal censorship mechanism—in *Jazz*. I also examine whether or not the harsh, subjugating racial performative acts Golden Gray displays toward other African Americans are justifiable in his time. According to Butler, gender construction is constituted by "social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms" ("Critically Queer" 21). Seeing racial performativity as a negotiation between conventionalized racial norms and an individuals' deliberate act or speech, I will also consider the racial politics by contextualizing *Jazz* alongside racial performativity.

With a better understanding of mulattos through psychoanalytical approach and racial performativity, I turn to interrogate how the sense of belonging sharpens some mulattos' comprehension toward subject-formation. In Morrison's speech "Home," she speaks of her concern for "[converting] a racist house into a race-specific yet non racist home" (5). That is, race should not be a taboo subject for discussion, nor a reason for biased treatment of others. In *Jazz,* Gray's sense of belonging in his Baltimore home is deprived once the taboo is unveiled all of a

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sudden. This incident, on the one hand, leads to his journey which brings racial confrontations. On the other hand, the lack of sense of belonging, whether in Baltimore or in Vienne, demands him to reflect on his racial identity instead of merely passing for white unwittingly.

Chapter Division

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, I will use two chapters to scrutinize the process these mulattos increasingly understand and recognize their racial identity in the society they dwell in, and the ways racism can be analyzed from mulattos' points of view.

The first chapter, "'I Want to Be a Free Man': Golden Gray in *Jazz*" looks closely into the description of the mulatto in the novel. When Gray announces that he wants to be a free man instead of being categorized as a free nigger (*Jazz* 172-73), freedom seems to imply being free of the history and the burden of slavery. However, I see freedom as his quest to be free from self-questioning and consequently accepts himself as a mulatto with light skin complexion. I maintain that as Gray negotiates his own sense of self in different places, he gradually recognizes his African American ancestry. I first examine the significances of Golden Gray's status as both the object of desire and the abject. Golden Gray is the object of desire for True Belle since he stands for a case of racial miscegenation and a surrogate son for her maternal love. He also is the abject who threatens the identity border of Vera Louise and his white grandparents. Then, I analyze how his gestures toward others reflect his thoughts with

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racial performativity. For instance, he takes a superior attitude toward an African American boy, attempts to shield himself away from a black woman physically, and subjugates his black father with his look. Lastly, I interrogate the moments in which he cannot find a sense of belonging and therefore is forced to leave. These moments delineate a trajectory of how he lives without knowing his black father, the disturbing experiences he encounters on his way to perform patricide, and his response to his father's request to be "white or black" (173). Even though Gray's disappearance seems to be a passive gesture on his part, I highlight the process in which he confronts and embraces his African American ancestry, and I propose to read his final decision as his preliminary step to reject passing for white naively.

The second chapter, "Mulatto Racial/ Sexual Politics and Mother-Daughter Relationship in *Paradise*," examines Patricia Best's position and her maternal relationships in the black-privileged town, Ruby. I continue with Christiansen's argument that in Ruby, a town with reversed racial hierarchy, the light-skinned mulatto identity allows Patricia to see more clearly the racism in town. I argue that Morrison envisions mulattos' participation in the formation of reversed racism and its following consequences, and that the light-skinned mulatto identity intensifies the mulatto maternal relationships. The first section includes scholars' discussions on the relationship between black migration and African American exceptionalism in the novel. In the second section, I trace Rubyites' own experiences of becoming the abject in the Disallowing, the Fairly's discriminative practice, and look into the ways the abjection experience is circulated in Ruby. The third section pins down the scope from the collective mulatto group to individual mulatto characters in the novel. I analyze

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the hindrances Patricia encounters when compiling Rubyites' genealogy, the racial and sexual oppression revealed by that genealogy, and finally her decision to burn this document. In the last section, I address the two mulatto mother-daughter relationships between Delia Best and Patricia Best, and between Patricia Best and Billie Delia Cato. I suggest that the oral stories of the treatment Delia Best once received from both the 8-rocks and Ruby women helps Patricia understand racism from a personal perspective. At the same time, Patricia also understands that one of the reasons the 8-rocks discriminate against female mulattos is because these mulatto mothers produce constant threats through the maternal body. Consequently, Patricia adopts strict parenting strategies, imposes gaze surveillance and even beats Billie Delia Cato as she fails to abide by the dominating racial codes. The novel eventually reveals Patricia's pressure to blend in may lead to her failure to differentiate who her daughter is from who she wants her daughter to be.

After the discussion in these two chapters, I will show that these mulatto characters are never the doomed and easily predictable figures shown in the tragic mulatto trope. Even though they are marginalized people in both novels, they are constantly developing new awareness of their racial identity. Moreover, analyzing the racism also unveils that light-skinned mulattos not only suffer from but may also implement racial discrimination. They are at times the victims of racial discrimination, and at other times the ones that oppress people who are even more powerless than they are. Last but not least, the light-skinned mulatto identity hinders a nurturing maternal relationship once the mothers are pressured to blend in the mainstream society. A comparison of the two novels further shows that mothers of

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different races may display motherhood in very different ways. I also suggest that as much as the mother-child relationship is often malfunctioning in *Paradise*, it is the violent acts that often, in a retrospective manner, trigger the mulatto mother's critical reflection on the difficulty at blending in the dominating society as well as offer a chance to evaluate whether or not they have protected their mulatto children.

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Chapter One

"I Want to Be a Free Man:" Golden Gray in *Jazz*

Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) portrays African Americans' desires and fears in a city which grants "freedom of choice" (*Jazz* xv). One central theme in the novel is the characters' concurrent search for individual freedom, regardless of skin tone or age. The two leading dark-skinned African Americans, Joe and Violet Trace, leave the South in 1906 and relocate in the city in order to seek a new self and opportunities. As the novel unfolds, Violet Trace becomes lost in the city when she attempts to find substitutes for Golden Gray, a mulatto whose story is instilled to Violet during her childhood. As for Golden Gray himself, being a light-skinned mulatto, he constantly faces challenges from both dark-skinned African Americans and white Americans while he searches for his African American roots and freedom. In the novel, Gray is raised by Vera Louise, his white mother, and unwittingly passes for white in the beginning. It is True Belle, his black mammy, who reveals the name and the location of Gray's African American father to him. Then, Gray embarks on his journey to perform patricide and unexpectedly encounters an African American woman whose skin tone disturbs and threatens him. Gray's reunion with his father results in his father's instruction—to be either white or black. As a response, Gray disappears without leaving a clear trace.

I argue that as Gray negotiates his own sense of self in different locations, he gradually recognizes his African American side. Gray's declaration that he "[wants] to be a free man" instead of "a free nigger" seemingly suggests being free from slavery

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and its historical burden (173). Nevertheless, taking Gray's light-skinned mulatto identity into consideration, I propose to interpret this freedom as his quest to be free from self-questioning. At the end of the quest, he sees himself as a light-skinned mulatto. In the first section, I interrogate the ways African Americans and white Americans treat Golden Gray, and how these treatment impacts him. Whereas Jacques Lacan's object of desire provides a crack to investigate the objec*t a* Gray embodies, Julia Kristeva's abject demonstrates that miscegenation remains a taboo subject in the Antebellum American South. The second section explicates the power hierarchy Gray establishes with his behaviors and speech via racial performativity. Seeing racial performativity as a negotiation between conventionalized racial norms and an individuals' deliberate act, I also interpret Gray's acts alongside the racial politics in the Antebellum American South in *Jazz*. The third section probes into how the sense of belonging perpetually drives him to new locations, which sharpens his comprehension of self-formation and racial awareness. Although Gray's disappearance seems to be a passive response to his father's challenge, the refusal to be completely white or black suggests that he has moved beyond passing for white unwittingly.

Desire and Abject: Golden Gray's Reception

One crucial trait of light-skinned mulattos is their interstitial position in terms of skin color and social standing. In "The Color Fetish," Toni Morrison writes that the goal of her novels is to "de-fang cheap racism, annihilate and discredit the routine, easy, available color fetish" in a world where "[c]olor-ism is so very available" (53;

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44). Her novels frequently derail the ways the public conceptualize people with various skin tones. Christiansen points out that Morrison has achieved her ambition by "revising the stereotype of the tragic mulatto" via several techniques such as Gray's parents and the double-voiced narration (74; 86-87). Adding to Christiansen's argument, this thesis teases out passages in which Golden Gray's liminal existence may be interpreted through object of desire and the abject. On the one hand, Gray's golden skin and curly yellow hair (*Jazz* 139) make him the object of desire for True Belle. On the other hand, he is the abject for Vera Louise and Vera Louise's own parents. Straddling these two positions at times baffles Gray's own understanding of himself, and at other times forces him to acknowledge his true identity.

The Lacanian concept, object of desire, may indicate certain qualities of light-skinned mulattos which are desired by others. In Lacan's object-desire relation, he implies object of desire through an explanation of object petit *a*:

> [T]he object *a*—which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire—is to be conceived of as the cause of desire. To take up my earlier metaphor, the object lies behind desire. (*Anxiety* 101)

In other words, the object petit *a*—or what Lacan sometimes refers to as "the object"—is very difficult to reach or attain because it is often disguised in forms of various desires. Slavoj Žižek further elaborates on the difference between object of desire and the cause of desire:

> We have to distinguish here between *l'object petit a* as the cause of desire and the object of desire: while the object of desire is simply the desired object, the

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> cause of desire is the feature on whose account we desire the object, some detail or tic of which we are usually unaware, and sometimes even misperceive it as an obstacle. ("Troubles with the Real" 67)

In Žižek's explanation, compared to the cause of desire, the desired object appears to be a more visible and attainable goal. With Lacan's statement and Žižek's clarification, it can be inferred that an interrogation on the object of desire can facilitate seeking the underlying object petit *a* for individuals. Extending object of desire to racial contexts, the mulattos can be the object of desire for African Americans. In Morrison's early novel such as *The Bluest Eye*, the social privileges coded within light-skinned mulattos' physical traits tend to be the object petit *a* for dark-skinned African Americans. More specifically, Maureen Peal's and Geraldine's appearances are attractive among most African Americans, but the attractiveness in their beauty in fact is intertwined with white beauty standards, social status, and property. Compared to these two characters, Golden Gray in *Jazz* demonstrates a more complex, multifaceted object petit *a* which is intermingled with racial conflicts and motherhood.

Interestingly, Golden Gray is treated more often as what Julia Kristeva terms "abject" than as object of desire in the novel. He symbolizes the emerging and haunting disturbance within a society built upon fixed racial boundaries. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva proposes that the abject "cannot be assimilated" into the subject, nor can it be counted as an object radically exclusive from the subject (1). In the racial contexts, the abject sits in an uneasy position where it can neither be easily embraced by communities, nor entirely separated from them. Although some light-skinned

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mulattos are capable of passing for white, they are constantly under the danger of being exposed in the white communities. Moreover, abjection alerts communities because it occurs when "what disturbs identity, system, order" emerges (Kristeva 4). Morrison strikes a similar note with Kristeva as she points out that "when plot requires a family crisis, nothing is more disgusting than mutual sexual congress between the two races" ("The Color Fetish" 42). Brandon R. Davis scrutinizes the power hierarchy with the combination of two races. He utilizes Kristevian abjection to address the racial abjection African Americans face, stating that "[r]acial abjection [re]creates White identities and the White social order" (148). Although Davis addresses racial abjection in terms of general African American sexuality and body, his argument is also valuable in investigating how light-skinned mulattos disrupt white Americans' "clean" identity border as well as the various reactions mulattos receive from darker-skinned African Americans.

Golden Gray's interactions with Vera Louise and True Belle serve as a case in point that illustrates how the mother-son relationships can be intertwined with both object of desire and abject. Influential feminists such as Aoi Mori and Andrea O'Reilly have observed the malfunctioning African American mother-child relationships in Morrison's novels. Both Mori and O'Reilly indicate that the lack of mother-child interaction prevents Joe and Violet Trace from building a steady sense of self. The fracture in motherhood is coped with Violet's "chain of substitutions" and Joe's "shifting selfhood" (O'Reilly 369; 371), and the wounds gradually recuperate due to "[their] willingness and ability to disperse their individual loneliness and rootlessness" (Mori 329). Golden Gray's case is different in that he acts as object of

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desire for True Belle, his African American mammy, and as abject for Vera Louise, his white mother. Juxtaposing Gray's two statuses helps reveal how the equivocal, even conflicting mother-son experiences shape his shifting self-understanding.

Golden Gray's particular position as an object of desire for True Belle discloses her perception on her own race as well as her impotent motherhood. In the beginning, True Belle's laugh at Gray's birth invites several interpretations. The narrator describes that True Belle "[laughs] out loud the minute she [lays] eyes on him and thereafter every day for eighteen years" (139). Although one may consider such laugh merely a joy for a new born life, the explicit laugh can also show True Belle's excitement at witnessing a reversed case of racial hierarchy and racial miscegenation. To put it differently, being "a product of a white mother and black father" (Christiansen 86), Gray violates the common cases in which female African American slaves are the ones sexually abused by white masters and bear their children. Under this circumstance, Gray may be the object of desire for True Belle as he exemplifies the impossible triumphs of African American slaves over their white owners. However, when True Belle raises Gray into a young man, her treatment conveys various significances beyond a racial triumph. As Gray recalls his memory, True Belle is the one who

> sent baskets of plum preserves, ham and loaves of bread every week while he was in boarding school; who gave his frayed shirts to rag-and-bone men rather than let him wear them; the woman who smiled and shook her head every time she looked at him. (148)

These careful actions indicate that True Belle sees Gray as the desired object because

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he represents not only a racial triumph but also a receiver for her maternal love. Being a servant to Vera Louise, True Belle is forced to leave her two young daughters behind and move to Baltimore. Aoi Mori contends that this incident follows the Antebellum South convention in which African American female slaves sacrifice their own motherhood for their owners (326), but I want to propose another interpretation by considering the nurturing motherhood True Belle has for Gray. When she tends to Gray's needs with genuine affections, he also fills the vacancy for her maternity. This is not to suggest that True Belle no longer sees Gray as a successful case of racial triumph, but rather to argue that she finds another object petit *a*—the motherhood that she does not and cannot perform for Rose Dear and May—on Golden Gray. Symbolizing both a reversed racial miscegenation and a surrogate son complicates True Belle's affections of and treatment toward Gray.

Golden Gray's African American blood also makes him the abject for Vera Louise. The treatment Gray receives from his mother develops from a close call from abortion, a mixture of indulgence and paradoxical love, and eventually her abnegation of maternal duty. In fact, the accounts of Vera Louise's interactions with Gray are complicated by multiple points of view and non-linear narration, which highlights her uneasy position more than maternal love in this mother-son relationship. The narrator first fashions Vera Louise as a loving and attentive motherly figure. Vera Louise would "[dress] [Gray] like the Prince of Wales and read him vivid stories" at that time (140). It should be pointed out that the dressing act may indeed indicate Vera Louise's love for her son, but it is also a gesture that potentially distances Gray from his African American ancestry. The heartwarming picture is overshadowed when the

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narrator further shows that Gray's physical traits accentuate his precarious situation as an abject. Vera Louise might have "[taken Gray] to the Catholic Foundling Hospital, where whitegirls deposited their mortification" had Gray not had golden hair (148). From Gray's childhood memory, Vera Louise and True Belle would "sometimes [pass] anxious looks at the palms of his hand, the texture of his drying hair" (149) when bathing him. Their anxiety comes from the fear that the physical traits of African Americans would suddenly emerge, which will put Gray in danger in the 19th century American South. Golden Gray's role as an abject becomes especially prominent when he questions Vera Louise about his identity. In the very beginning, from Gray's own account, Vera Louise denies her role of being his mother. She

> lied to him about practically everything including the question of whether she was his owner, his mother or a kindly neighbor. The other thing she did not lie about (although it took her eighteen years to get around it) was that his father was a black-skinned nigger. (143)

Vera Louise imparts the truth of Gray's birth only partially, informing Gray of his African American father but choosing to disguise her own identity. Eventually, Vera Louise confines herself in her room when Gray attempts to learn more information about LesTroy (143). This decision indicates that she intentionally excludes Gray from herself and her white parentage, treating him as an abject which reminds her of her shame and risks disrupting American racial hierarchy.

Golden Gray's position as an abject also ignites different degrees of anxieties for Vera Louise's parents, two landowners in the Antebellum American South. The moment Colonel Wordsworth Gray learns Vera Louise's pregnancy, he seems to

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search for “a shot of whiskey, his pipe, a whip, a shotgun, the Democratic platform, his heart” in the air (141). This act suggests his futility in maintaining his powerful, white-master image after his daughter’s sexual affair with an African American man. Then, he sweats severely and slaps Vera Louise when he thinks of the “seven mulatto children on his land” (141). The parallel between the seven mulattos and Golden Gray indicates that Colonel’s primary anxiety is the speculation that the pregnancy might be a revenge from his slaves. Unlike Colonel’s deflated confidence in white supremacy and anxiety, Vera Louise’s mother demonstrates a resolute abhorrence of the pregnancy. She shoots a gaze of repulsion so strong that Vera Louise seems to “taste the sour saliva gathering under her mother’s tongue” (141). The gaze Vera Louise’s mother shoots at her daughter, according to Erika Sophrer, can be a tool for punishing her daughter for committing miscegenation (“Colonizing Consciousness” 81). Vera Louise’s mother’s punishing eye gaze then also exemplifies Davis’s observation that racial abjection can be used as a strategy used to reaffirm the white hierarchy.

While white Americans treats Gray as an abject and displays the urgency to separate themselves from Gray, Henry LesTroy’s role as a father makes him instruct Gray the survival tactics by requesting Gray to select an identity. When Gray tells LesTroy that he “[wants] to be a free man” instead of “a free nigger” (173), Gray defines free man and free nigger differently, and is eager to distance himself from the latter. That is, he wishes to break away from his African American identity because even though some African Americans are free, lurking dangers and racism are still embedded within that racial identity. In response to Gray’s statement, LesTroy replies:

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> Don't we all. Look. Be what you want—white or black. Choose. But if you choose black, you got to act black, meaning drawing your manhood up—quicklike, and don't bring me no whiteboy sass. (173)

LesTroy's words denote that he is rather displeased with Gray's sudden arrival and blatant challenge. More significantly, LesTroy's emphasis on choosing bespeaks his conviction of the incompatibility between the two races in that era and therefore the necessity for Gray to choose to live either as white or black. In LesTroy's opinion, if Gray chooses to live with his African American identity, Gray should abandon his current indecisive, immature, and imprudent behaviors to become a man with resolute masculinity like LesTroy.

Besides being an abject himself, it is equally interesting to note that Golden Gray seems to internalize the experiences of being excluded by the white and sees Wild as an abject. As Gray ventures to kill LesTroy, he unexpectedly encounters Wild, a pregnant African American woman who is shocked by Gray and accidentally knocks herself down in the trees. When Gray checks on the unconscious Wild, he "[holds] his breath against infection or odor or something" which "might touch or penetrate him" (144). Gray's refusal to touch the woman is similar to Vera Louise's parents' reaction since both parties emphasize the need to maintain a clean physical and psychological border, and their unwillingness to be associated with traits of African Americans. However, Gray's exclusion is slightly different from that of his white grandparents' and Vera Louise's. He realizes and feels guilty about "the pride he takes in his [black] horse [and] the nausea the woman [provokes]" (144). Afterwards, he has a vision in which he abandons the pregnant woman (*Jazz* 145), and the vision "ultimately helps

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him assume the critical distance that requires that he help the naked, pregnant woman" (Spohrer 92). It is Gray's willingness to "see" his biased self and to offer help that distinguishes his practice of exclusion from the white's racial discrimination.

Golden Gray's Racial Performativity and Power Hierarchy

This section investigates Golden Gray's behaviors as these gestures bespeak his thoughts when interacting with dark-skinned African Americans. I draw on the concept of racial performativity, the repetitive enactment of conventionalized racial codes carried out to affirm individuals' own status in either public or private settings. In "Passing through Racial Performatives," Nadine Ehlers firstly adopts a Foucauldian perspective and asserts that if mulattos who pass are capable of disrupting and escaping from visual surveillance, then they "[highlight] that racial discipline is sustained through the performative compulsions of race" (52-53). Accordingly, mulattos passing for white are less likely to be subjugated through visual gazes since they do not have obvious physical markers of dark-skinned African Americans, and more importantly, because they follow the white racial codes. Ehlers carefully uses Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity to propose that "racial subjectivity is constituted through the mandatory reiteration of regularized racial 'norms'" (70). In this regard, Ehlers conceives race more as a construct rather than a born identity. Thus, it can be inferred that "[mulattos] are compelled to recite [racial] norms (of blackness and whiteness) in order to survive as a discursively and tenable racial subject" (Ehlers 70). In *Jazz*, Golden Gray's gestures establish a racial hierarchy between himself and other dark-skinned African Americans including Wild,

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Honor, and LesTroy.

Before delving into Golden Gray's performative acts, it is crucial to look into the historical period which he is born into since performativity does not equate complete freedom or personal will[4]. In the novel, it is likely that Gray is born around the 1860s, a time slightly before or after Abraham Lincoln declared Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Even after the announcement of Emancipation Proclamation, the law only applies to the enslaved living in the Confederate States of the America [5]("The Emancipation Proclamation"). Golden Gray's argument that Vera Louise raises him as a non-black so as to protect him is thus valid, since Gray may easily suffer from racial discrimination acts such as Jim Crow Laws.

The first clear racial performative act takes place as Gray meets Honor, an African American boy assisting Henry LesTroy's work. Honor first thinks of Gray as a ghost because of Gray's "wet yellow hair and creamy skin" (168). Gray's "smileless smile" is a performative act which possibly persuades the boy into the idea that Gray is a white man (156; 168). The ingenious smile may reflect Gray's way of treating other African Americans such as True Belle during his childhood. Following the smile, Gray asks the boy a series of questions regarding Henry LesTroy instead of

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[4] As Butler reminds us, gender performativity is never merely a personal choice. She defines gender performativity as a "reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings *already socially established*" ("Gender Trouble" 178; italics mine). Put otherwise, individuals' acts are conditioned by "social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms" ("Critically Queer" 21).

[5] In *Jazz*, Gray and Vera Louise in Baltimore, Maryland, a place that didn't belong to the Confederate States of America. LesTroy lives in Vienne, possibly the Vienna, Virginia now. Virginia used to be part of the Confederate States. The different conditions in the two states may explain why LesTroy and Gray do not conceptualize "free niggers" in the same way.

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providing his own background first, and even directly demands the boy's service. The narrator portrays:

> That was it, then. The place he[Gray] meant to come to and any day now the blackest man in the world would be there too . . . "Say!" Golden Gray held up his hand. "When you're done, come back here. I want you to help me with something. Hear?" "Yes, sir. I be back." (157)

Both the smile and Gray's repetitive use of imperative sentences can be seen as an extension of Butler's performativity. These two devices highlight and reinforce the hierarchical relationships between the light-skinned mulatto and the dark-skinned African American boy. Just as gender is "a strategy of survival within compulsory [heterosexual] systems" (Butler 178), racial performative speeches and acts, in this scenario, are the survival strategies Gray has used in a society permeated with white supremacy.

Gray's choice of specific clothes is another performative act he adopts toward Wild and LesTroy. Although racial performativity acts are usually associated with actions that are displayed in public, Gray's treatment of Wild is also one of such acts since he "behaves as though there is" someone watching his actions (153). That is, Golden Gray's own thoughts plays the role of the imaginary audience who watches and censors his behaviors. In terms of Gray and Wild's relationship, it is seen that clothes convey multiple layers of significance. Firstly, Gray "unfolds his long [vanilla] coat that has been tucked in the seat beside him and throws it over the woman" (145). Whether Gray's behavior may derive from either his hatred to behold the naked Wild or his compassion to cover her, the act symbolizes the clash between

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the African American and the mulatto. Secondly, after Gray lays Wild down on the cot in LesTroy's house, he "selects a white cotton and flannel waistcoat" (147). Clothes, for Golden Gray, is an important way to maintain a clean, and more specifically, "white" American identity boundaries. Another similar scene happens even before Gray meets LesTroy in person as he selects "formal, elegant" attire which he assumes will be appropriate for their meeting (157). This gesture, on the one hand, indicates that Gray treats their first meeting seriously. On the other hand, it also implies Gray's anxiety as he is going to witness the truth that his father indeed is an African American (149). On this occasion, clothes functions as a way to bespeak Gray's racial recognition. Just as Vera Louise "[dresses] him up like the Prince of Wales" (140) during his childhood to show his upbringing, Gray now repeats this act and puts the white American side of identity on display. The formal clothes which he deliberately selects seems to act as an armor to avoid blackness from penetrating him symbolically.

The tension between the mulatto and African Americans accelerates when Gray finally meets his father. The moment when LesTroy steps into his own house and finds Gray, it is described that

> [w]hen the blond man turned to look at him, the gray eyes widened, then closed, then, sliding slowly up from Hunter's boots to his knees, the chest to head, the man's gaze was like a tongue. By the time the gray eyes were level with his, Hunter had to struggle to keep from feeling trapped – in his own house. (168-69)

Gray's gaze here "colonizes" and evaluates LesTroy's standing. Erika Spohrer adopts

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Susan Sontag's and Laura Mulvey's gaze theories[6] to point out that Gray's gaze is a "colonizing gaze [used] to colonize blackness" (91). Besides acting as a freezing gaze, Gray's gaze is also a tool for evaluation. His bottom-up gaze traces LesTroy's boots and eventually leveling with LesTroy's eyes, suggesting that Gray may be judging LesTroy's appearance as well as his social ranking. This gaze immediately establishes a power hierarchy between Gray and LesTroy even before either of them speaks.

Both Golden Gray's choice of words and his non-verbal gestures are the racial performative acts that build the racial hierarchy between the white and the black. Gray's skin tone may have presented him as a white American, but it is his language that forces Honor to help him. The clothes Gray throws over Wild and puts on before meeting LesTroy echoes with the prince-like attire Vera Louise dresses him in his childhood. On encountering LesTroy, Gray's gaze controls LesTroy's body and subjugates him. These performative acts hint that Gray still behaves and occasionally considers himself quite different from the dark-skinned African Americans he has met.

[6] Both Sontag and Mulvey examine the power hierarchy between the viewer and the object. Sontag considers gaze "a form of surveillance and control," and Mulvey indicates that through the gaze, "the subject possesses and controls the object of his gaze" (qtd. in Spohrer 91). Although Mulvey's theoretical assumption has been challenged since it only applies to the relationship between a white viewer and the object of gaze, Gray's self-awareness as a passing mulatto here is in line with the white viewer in Mulvey's assumption.

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From Disjunctions to Disappearance

With a better understanding of Gray's psychology through object of desire, the abject, and racial performativity, this last section turns to interrogate how the sense of belonging sharpens Gray's comprehension of himself. Morrison's speech "Home" introduces her concern for "[converting] a racist house into a race-specific yet non-racist home" (5). To put it differently, Morrison conceives of home as a place where race is neither a taboo subject, nor a reason for biased treatment. Golden Gray's home in Baltimore is a location where race remains a taboo subject, a topic that rarely appears and discussed during his childhood. However, once the racial taboo is revealed, a fracture appears and makes the house no longer a safe harbor. The fracture does not simply suggest a banishment from home, but it also provides him with opportunities for personal relocation in the society. To do so, I look specifically into the moments in which Gray's status as a light-skinned mulatto brings conflicts and disjunctions that in turn allow him to continue with his search for his racial identity. In *Jazz*, there are at least four moments in which Gray experiences and is driven by these disjunctions—the first in Baltimore with Vera Louise and True Belle, the second with Wild, the third as Gray is contemplating on his own in LesTroy's home, and the fourth with LesTroy's conflicts on Gray's search for freedom.

The house in Baltimore becomes psychologically unsafe after Golden Gray grows aware of his mulatto status. After Gray learns from True Belle the name of his African American father, he becomes "loose, lost" and falls into despair (159). Gray "first [fingers] then [tears] some of his mother's clothes . . . [and looks] at the things scattered on the lawn as well as in his mind" (159). The succession of actions presents

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his shock at receiving the information, his rage at his mother and the white ancestry which he previously assumes he entirely belongs to, and eventually how he grows perplexed, being uncertain of what to do. Vera Louise even refuses to provide further information and confines herself to her room (143; 148). Learning his own parentage from True Belle and the break in maternal care create a sense of personal detachment in his home. It is True Belle who offers LesTroy's possible location as well as encourages Golden Gray to search for his father (159). In response, Gray embarks on his mission to perform patricide, a gesture that shows not only his anger at his parents but more significantly, his desire to abject—to symbolically negate and reject—his African American ancestry.

Setting off to kill LesTroy, Gray encounters Wild and experiences the disjuncture the second time. Whereas the first disjunction initiates his search for selfhood, this second scenario requires him to confront blackness and hence makes him admit his African American identity. While it may be easy to criticize Gray for his reluctance to look at Wild's deer-like eyes and touch her skin, the reluctance in fact derives from the fear that Wild, an abject, may invade his identity boundary. Unlike Vera Louise's parents who condemn and banish their daughter for having an affair with an African American man, Gray does aid the unconscious black woman. Although Wild provokes nausea so severely that Gray has to imagine her as a "vision" before offering help, this vision, as Spohrer contends, also creates a "critical distance" which helps Gray "disengage from the body . . . to see clearly" that Wild is in critical need of help (92). Wild's presence further disturbs Gray when he reaches LesTroy's house as he recalls True Belle's meaningful smile when bathing him:

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> Vera Louise was anxious [whether Gray's African American physical traits would emerge]; True Belle just smiled, and now he knew what she was smiling about, the nigger. But so was he. He had always thought there was only one kind—True Belle's kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry LesTroy. Like the filthy woman snoring on the cot. But there was another kind—like himself. The rain has stopped for good . . . .(149)

This is the critical moment where Gray begins to face his existence as a mulatto who shares blood with the black. Previously, he assumed that blackness entailed nothingness and even filthiness, as represented by True Belle, LesTroy, and Wild. Blackness, for Gray, was also associated with the destructive force that may destroy one's racial identification, as shown at the moment when True Belle informs Gray of his father. Currently, he is capable of differentiating various degrees of blackness and includes himself in that spectrum. This realization nevertheless does not indicate his change of attitude toward African Americans. As his attention is drawn back to the discourse on weather, an external and objective fact, it seems that Gray is unwilling to further explore his African American root at this phase.

Following this new discovery, Golden Gray is immersed in both the pain of an absent father and his wish for meeting LesTroy. At this third disjunction moment, as Gray lays out his clothes in LesTroy's house, his pain is sharpened by learning that he "[has] a father" who is absent from "where he should have been" (158). Rather than being frustrated by his father's abandonment, Gray envisions their reunion scene in which he has the opportunity to know "[t]his part of me that does not know me" (158). These expressions embody that now, being in LesTroy's own house, Gray

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dreams of learning more about this absent father —the part that has been veiled from Gray for eighteen years. Notably, LesTroy is depicted as an arm which constantly alters its appearances and functions along with Gray's internal monologue. Gray first visualizes LesTroy as an arm which he does not need (158). Then Gray changes his attitude when he imagines that the arm will "no longer be a phantom . . . [and] grow its own muscle and bone" (159). Gray currently assumes that his wound will heal on its own when he meets LesTroy in person. Gray ponders:

> What do I care what the color of his skin is, or his contact with my mother? When I see him, or what is left of him, I will tell him all about the missing part of me and listen for his crying shame. I will exchange then, let him have mine and take his as my own and we will both be free, arm-tangled and whole. (159)

At this moment, it may be inferred that Gray has abandoned the decision to perform patricide and rather hopes to reunite with his father. This phase is significant for Gray's subject-formation since Gray may have already become a non-racist, but he hasn't reached what Morrison describes as "race-specific." He no longer abjects his African American father due to his skin color. Nonetheless, his choice to intentionally neglect LesTroy's skin color also indicates his unwillingness to recognize LesTroy's African American identity.

The fourth moment comes during Gray and LesTroy's encounter. The encounter with Henry LesTroy produces a ripple of doubts and hostility within Gray, and Gray disappears in the end. As LesTroy helps deliver Wild's baby, the affliction of LesTroy's absence resurfaces and makes Gray sarcastically mark the scene as

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"touching" (172). In response to LesTroy's critique towards Gray's sudden arrival, Golden Gray reclaims his goal:

> Golden Gray was sober now and his sober thought was to blow the man's head off. Tomorrow. It must have been the girl who changed his mind. Girls can do that. Steer a man away from death or drive him right to it. Pull you out of sleep and you wake up on the ground . . . .(173)

The first two sentences seem to demonstrate Gray's reversion to his original plan even after traversing a long physical and psychological journey. However, he decides not to do so because Wild, another marginalized figure, allows him to see his black side and different possibilities for life. In the last four sentences, as the word "girl" signifies from Wild to females in general, Gray disappears from the narrative and never leaves a clear trace in the following chapters. Gray's sudden disappearance gives birth to several hypotheses. Caroline Brown suggests that there are three possible endings. Gray may take "the cave haunted by Wild's presence" as hinted by Joe Trace's discovery of a green dress and man's trousers in the cave, "pass as white" and live anonymously in the post-bellum America, or "[run] off with [Wild], whereabouts unknown" (636). Brown proposes that the first assumption emphasizes Gray's position of being stuck, and the second shows his new life as a passing mulatto figure (636). Along the same line, Christiansen contends that through vanishing, Gray "dismisses both the white and black community that threaten to contain him" (89). While it is true that disappearance may be Gray's rejection of LesTroy's instruction to live either as black or white, it does not necessarily follow that Gray symbolizes "a solution to the problem of hybrid identity" as Christiansen claims (89). Rather, the

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disappearance shows that Gray's mulatto status still remains a haunting presence. This is not to see Golden Gray as a flat character who makes little progress in his subject-formation, but rather to suggest that after the fourth disjuncture experience, he only reacts passively at the moment.

Morrison's *Jazz* portrays a historical period with the surge in African American rights and its accompanying emotional turbulence. Such inner insecurity is also shared by Golden Gray, the mulatto who transforms from passing for white, realizing the African American blood within him, and confronting dark-skinned African Americans. This chapter probes into his status as both the object of desire and the abject, his racial performativity, and the four major fractures that propel him to go on a continuous search for his light-skinned mulatto identity. As such identity border is constantly put in jeopardy, it is revealed that Gray's self-formation requires more than passing unwittingly. Passing for white is indeed a crucial survival strategy for light-skinned mulattos in the 19th century America, but it is very likely that the sense of personal dislocation will creep on the individuals eventually. In this context, Gray's freedom entails more than a personal, temporary escape from slavery or racial discrimination, but to be free from the haunting psychological disjuncture. The second possible ending Brown advances hints that Gray may choose to pass for white in the end, but Gray's anger, fear, and self-doubts along this journey suggest that he is no longer an individual who passes without knowing. The journey has propelled him into facing, helping, and even confronting African Americans, suggesting that whether Gray chooses to pass for white in the end or not, these experiences allow Gray to recognize himself as a light-skinned mulatto.

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Chapter Two

Mulatto Racial/ Sexual Politics and Mother-Daughter Relationship in *Paradise*

Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) presents a unique form of racism in African American literature. Whereas most of Morrison's previous novels concentrate on the dynamic and unstable power struggles between the privileged white Americans and the socially, economically deprived African Americans, *Paradise* reverses such racial hierarchy and even delicately includes mulattos in its political and sexual agenda. In "Being or Becoming the Stranger," Morrison writes that she "examined the contradictory results of devising a purely raced community—only this time the 'stranger' is every white or 'mixed race' person[7]" (31). *Paradise* traces the American history and illustrates how the Fairly, a group of light-skinned mulattos, impacts a group of dark-skinned African Americans in post-Reconstruction migration, and causes the latter to establish Ruby, a town that devotes itself to a blood rule based on African American racial purity. In comparison with the Rubyites' male, African American-dominated society, marginalized white, black, and mulatto women leave their previous communities and gather at a shelter named the Convent near Ruby. In

[7] Morrison's design here can be seen as her experiment on colorism. Colorism is commonly used to describe the situation that within the black communities, there are preferences of light skin over the dark or vice versa (Encyclopedia of African American Society 208). The term has also been adopted in examining the roles skin colors play in Morrison's novels. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's pursuit of whiteness so as to be loved stands as an extreme example of colorism, and that Maureen's treatment of Pecola suggests that she both performs and is trapped by colorism (Davis 31-33). In another example, Baby Suggs' sermon in *Beloved* shows that "the dehumanizing experience of colorism," or African Americans' abomination of their own flesh, may be resolved with self-love (Bolton 100-101).

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the Convent, heterogeneous values trigger conflicts and negotiation, and the wounds of these marginalized women eventually heal. Interestingly, Patricia Best, the leading light-skinned mulatto character, faces Rubyites' exclusion but does not leave Ruby and even initiates a historiography project which reveals the racist viewpoints held by the 8-rock families.

In this chapter, I argue that *Paradise* depicts light-skinned mulattos' participation in the formation of reversed racism and its following consequences, and that the light-skinned mulatto identity intensifies their mother-daughter relationships. This chapter examines first the reversed racism at work and then the mulatto characters in *Paradise*. As a background to the reversed racism in the novel, I provide critics' analysis on the Ruby ancestors' post-Reconstruction migration, followed by the relationship between migration experiences and African American Exceptionalism discourse in *Paradise*. I then draw on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to analyze the Disallowing, the experience in which the Fairly provides food but prohibits Ruby ancestors from staying within their community. This refusal leaves a scar on African American's pride and therefore triggers a defense mechanism, or reversed racism, in *Paradise*. This humiliating experience goes through what Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney term "remediation" as it transforms via different media— from an oral story to a representation in the annual Christmas Play. The play re-shapes and intensifies viewers' and children actors' understanding of racism, abjection, and their own racial identity.

The second half of this chapter explicates Morrison's depictions of mulattos to interrogate individual mulatto's position in Ruby and their mulatto mother-daughter

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relationships. I examine, through Patricia Best's point of view, the female and racial oppressions in Ruby. I look into the struggles Patricia experiences when she reflects upon the hierarchy in Ruby and her biased self. As a genealogist, she has probed into the injustice women and mulattos face. Nonetheless, she also realizes that she has practiced exclusivism on a priest who comes from outside. The light-skinned mulatto identity, moreover, complicates the mother-daughter relationships among the female mulattos, including Delia Best, Patricia Best, and Billie Delia Cato. The last section then scrutinizes how their mulatto status causes conflicts and jeopardizes the mother-daughter relationship. I analyze Patricia's concern when passing on the light skin color to her daughter, and the symbolic meanings of such complexion for the 8-rocks. The symbolic meaning forces Patricia to discipline herself and Billie Delia, eventually leading to an irrevocably harmful relationship between the mother and the daughter.

Black Migration and African American Exceptionalism

Similar to Morrison's *Jazz*, *Paradise* reflects on the historical events regarding African American migration experiences. After the Reconstruction period (1865-1877)[8] ended, the Old Fathers of Ruby left Louisiana and established Haven, their first town in Oklahoma in 1890 (16). Haven once thrived in 1932 but quickly shrank into a "ghosttown" ravaged by famine and economic depression by 1948 (5-6).

[8] The 15th Amendment provided African Americans with suffrage, and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 guaranteed their access to political events, public accommodations, and jury services ("Landmark Legislation"). However, these rights became annulled after the Reconstruction era, especially when several Southern states began to implement the notorious Jim Crows Law ("Jim Crow & Reconstruction"). The harsh economic depression and social constraints led to a rising number of cases of African Americans' migration to Northern and Midwest states in the 1890s ("Moving North, Heading West").

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Therefore, the Ruby ancestors left Haven in 1949 for their second migration and named the new town Ruby in 1952. Whereas several Haven residents joined the second Great Migration and moved west to California or northeast to Saint Louis and Chicago, the Old Fathers decided to migrate "deeper into Oklahoma" (16).

The first African American migration journey in the novel, as several critics have pointed out, may correspond to African American experiences during and after the Reconstruction period (Yoon 68; Evans 381; Sweeney 48; Krumholz 29; Romero 420-21; Widdowson 323). Searching for the origin of Rubyites' exclusive practices, Channette Romero contends that *Paradise* reveals the failed attempt "to bring about equality" after the Reconstruction period (420). One prime example for the failure of equality is the Disallowing, the rejection Ruby ancestors face from a light-skinned African American community because of their darker complexion (Krumholz 29). Peter Widdowson similarly asserts that *Paradise* mocks "Reconstruction's high ideals of equal citizenship" when the post-Reconstruction period produces "dispossessed and disenfranchised" blacks in 1875 (323). According to these arguments, Ruby ancestors suffer not only from white Americans' treatment but also from the light-skinned mulattos' Disallowing. Humiliated by the Disallowing, Ruby ancestors transform that experience and practice it on other light-skinned mulattos they encounter in the future. After Haven gradually dwindles in size and in population, Ruby ancestors went on the second migration[9], a time during which the one-drop rule

[9]It can be inferred that this second migration takes place between 1949 and 1952, which intersects with the second wave of Great Migration (1940s-1970s). I do not see Ruby's second migration as part of this second wave movement because they do not leave Oklahoma. Moreover, most critics refer to this movement as simply migration rather than the second wave of Great Migration.

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prevailed.

As *Paradise* reimagines African American migration experiences, it is crucial to point out critics' examination on how the novel engages with historical narratives. Whereas historical accounts tend to inform readers of historical events from a consistent and linear point of view, *Paradise* provides various, fragmented and non-linear narratives of the migrating process. Scholars have scrutinized the relationship between Rubyites' historiography and community formation. Sharon Jessee interrogates Rubyites' historiographies produced alongside the migrations, and she contends that an examination on historiographies helps "[reveal] tremendous variations in emphasis and interpretation" which are complicated by the founding fathers' opinions on the establishment of black towns and economic decline (87-88). Rob Davidson looks into the power structure in Ruby, indicating that the communal historiography is "predicated on the subordination of the individual to the group" (356). From these critics' perspectives, Ruby's official, communal historiography acts as an ideological tool that presents a biased account of history, and this biased narrative is held true when each member is supposed to subjugate himself/ herself to the community.

The Rubyites' communal historiography can be seen as an allegory of African American exceptionalism that prioritizes African American cultures and experiences formed and intensified during their migrations. As Marni Gauthier suggests, *Paradise* presents the "omission and exclusion" of national mythic history and "its narrative processes" (396). Readers are shown how the Rubyites' national mythic history is formed by the eight-rocks, circulated within the community, and passed on to future

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generations. Similarly, Katrine Dalsgård also scrutinizes the migration experience as she looks into the rejections the founding families experience:

> She[Morrison] suggests that, in its origins, African American nationalism—no matter what its hue—must necessarily be articulated on oppositional grounds. Hence . . . the African American exceptionalist discourse she discerns is a counter-discourse that works in the service of a separate black nation (237).

Dalsgård proposes that African American Exceptionalism, which Morrison disagrees with, is different from American Exceptionalism. While American Exceptionalism, portrayed in the Exodus-like narratives, tends to treat America as a singular and united entity, the African American Exceptionalism Morrison implicitly critiques functions through the binary opposition between the self and the other. The 8-rocks sets a clear dichotomy between the dark-skinned African Americans and others in the beginning because of their own marginalized status.

Experiences and Emulation of Abjection

Ruby's African American Exceptionalism can also be examined in light of Kristeva's abjection since both emphasize the need for a distinction between subject and object. Abjection in *Jazz* unveils the desire for clear-cut distinctions between different races in the Antebellum American South. Golden Gray's light-skinned mulatto identity marks him the abject for the white-master authority. Abjection in *Paradise* similarly addresses the border between light-skinned mulattos and dark-skinned African Americans, and it further magnifies the unstable powers the abject holds. More specifically, analyzing the interactions between the Rubyites and non-

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Rubyites shows that abjection does not yield to the extinction of powers. Rather, the abject is capable of learning from the affliction and takes on the subject's position to banish others. After the Disallowing, the Ruby ancestors become the ones to exclude "the impure" (194). In this section, I first examine the two obvious targets of abjection in Ruby, females and outsiders, by considering the treatments Billie Delia Cato and Richard Misner receive in Ruby. I then trace the Rubyites' own experiences for being the abject in the Disallowing, and I interrogate the ways Rubyites internalize, circulate, and reinforce the abjection experiences via the annual Christmas play.

Females and outsiders are two of the most common victims of abjection in the novel. According to Kristeva, the abjection is caused by "what disturbs identity, system, order" rather than "lack of cleanliness or health" (4). The abject brings chaos not because it is filthy, but because it challenges established disciplines. Mark A. Tabone comments on Billie Delia Cato's description of Ruby as "a backward noplace ruled by men whose power to control was out of control" (*Paradise* 308), suggesting that the Convent

> is a site of projection and abjection into which are cast the town's various irreconcilable "impurities." Ruby's extraracial desires, its repressed sexualities, its unsanctioned pregnancies, its 'weakened' men and 'wayward' women —and in many ways, 'feminity' itself—are banished to the Convent, or seek refuge there. (Tabone 135-36; original emphasis)

Put differently, the Convent is the exact place which contains the abject from Ruby, including those who violate 8-rocks' ideals of racial boundaries and female sexuality.

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Yi-Ting Tsai similarly uses Kristeva's theories to interpret the incident in which Billie Delia takes off her Sunday panties before riding the horse in her childhood (*Paradise* 151). On the surface, Billie Delia's shame seems to come from violating the femininity as she undresses. However, a more implicit but crucial reason lies in the fact that Billie Delia violates racial ambiguity, "[defying] clear distinction and distinct borders" (Tsai 42; 51). Besides females, Patricia and Richard Misner's discussion on Rubyites' attitudes toward the non 8-rocks shows that outsiders are also the abjects for Rubyites. When Richard explains that he is more an outsider than an enemy, Patricia succinctly points out that "in this town those two words mean the same thing" (212). From Rubyites' viewpoint, an outsider like Richard needs to be abjected from Ruby because his perspective is more in line with the beliefs of the young generation, threatening to undermine the founding fathers' authority.

The abjection is experienced not only by outsiders but also by the 8-rocks. The exclusion Rubyites practice on mulattos can be considered an imitation of what they have learned from the Fairly's expulsion during their first migration. In this expulsion, the Disallowing, the Ruby ancestors are prohibited from staying within the mulatto households in Fairly, Oklahoma:

> [T]he Disallowing came from fair-skinned colored men. Blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits. They were kind, though, as the story went. Gave them food and blankets; took up a collection for them; but were unmoving in their refusal to let the 8-rocks stay longer than a night's rest. (195)

Though the Fairly provide provisions for the founding families, the Fairly refuse to let them stay within the community. As staying within the same community connotes a

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strong sense of belonging, the Fairly's behavior reveals that they see 8-rocks as the abject and therefore exclude the latter. Moreover, Rubyites' description of the Fairly's appearance forms an interesting comparison with Patricia Best's characterization of the 8-rocks. She describes the 8-rocks as a group of "[b]lue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes [give] no sign of what they really [feel] about those who [aren't] 8-rock like them" (193). Notably, both narratives illustrate the Fairly's and the 8-rocks' appearances before their characteristics, which emphasizes their unapproachableness. Just as the Fairly's unmoving refusal bespeaks their insistence on drawing a clear distinction, the 8-rocks' eyes disclose little information to the non 8-rocks.

The abject experience from the Disallowing leaves a scar on the Ruby ancestors and is later on remediated in the annual Christmas Play in Ruby. After being "disallowed" to live in the Fairly, the 8-rocks "saw a new separation" between "light-skinned against black" (194). This painful realization is put on stage by children "hidden by a yellow and white mask featuring gleaming eyes and snarling lips" (208), suggesting a twisted version of their memory. 8-rocks' desire for retaliation may be best illustrated as the children present, based on oral stories and the playwright's design, the way the Fairly may be punished:

> And sure enough, the masked figures wobble and collapse to the floor, while the seven families turn away. Something *within me* that banishes pain; something *within me* I cannot explain. Their frail voices are accompanied by stronger ones in the audience, and at the last note more than a few are wiping their eyes. (*Paradise* 211; emphasis added)

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If the interior speech represents Rubyites' mindset, then the speech emphasizes that Rubyites attempt to reduce their trauma by making others the abject. This example complicates Kristeva's arguments because it shows that the abject does not always stay marginalized. Rather, the abject is able to occupy the subject's position and emulate the practice of externalizing the abject. The annual Christmas play can be regarded as an attempt to alleviate the pain caused by the Fairly's Disallowing. In this vein, the event is no longer the actual event but rather goes through what Astrid Erll refers to "remediation." According to Erll, remediation takes place when the events are "usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media" ("Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures" 111). The Disallowing, a historical event, has been passed down from oral stories and transformed into a play connecting audiences of all ages. What's more significant is that the play invites adults' call-and-response participation. As Erll argues, media "play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past" ("Introduction" 3). Although most viewers have not experienced the Disallowing themselves, they are made to re-live their ancestors' sufferings and condemn the Fairly. The ending line of the play, "I once was lost but now am found" (212), suggests that Rubyites convince themselves that they have alleviated and even reconciled with that pain by establishing their own town. Nevertheless, that "something within me" (211) is still left unexplained and keeps haunting both the Ruby ancestors and Rubyites.

As much as the Disallowing reveals the painful abject experience, it is noteworthy that encountering mulattos does not necessarily produce such agony. When Deacon, Steward, and Big Papa Morgan went on what they call "The Grand

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Tour" in the 1910s to see other colored towns, they visit one prosperous town that left a positive impression on the Morgan twins. According to Deacon's memory, there were nineteen ladies with skin "creamy and luminous in the afternoon sun [and] [takes] away his breath" who leave a "pastoral colored and eternal image" in Deacon's mind (109; 110). Deacon's description of the mulattos' skin color, though quite condensed, implies that he is attracted to rather than being hostile to light-skinned mulattos in that phase. This incident suggests that neither these light-skinned mulattos nor the Morgan twins see each other as abjects.

Patricia Best and the Genealogy

After examining the process and impacts of the Fairly's Disallowing, this section looks into the conditions mulattos face through an analysis of Patricia Best's characterization and her history project, the genealogy of Rubyites. I will analyze the difficulties Patricia faces when compiling Ruby's genealogy, the sexual and racial oppression revealed by that genealogy, and eventually her decision to destroy the genealogy herself. Similar to Golden Gray, Patricia complicates and even at certain points reverses the tragic mulatto image. The tragic mulatto, according to Rainer Spencer, refers to a character who wishes "to be white or who otherwise rejects or laments her or his blackness, and whose *internal* racial struggle . . . is the chief source of intense personal tension . . . [and ultimately leads to] a tragic ending" (35-36). For Spencer, tragic mulattos' strong desire to pass or condemnation of their racial identity brings them internal affliction. Annamarie Christiansen points out that the tragic mulatto trope in the nineteenth century representations is highly predictable. The

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mulattos' "vulnerability of color usually results in death, often suicide, or at the very least, being sold down the river" (Christiansen 78). Based on her own perspective, Christiansen contends that Patricia Best displaces the tragic mulatto trope because her position in Ruby embodies Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space which asserts that "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (qtd. in Christiansen 91). From this perspective, Patricia assumes a unique role which is especially crucial for a genealogist. In *Paradise*, Patricia initiates compiling "the genealogies of each of the fifteen families" as a gift to Ruby residents (187). To do so, she collects information through various sources—from students' autobiographical compositions to conversations with Ruby women. Though she painstakingly discovers the exclusionism practiced within Ruby when compiling the genealogy, she burns down the document in the end.

Patricia's mulatto status enables her to compile a detailed genealogy composed of official history, conversation with Ruby women, and her personal reflections. Patricia herself describes that she can interpret where inconsistency between Ruby documents and oral stories occurs "freely but . . . insightfully because she alone [has] the required emotional distance" (188). As much as her mulatto status allows her to better detach herself from the Ruby disciplines, it also hinders her investigation:

> [Patricia] had gleaned from her students' autobiographical compositions. Not anymore. Parents complained about their children being asked to gossip, to divulge what could be private information, secrets, even. After that, most of

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her notes came from talking to people, asking to see Bibles and examining church records. Things got out of hand when she asked to see letters and marriage certificates. The women narrowed their eyes before smiling and offering to freshen her coffee. Invisible doors closed, and the conversation turned to weather. (187)

This passage emphasizes Patricia's difficulty in procuring information from the personal records and discourses, or what Richard Misner observes to be the lives "they shut up" about (161). Firstly, the Ruby women's implicit rejection on hearing Patricia's request manifests both Patricia's ambiguous position among the Rubyites and her daunting ambition to probe into the secretes. They do not reject Patricia's request directly, but they close the "invisible doors" by offering coffee and alternating conversation topics. These women foreclose an in-depth discussion with Patricia possibly to shun the blame from the Ruby men. In doing so, these women highlight the gap between themselves and Patricia, a mulatto who lives among dark-skinned African Americans and dares to break the silenced history. This ambiguous position, nevertheless, allows her to question and reflect on the validity of given historiographies. Secondly, Morrison demonstrates that, compared to public oral history, personal written records such as letters and marriage certifications are much more difficult for Patricia to access but are crucial for her project. Patricia does not entirely trust "[t]he town's official story" told in churches and ceremonies because it "[has] a sturdy public life" (188). Interestingly, *Paradise*, similar to other Morrison's novels, considers oral stories to be an important medium to pass down African

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American heritage[10], but the novel also indicates its unreliability and inconsistency when it serves only the authority.

Patricia's highly reflective genealogy highlights that the crux of Ruby problems includes female and racial oppression. The first example of female oppression lies in "the small *m* period" which appears in Rubyites' family Bibles. Some women, including Delia Best, are recorded only with their first names, which implies that the 8-rocks do not see them as Rubyites. The rest of the women appear only in their last names, indicating the cruel fact that their identities are "rested on the men they [marry]" (187). Another instance, Patricia's shifting surnames, further problematizes female empowerment among different racial identities. After Billy Cato's death, Patricia's students and other Rubyites call her Miss Best instead of Mrs. Cato (199). The change from Cato to Best not only suggests Patricia's widowhood but more importantly, dilutes Patricia's marriage to one of the 8-rock families. While some feminists may believe that retaining one's maiden name is an act of female empowerment, I argue that retaining maiden name is a practice that highlights what Patricia Hill Collins calls "the struggle for individual autonomy" (173). Compared to the self-autonomy many Western feminists emphasize, Collins significantly points out that survival is often more crucial in ethnic women's circumstances (176). This is not to invalidate the argument that using maiden's names can empower women, but rather to suggest that racial factors should also be taken into consideration. In Patricia's case,

[10] In Morrison's novels, oral stories are displayed in different ways and carry various functions. For instance, in the opening lines of *Jazz* and *The Bluest Eye*, oral stories enhance the intimacy between the readers and the narrator and therefore increase the narrators' credibility. It also helps approach the pain, as shown in Alice Manfred and Violet Trace's mutual healing (*Jazz* 83-87) as well as Sethe's storytelling with Beloved (*Beloved* 69).

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having Cato as a surname can better provide security and respect in a town which disregards light-skinned mulattos.

Besides female repression, Patricia also reflects on racial oppression of her mother, Delia Best. Delia, as "a wife of sunlight skin [and] racial tampering" (197), constantly faces exclusion from Rubyites and the Ruby ancestors. When Roger Best asks Delia to live with him, his parents grow uneasy and do not respond directly; Steward Morgan is the one who declares Delia as "the dung we [leave] behind" (201). Roger's parents' reactions, compared to those of Vera Louise's parents in *Jazz*, seem to be less confrontational but equally firm in disapproval. Steward, in comparison, openly condemns the mulatto due to the agonizing Disallowing experience. Delia's skin color is so light that, according to the narration, even a stranger will not believe that Delia is "colored" and is married to Roger Best (200). Patricia sarcastically remarks that Delia's sunlight skin is accepted only when the Ruby women need to attain groceries under one-drop rule (200). From this perspective, it could easily yield to the impression that female bonding between Ruby women and Delia does not exist. Nevertheless, their sisterhood is manifested when Delia has difficulty in child delivery. It is these women who actively and relentlessly ask for Ruby men's permission to seek help from the Convent (197-98). These incidents show that Delia Best is excluded by the Ruby men because of her skin. In contrast to the Ruby men's exclusion, the relationship between Delia and the Ruby women is a female bonding which functions through mutual benefits and care.

Rubyites' exclusivism attitude in fact can also be found on Patricia herself. Patricia's discussion with Richard Minser as they watch the annual Christmas play

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makes her understand that the problems lie not only in Rubyites' authority. The narration also presents Patricia's own exclusivism against the outsider. Previously, she sees herself as the discriminated, marginalized mulatto in Ruby. After the play ends, Patricia contemplates on the way she ends the conversation with Richard Misner when they hold different opinions on home (209). She, similar to what Rubyites women have done to her when being asked for personal information, "[closes] him out to anything but the obvious, the superficial" (216). In other words, Patricia realizes that she may have imitated the Rubyites' exclusionism and practiced it on Misner, an outsider who comes from what Rubyites refers to "Out There" (16).

Patricia's annoyance of her own bias and Rubyites' oppression eventually make her burn down all documents. Morrison provides a detailed description of Patricia's shifting emotions as she ponders the racism in this town. At first, Patricia "[feels] clean" after burning the papers possibly because she believes that she can temporarily rid herself of all the nuisance in compiling the genealogy (217). Then, she brews tea and notices that:

> Tea leaves clustered in its well. More boiling water, a little steeping, and the black leaves would yield more. Even more. Even more. Until. Well, now. What do you know? It was clear as water. The generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too. . . That was their purity. That was their holiness. (217)

The clustered black tea leaves in the well may symbolize the founding families' cohesion in the towns they have built, and the water stands for light-skinned mulattos carrying lurking dangers. This tea brewing scene pictures the 8-rocks' greatest fear—

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light-skinned mulattos such as Delia Best become recognized as members of Ruby and undermine its racial purity, authority, and integrity. Following this discovery, Patricia murmurs "[dear], dear God. I burned the papers" (217). Patricia's words may be interpreted from two contrasting perspectives. It can be read that after Patricia burns the documents, she temporarily relieves herself from the painful truth about Ruby's violent exclusion. On the other hand, her sentences can also suggest a lament on burning the genealogy, a project that she may continue to investigate and even use it to confront Ruby's racist conventions.

Mulatto Mother-Daughter Relationships

Paradise depicts a scene in which the light-skinned mulatto identity complicates the mother-daughter relationships. To be more specific, *Paradise* presents two different mother-daughter relationships that manifest the struggles light-skinned mulatto women such as Patricia's family encounters. Although Delia Best dies of childbirth, Patricia fosters an imaginary bonding with Delia when Patricia reflects on their role in the genealogy. The lengthy reflection allows her to better understand that for the 8-rocks, the mulattos' racial heredities and the abject status can be passed on through the maternal body. Her understanding, however, is not imparted to her own daughter, Billie Delia Cato, especially after Billie's horse-riding incident. The incident leads to Billie's permanent shame in Ruby and severe punishment from her mother. These two contrasting mother-daughter relationships provide an explanation for Patricia's pressure to discipline herself and her daughter. To further investigate mulattos' motherhood, it is crucial to shift the center away from the early white

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feminist approaches to motherhood since they risk understating the importance of race and class. I first offer critics' discussions on the motherhood of marginalized race, then investigate Patricia's discoveries as she ponders her relationship with her mother, and finally analyze Patricia's complex relationship with her daughter.

Morrison's novels delineate mothers of different historical periods, races, and social standings. Several scholars observe that Morrison's depictions of black mothers[11] demonstrate at least two significances. On the first level, most mothers in Morrison's novels defy the ideal, passive, all-giving images. They display "an act of resistance" that refutes "conformity to the definitions imposed on them as stereotypes" (O'Reilly 125; Ghasemi 239). They may be "loving, nurturing, judgmental, punishing, and even murderous" (Eckard 35). On the second level, Morrison frequently portrays the absent mothers or the malfunctioning motherhood. O'Reilly stresses that in *Paradise*, the experiences of "loss and harm, pain and suffering" in motherhood bring women such as Billie Delia Cato to the Convent (133). This home-leaving journey, according to Cullen, is crucial for the characters seeking a different way to conceptualize motherhood and/or womanhood that stresses "the multiplicity of womanhood," commonality, and what Philip Page calls full identification[12] (64).

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[11] I use "black mothers" here in the broad sense to include both dark-skinned African American mothers and mulatto mothers. Although I follow the scholarly fashion which still considers mulattos to be African Americans, I do wish to use *Paradise* and *Jazz* as examples to point out the problems light-skinned mulattos face and how their position affects their motherhood.

[12] Philip Page investigates "loud dreaming," one form of talking cures practiced by the women in the Convent. Page points out that each woman "loses herself in full identification with each other, in acts of total interpretation" in the practice (qtd. in Cullen 64).

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Having an absent mother, Patricia nevertheless is able to imagine her mother's experiences of being a marginalized mulatto in Ruby. The oral memories from others help her understand the role of racial heredity within Ruby from a personal perspective. In Patricia's narration, Delia Best is despised because she is a woman without a last name, with sunlight skin, and acts as an example of racial tampering (197). That is, Ruby men deplore her for being without origins, for her skin color, and for her marriage which potentially puts Ruby's racial purity at risk. In a similar vein, Patricia also ponders her own condition while scribbling notes in the genealogy:

> They hate us because she[Delia Best] looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me, and although I married Billy Cato, who was an 8-rock like you[Roger Best], like them, I passed the skin on to my daughter, as you and everybody knew I would. (196)

It is crucial to note that in Delia's and Patricia's cases, the maternal body seems to pass on not only the skin color but also a specific moral standard which violates the norms in Ruby. The inheritable characteristics, according to Kwame Anthony Appiah, is not dangerous unless they are used in what he calls "extrinsic racism." Appiah asserts that people who believe in extrinsic racism may "[make] moral distinctions between members of different race because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities" (5). In *Paradise*, some members of the founding families such as the Morgan twins appropriate this notion when they falsely link racial markers to mulattos' morality. Here, I contend that combining Kristeva's abjection and Appiah's extrinsic racism sheds light on the way the 8-rocks look at the mulatto maternal body. For the 8-rocks, the abject can be passed on through heredity values

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and therefore causes constant threat of degrading moral values. The 8-rocks believe that they discriminate against Delia, Patricia, and Billie Delia because in their opinion, these mulattos are morally inferior to dark-skinned African Americans. Thus, when mulatto mothers give birth to future generations, the 8-rocks continue to adopt extrinsic racism and accuses mulattos of their downgrading morality.

The racist conception of skin color impacts the way Patricia disciplines herself and her daughter. Patricia describes that she manages to be well-educated "to make sure that everybody [knows] that the bastard-born daughter of the woman with sunlight skin and no last name [is] not only lovely but also of great worth and inestimable value" (203). Patricia's efforts indicate that she believes skin color and the lack of family name can be compensated by her behaviors. This belief becomes so crucial that it is also strictly implemented in her own parenting strategy. After Billie Delia pulls down her underwear to ride the horse at the age of three, she suffers not only from the boys' stares and "the cautionary look in the eyes of girls," but "a permanent watchfulness in her mother" (151). Whereas the boys' blatant stares and the girls' vigilance bring Billie Delia's shame, Patricia's watchfulness is much more aggressive and detrimental because it acts as a continual surveillance of Billie Delia's behaviors. In this vein, I suggest that the motherhood Patricia exhibits shares similarities with the motherhood of dark-skinned African Americans in Morrison's previous novels. For instance, she internalizes the dominant ideology as Pauline Breedlove does in *The Bluest Eye*, has the nearly smothering "thick love" Sethe possesses in *Beloved*, and emphasizes the necessity of displaying well-regulated behaviors as Alice Manfred does in *Jazz*.

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Patricia's aggressive surveillance turns into physical violence in 1973, resulting in Billie Delia's home-leaving. Billie Delia describes in retrospect that Patricia "fought her like a man" (152), which forces her to escape to the Convent and eventually dwell in another town named Demby (202). Compared to Billie's brief yet traumatized narration, Patricia's memory shows her effort to comprehend why she would smash Billie Delia with an electric iron. Patricia hit Billie Delia then because Patricia was convinced that she had an sexual affair with the two Poole boys even though Billie herself refuted it (202). Afterwards, Patricia realizes that she has taken Billie Delia "as a liability . . . [and] not being quite as much of a lady as Patricia *Cato* would like" (203; emphasize mine). Conceiving Billie Delia as a liability suggests that Patricia may have a too strong sense of responsibility to raise a child with proper maternal care. Morrison's use of Cato here implies that Patricia's expectation of her daughter in fact comes from the pressure to blend in with Rubyites. In the previous section, I argue that having Cato has a surname better protects Patricia, a marginalized mulatto, in Ruby. The surname, however, now also acts as handcuffs that require them to behave in conformity to the 8-rocks' values.

Patricia Best's stream of thoughts eventually leads her to a reflection on the present moment. Dwelling on the past memory, Patricia tries to understand

> whether she had defended Billie Delia or sacrificed her. And was she sacrificing her still? The Royal Ease[electric iron] in her hand as she ran up the stairs was there to smash the young girl that lived in the minds of the 8-rocks, not the girl her daughter was. (203-04)

Reflecting on the physical brutality she once imposed on her daughter brings her the

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shocked realization that she did not intend to punish her mulatto daughter. Rather, it is the fabricated, ideal image which abides by the 8-rocks' standard that Patricia Best would instill in her daughter. Patricia also finds herself struggling to "separate what she [has] seen from what she [fears] to see" (202). It is difficult for Patricia to distinguish her own view of Billie Delia from the ideal image which she imposes on Billie Delia. Unlike Golden Gray's vision which enables him to reach out for a dark-skinned African American woman, Patricia's conflated vision prevents her from treating Billie Delia simply as her daughter. The inability to tell the two visions apart implies that Patricia Best may have internalized and imposed Rubyites' racist concepts on her own daughter as well.

With reversed racism as its backdrop, *Paradise* showcases the dilemmas mulattos face and their special mother-daughter relationships based on this identity. The novel moves beyond the common configuration of the tragic mulatto trope which portrays mulattos' tragic and predictable life trajectory. It slowly unveils the ways 8-rocks transform the humiliation they receive from mulattos, or the ones they consider to be "the impure," into reversed racism functioning with a complex mixture of fear and hatred. It also shows that under such racial hostility, Patricia suffers but also becomes the one who investigates and resolves the entangled power structure within Ruby. Another crux of the light-skinned mulatto identity politics lies in the mother-daughter relationship. For the Rubyites, the maternal body becomes the medium for passing on identifiable hereditary characteristics and the accompanying threats. Patricia Best then faces extrinsic racism and even internalizes the biased concept.

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Morrison's *Paradise* then, compared to *Jazz*, shows a less optimistic but more sophisticated, cross-generation characterizations of mulattos.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise* portray many African Americans' concurrent search for identity, whether as individuals or groups, during migration itself and their relocation experiences. In these two novels, Morrison delicately includes American light-skinned mulattos in her racial and sexual agenda and alters earlier conventional literary devices such as tragic mulatto trope and passing mulatto characters. The leading mulatto characters in these two novels frequently confront racist treatments from dark-skinned African Americans and/or white Americans due to their light-skinned mulatto identity, but the dilemmas facilitate their understanding of self and the reflection on their position in the community.

In these two novels, the role mulattos play in racism and exclusion is both similar to and different from that of white Americans' and dark-skinned African Americans'. In *Jazz*, Gray's journey to find a self is accompanied by the experiences of being excluded and excluding others. White American landlords such as Vera Louise's parents despise the non-white and abhor racial miscegenation, while Henry LesTroy is displeased with Gray's challenge and instructs him to live either as an African American or white American. As for the mulatto himself, Gray's childhood upbringing makes him initially adopt racist viewpoints more in line with the whites', as shown in his racial performativity acts. He avoids physical contact with Wild as he believes that she will penetrate his identity border, and he subjugates Honor and

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LesTroy via language and gaze. In *Paradise*, Patricia Best's narration unveils the roots and impacts of racism in Ruby. The Fairly's Disallowing leaves a scar and leads to Rubyites' devotion of racial purity. These mulattos offer their kindness by providing Ruby ancestors' with temporary shelter but refuse to let them stay permanently, which indicates that these mulattos still distance themselves away from their dark-skinned African American peers. Having internalized the pain of being abjects, the 8-rocks blatantly condemns light-skinned mulattos and passes on racism through the official historiography and its remediated version, the annual Christmas play. In a similar vein, Patricia forecloses further discussions with Richard Misner once she treats him as an outsider even though they are both discriminated against in Ruby. These two novels imply that because of their distinctive light-skinned mulatto identity, these mulatto characters can easily become the victims and practitioners of racism, depending on the dominant racial ideology they are in.

The racist concept is also imposed on the mulatto children in different ways. Both *Jazz* and *Paradise* indicate the mothers' pressure to conform to the mainstream racial codes, but they also delineate mother-child relationships at the two extremes of the mothering spectrum. *Jazz* shows Vera Louise's trajectory from performing indulging to indifferent motherhood which Gray interprets as an act of protection under white supremacy, to an abnegation of her maternal role. In contrast, True Belle dedicates herself to taking care of Gray because he embodies a reversed case of racial triumph and more significantly, a receiver for the maternal love she cannot perform for her own daughters. True Belle's meaningful smile even leaves an imprint in his memory, which later on allows him to differentiate various shades of blackness and

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even include him in that spectrum. In comparison, *Paradise* demonstrates Patricia Best's strict parenting strategies from a permanent watchfulness to the physical violence that leads to Billie Delia's home-leaving. Both the surveillance gaze and brutal fight bespeak Patricia's conviction that well-regulated behaviors can reduce the 8-rocks' hostility at the light-skinned mulattos. Patricia's stream of consciousness further discloses that the pressure to blend in has caused difficulty in separating her own view of Billie Delia from the daughter who fails to obey Rubyites' values. In this regard, Patricia's motherhood seems to be a mixture of Morrison's characterization of dark-skinned African American motherhood in *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*—she internalizes the leading racial politics, possesses intense love for her own child, and stresses the importance of decent behaviors. With these two novels, Morrison shows that whereas Vera Louise, a mother of dominating race, chooses to reject or exclude the mulatto from her white ancestry, Patricia, as a mulatto mother holding marginalized position, performs a self-conflicted motherhood more in accordance with dark-skinned African American motherhood.

Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise* thus revise both the literary convention of tragic mulatto trope and depictions of light-skinned mulattos' socially and economically secured life. With theories of object of desire, abject, racial performativity, and discourses on home and motherhood, this thesis interrogates the light-skinned mulatto identity in different social, historical settings as well as the multifaceted racism. These mulatto characters encounter challenges including self-doubt about one's racial identity, fear to engage with dark-skinned African Americans, explicit and implicit racial discrimination from others, and aloof or authoritarian mother-child

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relationships. These challenges, nevertheless, also provide chances for developing knowledge about how to situate themselves in the community and facilitate reflections on parenting strategies of marginalized group. Using American light-skinned mulattos as points of intervention, this thesis hopes to contribute to future analysis of the identity of light-skinned African Americans, and participate in Morrisonian scholars' ongoing discussions on racial and sexual politics.

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