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Love in the Times of Hatred: Miscegenation in *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward

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ABSTRACT

Interracial marriages have been considered taboo for North America from the very beginning. It would be appropriate to look for the origins of this issue in the causes of the Black Lives Matter protests being held these days. Blacks have been exploited by whites in every period of history. Their lands have been occupied and rich underground and aboveground resources have been made available to the white Europeans. Europeans, who were not content with this, sold them to rich landowners like property and killed them with all kinds of torture. The status of blacks, which whites see through the window of slavery and mastership, was not different from animals. Therefore, unification between the two races was seen as a sin. Although this sin was tried to be prevented by violent punishment so as to keep the purity of the white race, sexual intercourse continued between the two races. Prohibitions to prevent racial mixing continued to exist unbelievably until the middle of the second half of the 20th century. Especially in literature produced by African-American writers, it is possible to see that love relations between races are frequently studied. In this study, a comparative analysis of the characters of different races in the Pulitzer winner *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones and National Book Award winner *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward will be done in the context of miscegenation.

Keywords: Miscegenation, Edward P. Jones, *The Known World*, Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

Nefret Günlerinde Aşk: Edward P. Jones'un *The Known World* ve Jesmyn Ward'ın *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Romanlarında Irk Karışımı

ÖZET

Irklar arası evlilikler Kuzey Amerika için en başından beri bir tabu olarak görülmüştür. Bunun kökenlerini bu günlerde şahit olduğumuz Black Lives Matter protestolarının nedenlerinde aramak doğru olabilir. Siyahlar tarihin her döneminde beyazlar tarafından sömürülmüştür. Toprakları işgal edilmiş, zengin yer altı ve yerüstü kaynakları beyaz Avrupalıların hizmetine sunulmuştur. Bununla da yetinmeyip bir mal gibi zengin toprak sahiplerine satılmışlar, türlü eziyetlerle hayatlarını kaybetmişlerdir. Beyazların kölelik ve sahiplik penceresinden gördüğü siyahlarının statüsü hayvanlardan farklı değildi. Bu nedenle iki ırk arasında gerçekleşecek bir birleşme bir günah olarak görülüyordu. Bu günah beyaz ırkın saflığının bozuluyor olması gerekçe gösterilerek şiddetli cezalarla önlenmeye çalışılsa da iki ırk arasında birleşmeler devam ediyordu. Irk karışımını önlemeye yönelik yasaklar inanılmaz biçimde 20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısının ortalarına kadar varlığını sürdürmeye devam etmiştir. Özellikle Afrikan-Amerikan kökenli yazarların ürettiği edebiyatta da ırklar arası aşk ilişkilerinin sıklıkla işlendiğini görmek mümkündür. Bu çalışmada, Edward P. Jones tarafından yazılan Pulitzer ödüllü *The Known World* ve Jesmyn Ward tarafından yazılan Amerikan Ulusal Kitap ödüllü *Sing, Unburied, Sing* romanlarındaki farklı ırklardan karakterlerin ırk karışımı bağlamında karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirilmesi yapılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Irk karışımı, melezleme, Edward P. Jones, *The Known World*, Jesmyn Ward, *Sing Unburied Sing*.

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Introduction

Slavery, the source of the richness of the south, appears as a result of the plantation owners' search for cheap labor. Virginia was the first colony to meet this need for labor force with African slaves. The first Africans brought to the New World were employed as indentured servants and ultimately gained their freedom. But soon these service agreements evolved into slavery. By the 18th century, southern plantation owners knew that slavery would no longer be replaced by any workforce. European white workers could not work as efficiently as African slaves under the hot sun. So the number of slaves increased so much that the ratio of African slaves to the population in British colonies at the end of the colonial period was two out of five (Gallay, 2006, pp. 247–249). The number of Africans who had been forcibly taken from their homeland and sold as slaves in America for four-hundred years had reached 11 million. Those who survived the first years of their slavery had suffered great atrocities; so, many of them realized that they had to keep up with this new order to survive. Those who learned English and adopted Christianity and adapted to these new conditions were called “New Negros” (Schweninger, 2006, p. 235).

Slavery, which was seen as almost a way of life for the pre-war south, has also been a way of defining the region. Slaves were employed in all kinds of jobs imaginable. Some slave owners allowed their slaves to work outside of the plantations, where they could earn money. They charged them for it. This was a small relief for the slaves, as they could choose jobs and masters to work with. However, the antebellum masters' attitudes towards slaves were rather harsh. In response to those who advocated that slavery should be abolished, the masters argued that most of their slaves lived in more favorable conditions than factory workers. But the truth was just the opposite. Despite the persecution they suffered, the submissiveness of the slaves was a kind of proof that they accepted their destiny (Lockley, 2006, p. 242).

With the wealth brought by the slavery institution in the south, an aristocratic upper class was formed. They lived life in pleasure by making full use of the blessings of slavery, which saved them from hard work (Vanspankeren, 1994, p. 12). For the south, which was the country's richest region thanks to slavery before the Civil War, the loss of the war was a disaster. Deprived of the greatest resources of wealth, the south entered a century-long period of poverty and isolation (1994, p. 144).

The slaves, who gained their freedom by breaking their chains during the Civil War, changed the course of the war. Since they had a large share in the victory for the north, a law was issued by the Congress of the United States after the war in which slavery was abolished all over the country. At the beginning of the war, slaves felt closer to Union states in the north. For this reason, in 1861, black slaves declared themselves free and joined the troops of the north to fight against the Confederate States of the south. The Union commanders, who preferred the Blacks to fight or work on their side, gave them their freedom in some cases. In other cases, slaves declared their freedom themselves. Slavery was abolished in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation (Bercaw, 2013, pp. 218–219).

American history is full of incidents of the pursuit of rights and freedom. Although the very roots of its foundation promised equal rights and freedoms to all, indigenous peoples and blacks could not enjoy these rights much. Aside from being protected by the Constitution, blacks were allowed to be treated as property by the white masters of the slave trade, who were taken under legal protection.

On the other hand, although some slaves attempted bloody riots, most of them preferred to protest this situation with more peaceful methods. Nevertheless, whites who took very hard measures against

bloody slave revolts wanted to overawe the abolitionists. Despite the pressures, the number of people who saved themselves from slavery was growing. In the 1830s, the numbers had increased enough to organize anti-slavery conventions (Wallenfeldt, 2011, p. 31). The abolition of slavery in America is a process that spanned two centuries and contributed by many public figures. An abolitionist is usually described as “someone who either joined a movement to end slavery or worked actively to convince slaveholders to emancipate their slaves” (Newman, 2006, p. 39).

It is possible to find the origins of anti-slavery in the colonial period. Early abolitionists lived in northern cities. Some organizations that came together against slavery in 1794 started planning their actions against slavery. This is the first step in the abolitionist organization. But blacks were not yet included in these early organizations. So some blacks tried to establish their anti-slavery societies. They consisted of the first slave activists who gained their freedom and aimed to enlighten the society with social protests and declarations that slavery was against human dignity. Using the newly established independent black churches as epicenters, these groups also helped fugitive slaves (2006, pp. 39–40).

Considering the methods they follow, some abolitionists preferred anti-violence methods, while most black activists defended their right to self-defense against violence. In particular, the laws that allowed the masters to search for and catch the fugitive slaves in the northern states where blacks were relatively comfortable had an important effect on this second view. Communities that protected the fugitives in many northern cities are also an adverse effect of these laws. Such formations have contributed greatly to raising awareness across the country. Because, although the number of anti-slavery Americans was quite low before the Civil War, most were aware of what abolitionism was about. As a result, when slavery was abolished at the end of the civil war, abolitionists played an important role in raising public awareness about equality (2006, pp. 42–43).

One of the methods used by anti-slavery supporters to spread their doctrines was literature. The purpose of this literature, whose roots are based on slave revolts between 1600 and 1700, was to help eradicate slavery by showing the world how barbaric the institution was. It was done by stimulating the public's feelings of empathy towards slaves, often using religious themes. For this purpose, many works of literature were given. One of the most popular types is “Slave Narratives”. These are autobiographical works in which freed or fugitive slaves describe their lives. Especially, such works have important contributions in gathering supporters for the anti-slavery campaign before the Civil War and afterward to abolish slavery (Cuddon, 2013, p. 3).

Even after slavery was abolished, free blacks had to continue fighting to have equal rights with whites. In the post-war reconstruction process, after the military forces of the Union in the south were withdrawn, the former slave owners were trying to reestablish their lost advantage with segregation laws (Wallenfeldt, 2011, p. 32). These so-called Jim Crow laws were social regulations that restricted blacks' lives. In some cases, the practices of segregation were even worse than slavery. At the beginning of the 20th century, 6 million of the 16 million people living in the former confederate states were black. Whites and blacks lived in very different conditions in everyday life. They were studying in different schools, being treated in different hospitals, traveling with different vehicles. The dead, as well as the alive, were treated separately. Like two different worlds on the same planet, there was a distinction between black and white. But blacks were far behind whites in terms of the public service they received. With a kind of caste system, blacks enjoyed fewer rights and freedoms than whites. They had no right to vote. Illiterate blacks were abused in trade by cunning whites. A justice system

was established by whites, where blacks could be punished for their smallest discordance. While blacks used words of respect when addressing whites, there was no such requirement for whites while addressing blacks. A black, who encounter a white while walking on the sidewalk, had to give way. Successful or wealthy blacks were not acceptable. Most blacks would have to hide what they had (Fremon, 2000, pp. 27–31).

A Brief History of Miscegenation in the US

The word miscegenation, which first appeared in a booklet about the mixture of black and white races in 1863, consists of a combination of Latin words *miscere*, which means mixing, and *genus*, which means race. In the United States, where inter-racial unification was not much compared to South America, miscegenation was seen as a threat to the superiority and purity of the white race. But blacks brought into the New World as slaves were already mixed with Europeans and Asians in the race. Before the term miscegenation, there were expressions such as “racial amalgamation” and “mulatto” that described interracial sexual intercourse and childbearing. These expressions were also indications of the prejudices of white Americans towards uniting with the black race. In the 1600s, the racial amalgamation was mostly made up of male slaves and lower-class women from the white race working in-home services. There were a few female black slaves to use in houses so the white women from lower classes were keeping landowners’ houses, and the miscegenation in the lower classes was not being taken too seriously (Edelstein, 2009, pp. 184–185).

From the very beginning, there were marriages between whites and other races. Due to the interest in black men among white women, the male masters pursued decades of fear and intimidation policies on blacks. Precautions against interracial intercourse began to be taken early. In 1630, a white American named Hugh Davis was sentenced to whipping for embarrassing God and Christians by engaging with a black woman. Later, because of this sin, white women were whipped and even sold as slaves. Nevertheless, such precautions were mildly tolerant when compared to future measures. There were reasons for that. Lerone Bennett explains it as such:

(...) the pioneer white women-and the pioneer white men-did not know they were white. There was no conception then-and no name-for whiteness. There was, secondly, no organized system of racism to define and focus the fears and anxieties of whites. Third, and most important, most of the white colonists were indentured servants, who were subjected to the same indignities as black servants and slaves and were held in equal contempt. (Bennett, 1993, p. 298)

The black and white indentured servants in the early colonies would work together and stay in the same places. For this reason, it is not so strange that black and white servants who share almost the same fate have a relationship. There have been legal or illegal marriages between these two separate races. As a result, too many mulattoes have joined the population (1993, p. 299).

Bennett does not believe that this is due to the regular abuse of black women by white masters, as some historians say. According to him, some studies have revealed that mulattoes are mostly descendants of black fathers. It is possible to see that the white woman of this period is free from racial prejudice from the court records, newspapers, and eyewitness statements (1993, p. 300).

Some landlords were against miscegenation, but for economic reasons, most white masters did not interfere with the relations between black and white servants. But when economic interests changed, thoughts about blacks changed, too. With the adoption of slavery as a workforce in the last quarter of

the 1600s, impenetrable cliffs began to be established between blacks and whites. The aim was to institutionalize slavery and make use of blacks as much as possible. Black will remain black and white will remain white. For this, religious propaganda was made to raise awareness of white women and men against racial amalgamation (1993, p. 301).

This danger ought to be prevented not only through religion but also through the justice system. For this, laws prohibiting whites and other races from marrying or establishing intimate relationships were legislated. The first state to legislate such a law was Virginia, which banned interracial fornication in 1662, long before the term "miscegenation" came into existence. In 1664, Maryland became the first colony to ban whites from marrying other races. The addressee of these laws was especially the black race. A function of these laws was to ensure the continuation of slavery. The mulattoes born from white fathers were not different from their slave mothers in terms of rights. So they couldn't enjoy the rights and freedoms that whites enjoyed (Robinson, 2009, p. 21).

In the following century, inter-racial relations and marriages were banned in British colonies such as North Carolina and Georgia, under the pretext of the disappearance of the white culture. Such prohibitions have also been used to minimize contact between whites working in-home services and blacks in the field. As a result, the miscegenation of black and white races has decreased considerably due to the increasing number of black female slaves, and the decline in the number of white women working at house services. From the eighteenth century to the abolition of slavery, miscegenation usually took place among white masters and slave black women. Until slavery was abolished, laws that prevented racial amalgamation in northern states continued to be introduced. Laws not only punished those who got married but also punished the clergyman who held the ceremony. To qualify a person as black and evaluate his/her relationship with a white as miscegenation, it was enough to have a black or mulatto ancestor in three generations before (Edelstein, 2009, p. 185).

Laws continued to be enacted against the miscegenation during and after the Reconstruction period when slavery was abolished. The segregation laws, also called Jim Crow laws, were a way to remind blacks who were liberated upon the abolition of slavery that they were an inferior race. While these laws allowed white men to abuse black women, they were more brutal when black men had relationships with white women. They also imposed various restrictions on the inheritance rights of mulattoes (Robinson, 2009, p. 22). The end of the blacks, who were found to be related to or suspected of being related to white women, was mostly death. This death could have been as a result of the rape accusation by the court or by the mob lynching the black man without a fair trial. The relationship of a white man with a black woman was not seriously punished (Fremon, 2000, p. 32). With the Emancipation Proclamation and the resulting freedom, the miscegenation began to be a growing dread. Whites were paranoid enough to think that blacks were perverts who wanted to rape white girls. As a result of these fears, with the end of the Reconstruction, there had been an increase in the laws against interracial marriage. When slavery was abolished, the contact between whites and blacks decreased to a minimum, and miscegenation also saw a major decline. Segregation laws also served the purpose of ending the racial amalgamation, as it almost eliminated relations between the two races. Despite the winds of change and the search for rights in the country, there were still 20 states where interracial marriage was illegal in the 1930s. In 1965, a black-and-white couple in Virginia was sentenced to prison because their marriage was against the laws of the god (Edelstein, 2009, pp. 186–187). With the Civil Rights movement, discriminatory laws against African-Americans began to attract social reaction. Like most discriminatory laws, anti-miscegenation laws were reconsidered in this process. When a couple of different races in Virginia were punished for breaking the law, they

brought the case to the higher court. In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional (Robinson, 2009, p. 22).

Whites, who were quite paranoid about miscegenation, could not tolerate this even in literature. The audience had to wait until the middle of the 20th century for Shakespeare's *Othello* to be staged by a black actor and a white actress. *Othello* has declined considerably in the number of screenings due to theater owners who are against staging as written. While whites' point of view to the miscegenation is like this, the blacks' perspective is ambivalent. Some blacks find it positive because it means harmonizing with whites, while others argue that miscegenation is a negative phenomenon that rejects the black identity (Edelstein, 2009, p. 187).

***The Known World* by Edward P. Jones**

Meryemma Graham says that for most African-American writers, the act of writing is a form of cultural revisionism, redefining history and facing the past. The way to shape the future is to make sense of the past. Since slavery is one of the most important points in the common past, which must be understood, there are many lessons to be learned from it (Graham, 2004, p. 5). Both the novels that will be examined in this study scrutinize slavery and its continuing effects, such as racism, to confront the past.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Known World*, written by Edward P. Jones in 2003, is a combination of many of the characters' small stories, all somehow related to a black slave owner named Henry Townsend, who used to be a slave himself. The events described in the novel do not proceed in a straight timeline. It can sometimes become complicated, with an ever-shifting plot between now, the past and the future. The book begins with the death of 31-year-old Henry Townsend, who owns more than thirty slaves, in 1855. Henry is a former slave whose freedom was bought by his father Augustus with the money he earned from carpentry. Father Augustus first buys his freedom, then his wife Mildred's, and finally his son Henry's from their white owner William Robbins.

When he is a slave to Robbins, he stands out with his diligence and skill and is protected by his owner. After his freedom, his relationship with Robbins continues. Robbins teaches him how to be a landowner and how to treat his slaves. He buys Moses, his first slave, from Robbins. He sows the first seeds of the farm he dreams of with Moses. When he tells his mother and father that he has bought a slave and decided to start his plantation, he is sent away by his father. In response, he says: "Papa, I ain't done nothin I ain't a right to. I ain't done nothin no white man wouldn't do. Papa, wait. (...) I ain't broke no law. I ain't. You listen here (...) Papa, just cause you didn't, that don't mean ..." Then, his father takes one of the canes he made and beat Henry, and expresses his disappointment: "Thas how a slave feel! (...) Thas just how every slave every day be feelin'" (Jones, 2003, p. 131).

Robbins does his best to make Henry ready for the mastership. He mediates his training from a free black teacher named Fern Elston. He sees Caldonia in a dinner that Elston gives to her students and they soon get married. After Henry dies, Caldonia invites Moses, the overseer of their slaves, to the mansion every day to report on jobs. During these visits, Moses often tells Caldonia, who bears the pain of her lost husband, how they built the house with Henry. These stories often do not reflect the truth, but for Caldonia, it is a way to alleviate the pain she is experiencing.

Moses and Caldonia become emotionally closer, and it is probably because of the emotional gap Caldonia has experienced due to the loss of Henry. They have intercourse some nights. His closeness

with his mistress in this way makes him believe that he will own the farm in the future. But there is an obstacle. Moses is married to Priscilla and has a son named Jamie. He convinces them to escape from the plantation. He gives them Alice, another slave who has lost his mental balance, as a guide. Alice has lost her sanity because she was kicked by a mule in the head. She goes away from the farm every night and walks around and returns late in the night. The slave patrols she encounters in the meantime do not interfere with her because they know her. When his wife and his son run away with Alice, Moses asks Caldonia if she would give his freedom. When he realizes that she has no such intention, he shows signs of anger, but the housemaid Loretta intervenes and throws Moses out of the house with the help of a knife. Totally disappointed, Moses also is the subject of the doubts about his escaping family and decides to escape from the farm. But since he does not know geography very much, he cannot find the way to freedom. He takes refuge in the house of Mildred, who is the mother of his dead master Henry. Meanwhile, Augustus, Mildred's husband, is sold to the slave traders by wanton slave patrols, after his certificate of freedom is eaten by one of them. As a result, Augustus will be shot and killed in a very remote state, because he does not want to work, saying that he is a free black. Sheriff John Skiffington thinks that the fleeing slaves are hiding in Mildred's house. He goes there with Counsel, his cousin, who, after an epidemic, loses all his slaves and his family and set fire to his farm before coming to be his deputy. John Skiffington is actually an antislavery lawman because of his religiosity, but he tries to do his job properly as he keeps the law in front of religion. When Mildred refuses to give Moses and meets them with a rifle, John kills her by accident. He sends Counsel to search for Moses inside the house. Counsel can't find Moses, but he finds a few gold coins inside. Thinking that there are more, he kills his cousin John with Mildred's weapon, making it look like she shot him. Meanwhile, Moses comes up with his hands in the air. While taking him away Counsel encounters other slave patrols. They cut Moses's Achilles tendons before taking him to the plantation he fled. Moses's wife, son, and Alice live freely in Washington D.C. while he spends the rest of his life as a cripple on Townsend plantation.

Miscegenation is not at the center of the novel as a theme but is evident enough to allow an ironic and brave critique of the slavery system. William Robbins, one of the two wealthiest landowners in Manchester County, Virginia, the setting of the novel, has a relationship with a black slave named Philomena. William Robbins is the former owner of Henry and his family. Robbins had a relationship with another black woman before Philomena, and he has two children from her. But although they live in a remote corner of the farm, he has not gone to see them for almost a year.

Robbins sees Philomena and buys her when he visits Colfax, another big landowner in Manchester County. When Philomena gets pregnant with Dora, he fears that his white wife will harm them, so he builds a house for her and gives her a servant. Then, at her request, he buys her mother and brother and places with her. Dora's birth brings Robbins closer to Philomena. He is no longer angry that Philomena addresses him by name. He has a daughter named Patience from his white wife Ethel. But Ethel lost her place in the heart of her husband. She is aware of Philomena and Dora but does not know about Louis, their second child until he is three years old. Robbins loves Philomena and his children born from her. Every week, he rides his horse to see Philomena and his two children, Dora and Louis. The author says the following about a census taken at that time: "The census did not say that the children were Robbins's flesh and blood and that he traveled into Manchester because he loved their mother far more than anything he could name (...)" (2003, p. 22). Robbins has a neurological disease. Sometimes he has seizures like lightning strikes in his brain. At these moments he forgets where he is and who he is. He thinks that the cause of the attacks is due to his love for

Philomena: "He saw the storms as the price to be paid for Philomena and their children" (2003, p. 26). As can be seen from here, Robbins is caught between his love for Philomena and his children and his white conscience. That is why he thinks that his deed is a sin to be paid a price. When Philomena escapes to Richmond, where she has been dreaming of living since childhood, he searches and finds her like a fugitive slave. It is understood from here that if he has to choose between his feelings for Philomena and the centuries-old master-slave cultural heritage, he will choose the latter.

To understand what kind of crime miscegenation might have been at that time, it is enough to read the following quote, which tells what happened to a white woman and her slave when their relationship became evident:

A white woman in Bristol had been whipped for such an offense, and her slave was hanged from a tree in what passed for the town square. Three hundred people had come to see it, the whipping and the hanging, the former in the morning and the latter in the afternoon. People brought their children, their infants, who slept through most of the activities. (...) In Bristol, the authorities claimed the white woman had been with child. No word of mouth or the newspaper account said what had become of the child. (2003, p. 273)

We know that influential white men like William Robbins don't have such fears. But when the white party who commits this crime is a woman, the wheels of the system start to turn. This fear has penetrated so deep that Caldonia, who had a relationship with slave Moses after her husband died, wonders "if Virginia had a law forbidding such things between a colored woman and a colored man who was her slave" and ask herself "Was this a kind of miscegenation" (2003, p. 273). As the word was first used eight years after this event, the use of the word "miscegenation" is an anachronism here. However, since she and her slave with whom she has a relationship are black, she knows that this is not possible, but she expresses her fear in this way, which may be the expression of her subconscious desire to be a white woman.

As a taboo, whatever measures were taken by the authorities against miscegenation, it failed. The racial amalgamation was occurred, in some cases, by force since the slaves were viewed as property, on which the masters regarded themselves the rightful owner, in other cases, just as in the case of Robbins and Philomena, by the magic of love which blinded them, so that they did not notice the skin color. Those of the second case were less successful in controlling themselves. Sheriff John Skiffington is one of the exceptions until he dies. Before Skiffinton came to Manchester County and became the sheriff, he lived with his parents in North Carolina on a farm owned by his father's cousin, where more than two hundred slaves worked. His father is the white overseer of the plantation. Because of a dream he had after his wife died, he thinks he should get away from the slavery system, so he leaves the plantation and devotes himself to religion. Just like his father, John is against slavery. When he gets married, his cousin Counsel, who came to his wedding from the farm they used to work, gives them a nine-year-old slave girl named Minerva as a wedding gift. His wife, Winifred, does not want a slave in her life like John. But they don't know what to do with Minerva. It is not possible to give her to someone else because they cannot know in advance whether they will treat her well or badly. So they decide to keep her with them. They raise her like their own daughter. But one day John's thoughts about Minerva take a different dimension. On the morning of Minerva's fifteenth birthday, he sees her dressing up in her room. The girl does not see him, and he leaves without saying anything. But since then, he hasn't gotten her out of his mind. Here's John's dilemma expressed by the author:

He knew many a white man who had taken black women as their own, and among those men, he would have been thought normal. But he saw himself living in the company of God, who

had married him to Winifred, and he believed God would abandon him if he took Minerva. And Winifred would discover what he had done, even if Minerva never said a word. (2003, p. 288)

On the one hand, while trying to make sense of his desire to have Minerva with the pressure of his feelings, on the other hand, his love for his wife, Winifred, keeps him from this. Piety is another reason that restrains him. He constantly prays God to guide him. But every time he sees Minerva, he thinks his prayers are in vain. He feels guilty for feeling that way for someone he regards as his daughter and thinks about his regrets, but suddenly catches himself on the sin again:

He and Winifred and his father and Minerva should have been in Pennsylvania long ago. (...) He should have been on the bank of a nice river, showing his son how to make a living just from God's bounty. And Minerva should have been out, out with some Pennsylvania Negro, out so that he would not think about her in a way a father should not think about a daughter. Out and about, Minerva should be, so that he would not think, as he had the day before, that once, just once, would not hurt anyone, would not disturb anything that mattered. Shhh . . . Don't tell Winifred, and don't tell God. Shhh . . . (2003, p. 316)

John Skiffington wrestles with tides caused by emotions for a slave girl whom he sees as his daughter: "Just once . . . Is that what Eve said to Adam, or did Adam say that to her? And if it was just once, would God allow him to see Pennsylvania" (2003, p. 317). John Skiffington was killed by his cousin Counsel while it wasn't too long after these thoughts. It is difficult to predict whether he would have mastered these impulses if he lived.

***Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward**

National Book Award winner *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, written by Jesmyn Ward in 2017, is narrated by three different characters. It is a novel that tells the relationship between a black and white couple and their two children born from their marriage. It begins with the morning of the thirteenth birthday of Joseph, who is called Jojo. He is the first child of a black mother - Leonie - and a white father - Michael. His father is sent to prison three years ago for a drug-related crime. Jojo has a three-year-old sister, who was born while her father was in prison. Her real name is Michaela, but everyone except her mother and father calls her Kayla. There is a very close connection between Jojo and Kayla. While their fathers were in prison, their mothers took little care of themselves. So, for Kayla, Jojo is almost both a mother and a father.

Michael and Leonie have lived with Leonie's parents since Leonie got pregnant with Jojo. So, Jojo and Kayla have been living with their grandparents River and Philomène, whom they called 'Pop' and 'Mam' respectively. Michael's father, Big Joseph (Jojo was named after him), is racist and does not approve of his son's relationship. Jojo has seen Big Joseph just twice in his lifetime, one of them happened three years ago when he came to take Michael from River and Philomène's house before he got in jail.

On Jojo's birthday, the phone rings while celebrating in Mam's room with a birthday cake brought by his mother. The caller is Michael and informs Leonie that he will be released soon. Michael works as a welder on an oil drilling platform in the bay before getting into the drug addiction that causes him to go to jail. He lost many friends and his job as a result of an explosion. Even though Pop protests, Leonie says that their father will want to see their children and says she will take them to the prison. The prison where Michael is held is the Parchman prison, where Pop was also once served his time

after an unfair charge. Parchman was no different from the big plantations of slavery when Pop was imprisoned. Prisoners were employed in the fields, and punishments such as whipping were used to maintain order. Black and whites were treated differently here.

Leonie takes her fellow worker Misty with them before going to Parchman. Misty is a white woman, whose black boyfriend is also in Parchman, so they often have prison visits together. Misty is a drug addict just like Leonie. When Leonie takes drugs, she sees his dead brother, Given. Given was shot dead by Michael's cousin for winning a claim made during a hunt. Michael's father, Big Joseph who is an ex-sheriff's, his uncle and his cousin, who shot Given, go to the crime scene. The author describes the scene as follows:

(...) Given lying long and still in the pine needles, his blood a black puddle beneath him. Beer cans all around him from the boys throwing them and running once the cousin with the bad eye aimed and fired, once the shot rang out. How they scattered like roaches in the light. The uncle had slapped his son across the face, once and twice. *You fucking idiot*, he'd said. *This ain't the old days*. And then his cousin had put his arms up and mumbled: *He was supposed to lose, Pa*. (Ward, 2017, p. 41)

The incident happens a short time before the 2000s, but the conversation between the boy who shot Given and his father is meaningful for it shows the whites' view towards blacks. After all, the event is considered a hunting accident by the court and the killer gets a minor punishment. Michael and Leonie meet a year after this event.

Leonie takes her kids and Misty and sets off for Parchman. It is up to Jojo to take care of Kayla, who is vomiting along the long journey to prison. They spend the night with Michael's lawyer, Al. Before they get to Al's place, they get drugs from somewhere. They think they can earn money by selling drugs because, according to Misty, they need to take advantage of opportunities. They pay Al with the drug they get.

When they get Michael out of jail the next morning, Richie's ghost gets into the car with them. Only Jojo and Kayla can see him. Richie was a twelve-year-old black boy who was imprisoned with Pop in Parchman for stealing because his siblings were hungry. He was the youngest of the prisoners. They made friends with Pop because their age was close. Pop assumed paternity on Richie and protected him. One day, Richie had to flee from Parchman. The responsibility of the dogs used for tracking the fugitives was on Pop. So when Richie escaped, he involuntarily joined the team to search for him. There was another black prisoner who forced Richie to run. He was on the run, too. But when the inmate attacked a white woman, he was caught by the people and lynched after his limbs were cut and was skinned. Pop found Richie hiding. Richie cried for help, but Pop killed him because he thought he had nowhere to escape and did not want Richie, whom he loved like a son, be treated like the other inmate.

Jojo has repeatedly listened to the story, except for the part that Richie escaped and the facts afterward. Now Richie's ghost asks Jojo for help, saying that the rest of the story will free him. He accompanies them in the car on the way back. They are ill-treated by a police officer who stops them on the road. Pop and Mam are not at home when they arrive, and Michael thinks it's time to introduce his father and mother to their grandchildren. When Big Joseph opens the door, he says he doesn't want to see them at his house, but Michael's mother Maggie pulls him aside and takes the kids inside. Maggie is not racist like Big Joseph. But Big Joseph can't hold himself and makes racist insults to

Leonie, her children and Pop. Thereupon, Michael and his father fall in a fight. They go back to Leonie's parents' house. Pop greets them and tells Michael "I expect it's good to be home" (2017, p. 166). The condition of Mam, who has cancer, has worsened. In order to die properly according to her belief, she asks for her daughter's help in performing some kind of pagan ritual. Meanwhile, Richie's ghost never leaves Jojo's presence. Richie's soul is finally released when Jojo makes his grandfather tell the whole story. Later than, Mam performs the ritual and dies. Her spirit rises with the spirit of her son Given. The book ends with the scene where Jojo and Kayla see the ghosts of those who died as slaves perched on the surrounding trees like birds.

Miscegenation is at the heart of Ward's novel. The reaction of the society for the relationship of black Leonie, white Michael directly affects the course of their life. Michael and Leonie go to the same high school. A year has passed since Given was killed by Michael's cousin. Michael approaches Leonie, who is sitting in the schoolyard and says that he is sorry for her brother. He had never spoken to her before. They probably never even paid attention to each other before Given was killed. But it is possible to say that Michael has been following Leonie closely for a year between the murder and the meeting. Did he feel a closeness to the girl who lost her brother with a sense of pity? Or, has he discovered something that may have led him to offer her to go out because he had been watching her for a year? Or, is it nothing, but an obsession that Michael's got? What is known is that the two love each other very much. Michael loves her enough to confront his father, whom he describes as "a old head" (2017, p. 44). Leonie loves Michael, too. Seeing what Leonie's love made her, Mam warns: "It ain't healthy, (...) All you hear, all you see, is him, (...) Every time you say something, you look at him like a little puppy dog. Like you waiting for him to pet you" (2017, pp. 119–120). The reason why Leonie loves him can be understood from what she says:

(...) from the first moment I saw him walking across the grass to where I sat in the shadow of the school sign, he saw me. Saw past skin the color of unskimmed coffee, eyes black, lips the color of plums, and *saw me*. Saw the walking wound I was, and came to be my balm. (2017, p. 45)

Discrimination due to her skin color caused deep wounds on her. In such a period, a white's interest in her felt like a remedy to her wounds. Although it may seem like going too far in the comment, it can be said that Leonie suffered some form of Stockholm Syndrome. Her brother was killed by a close relative of the man she is in love with. And the only reason in the murder was the skin color. While she is the sister of the victim of such a hate crime, it is not very healthy to fall in blind love with a member of the family who committed this crime, as Mam puts it.

Their families have different views on their relationships. Michael's father, Big Joseph is racist. When Michael gets out of jail and brings his family to his parents' house, Big Joseph's reaction reveals his identity. He stands before his son and his family at the door to his house. When his wife, Maggie wants him to let them in, he says: "You know they ain't welcome in this house" (2017, p. 158). Maggie is more moderate than her husband. She introduces herself to her grandchildren. But they remain silent, probably because they are afraid. Big Josef finds this behavior rude and blames their mothers: "Raised by her, what you'd expect, Maggie? (...) Hell, they half of her. Part of that boy Riv, too. All bad blood. Fuck the skin. (...) [To Michael-] I told you they don't belong here. Told you never to sleep with no nigger bitch!" (2017, pp. 161–162).

The reaction of Leonie's family is more humane despite their lost sons. When she brings Michael in to meet her family, neither her father nor her mother reacts negatively. After Michael leaves, Mam

advises his daughter to be careful. When Leonie asks if they loved him, she replies: "I . . . it ain't his fault what he was born to. (...) Into that family. (...) He just a boy, a boy like any other his age. Smelling his piss for the first time and thinking with his nether-head" (2017, p. 120).

But their relationship with Leonie's parents will be broken. Michael loses his welding job after an accident, in which many of his friends died. He was dragged into drugs due to his crisis related to this event. He makes Leonie an addict like himself. He starts cooking drugs in his shed next to Leonie's parents' house. This is not welcomed by Pop and Mam, and Michael has to leave and live with Big Joseph just a little before his arrest. Leonie's co-worker from the restaurant, Misty, is also a drug addict, and her boyfriend is in the same prison as Michael. She tells Leonie that she wants to turn the journey to prison into an opportunity. The opportunity is to buy and sell drugs from a producer on their way to Parchman. Misty tries to persuade Leonie saying:

If we do this, the trip's paid for. (...) You and Michael could have enough for a deposit. Y'all could get your own place. You always say the problem is y'all parents. Yours 'cause you live with them; his because they're assholes. (...) How you think I paid for all my trips up to Bishop? From tips? (...) You better take advantage. (2017, p. 72)

As it turns out, living with Leonie's family has become a problem for Michael before his arrest. Leonie has been complaining about this at the drug parties with Misty.

Misty is a white woman. As her lover Bishop is a black man, it is possible to evaluate their relationship in the title of miscegenation. Bishop is a drug dealer. Misty seems to have visited the place where she wants to stop to turn the journey into an opportunity before with Bishop (2017, p. 63). This is probably the reason why he was put in jail. Misty has tattooed the initials of Bishop's name on her ring finger. Leonie is friends with Misty because of their common characteristic which is "loving across color lines" (2017, p. 29). Misty has grown up in a loveless family, which is why she says she needs Bishop (2017, p. 29). From this point of view, their similarity with Leonie is not only their love of different colors. They both filled a gap they fell in for different reasons, with their lovers of different colors. While Leonie was trying to overcome the inferiority complex caused by racism with a white man, Misty had a relationship with a black drug dealer to take revenge on her mother, love of whom she never felt.

The last person to be mentioned from the novel is a prisoner named Blue who was in Parchman when Pop was in prison. Blue is a huge black and he is the reason why Pop kills Richie. He takes Richie by force while escaping from prison. While the patrols search for them, Blue tries to rape a white girl who takes water from the fountain. Richie prevents this. When the girl escapes and tells what happened to her family, a crowd gathers and starts looking around for them. Blue, who was found by the mob before the patrols, is lynched after the limbs are cut one by one. Pop, who joined the search team for being responsible for the sniffer dogs, finds Richie before the angry mob. Pop knows what the screams of Blue heard from afar mean. He tells everything happened in that day to his grandson Jojo:

They were going to do the same to him. Once they got done with Blue. They were going to come for that boy and cut him piece from piece till he was just some bloody, soft, screaming thing, and then they were going to string him up from a tree. (...) He wasn't nothing but a boy, Jojo. They kill animals better than that. (2017, p. 198)

Pop tries to calm Richie, who is asking for help with fear. He tells Richie that he will take him home. What he did is told by him as follows:

Yes, Richie. I'm a take you home, I said. And then I took the shank I kept in my boot and I punched it one time into his neck. In the big vein on his right side. Held him till the blood stopped spurting. Him looking at me, mouth open. A child. Tears and snot all over his face. Shocked and scared, until he was still. (...) I laid him down on the ground. Told the dogs to get. They smelled the blood. Tore into him. (2017, p. 198)

What Pop does to Richie, whom he loves and watches like his own child, may seem brutal. But since it is inevitable for Richie to experience the same end with Blue, who was lynched, it is concluded that his killing of Richie was due to his mercy. He kills him in the fastest and the most painless way that he knows. That he let dogs tear him apart after he died has also a symbolic meaning. Slaves, who escaped in the years of slavery, were searched with dogs. The fact that the same practice continues in Parchman after a hundred years is a reference to the continuing slavery. Also, being torn off by dogs rather than falling into the hands of whites, can be considered as criticism for white persecution.

Some Similarities and Differences

It is possible to find some similarities and differences when examining the motivations that lead the characters to the miscegenation. The reason for the relationship between William Robbins and Philomena in *The Known World* is love according to Robbins. In fact, he attributes the storms in his head to this temptation. There is not enough evidence to say that Philomena experienced the same emotions. After all, she is a slave and she knows that she is obliged to obey her master. So, it can be difficult to fully discover the roots of her loyalty to Robbins.

The reason for the relationship between Michael and Leonie in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is love, too. They both love each other. Michael does it at the expense of confronting his family. In fact, given his family's thinking style, he does something that the whiteness pride should never allow. He starts to live with Leonie's parents. Leonie loves Michael despite the blood feud between families. Michael's cousin killed Leonie's brother Given years ago for losing a claim. It is Michael's racist father, Big Joseph, who makes this hate crime assumed as an accident and ensures that the cousin is saved with a minor punishment. It is clear that Leonie loves Michael, but her conscience is not very comfortable with it. This can be understood from her seeing Given's ghost after Michael went to jail.

Misty and Bishop also apparently have a love affair. There is not much information about Bishop except that he buys and sells drugs with Misty and he loves Misty's hair. But it is possible to say that she loves him since Misty has his name tattooed on her ring finger.

In both of the novels examined, a black man is lynched because of either raping or having an affair with a white woman. In *The Known World*, a white woman from Bristol was whipped because she had an affair with her black slave, and her black slave was hanged before the public. Death does not come so easily for the black man in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. His lynching was not caused by a voluntary relationship like the one between the white woman from Bristol and her slave. His crime is a rape attempt. Surprisingly, there is another similarity between the two events. Both events occur when miscegenation is illegal. The first one was in Virginia in the 1850s and the second one was in Mississippi in the 1950s. Another seventeen years had to pass for the decision of the United States Supreme Court, which completely repealed the ban on inter-racial affairs. What is even more surprising is that even today, some wedding venues do not want to serve customers of different races with religious references, and this is legal (See Reilly, n.d.).

There are also differences between the characters of the two novels in terms of their relationship with their mulatto children. William Robbins is quite fond of Dora and Louis. For example, he calls his son “my little prince. My little princely prince” (Jones, 2003, p. 24). He loves him enough to think that his son's eye problem is the persecution of God. In turn, Louis loves his father and looks forward to seeing him. When his father comes, he takes Louis to his knees and moves him up and down. Louis calls his father “My horsey Mr. William” (2003, p. 24). Robbins hires the best teacher for the education of his mulatto children. One day, while returning from Richmond in a carriage, he looks at Dora, who is sleeping on his lap, and thinks “this would be a good way for him to die, right there, on the road home with his children” (2003, p. 115).

Michael and Leonie's relationship with their children is not so positive. Leonie is not suitable to be a mother from the very beginning. While Mam is on her deathbed, she explains it to Jojo as follows:

I don't know if it's something I did. Or if it's something that's in Leonie. But she ain't got the mothering instinct. I knew when you was little and we was out shopping, and she bought herself something to eat and ate it right in front of you, and you was sitting there crying hungry. I knew then. (Ward, 2017, p. 182)

Leonie does not hesitate to use violence on her children. Jojo wants to object to her mother because of the herbal tea she gave to Kayla, but he backs up. He explains it like this:

She might hit me. I did a lot of talking when I was younger, when I was eight and nine, in public. And then one day she slapped me across the face, and after that, every time I opened my mouth to talk against her, she did that. Hit me so hard her slaps started feeling like punches. Made me twist to the side, my hand on my face. Made me sit down once in the middle of the aisle in Walmart. So I stopped. (2017, p. 91)

Michael is no different from Leonie. He asks Jojo to buy some charcoal and milk from a roadside shop to treat Leonie, who got into the drug coma while on the way home from Parchman. The trip is also very difficult for his three-year-old sister Kayla. Along the way, she vomits constantly. Finally, she sleeps in Jojo's arms; so he refuses when his father tells him to go to the shop, saying that Kayla will wake. When Misty says he's going to pick up the stock, Michael won't let her. Forcing Jojo to go, Michael raises his hand, and when he is about to be hit, Jojo gives in and goes shopping (2017, pp. 134–136). Misty could go, and there was no reason stopping him from going, but the way he insists that Jojo should go shows the degree of his love for his children. The morning they arrive at Leonie's parents' house Michael tries to show his longing for the children by saying “I just want you and Michaela to know that I'm here. I'm here to stay. And I missed y'all” (2017, p. 177). After just a few minutes, he starts yelling at Kayla and beating her. Jojo rescues her from Michael's hands and takes her out. Jojo thinks his mother will get angry with Michael when he beats Kayla but then realizes she doesn't care (2017, p. 178).

There may be a reason for their indifference to their children. While returning from prison, Leonie dreams of the good old days she had with Michael. While regretting because she could not live those beautiful moments to the backbone, she thinks:

I've never had enough of this. After Michael and I got together in high school, I got pregnant with Jojo in just under a year: I was seventeen. Ever since then we had Jojo and Michaela around us, making those spaces bigger between us. I remember it in flashes, mostly when I'm high, that feeling of it just being me and Michael, (...). (2017, p. 119)

As can be seen from here, Leonie sees her children as an obstacle between her and Michael. When Jojo tells Mam that his mother hates them, Mam tells that it's not true. According to her, Leonie loves them, but her love for Michael and herself confuses her and prevents her love for her children (2017, p. 183). It turns out that Leonie is too selfish to show her love for her children.

Conclusion

Slavery has been a disgrace in the history of the American continent as a result of white landowners' pursuit of cheaper labor. Throughout the four centuries of American slavery history, millions of African people took their places in the destiny of the new world as slaves. Africans employed as slaves were punished when they showed the slightest sign of dissatisfaction. Some occasional slave revolts that could not withstand the cruelty were suppressed in a very bloody way. Until the Civil War, this situation continued. When the war started, the slaves naturally fought in ranks of the Union of the north against the Federalist south. Thanks to their effort in winning the war by the north, they gained their freedom legally.

But this so-called freedom remained only on paper for a long time. In practice, benefiting from the same rights as whites was prevented by different laws issued by racist state administrations. In the Jim Crow era, blacks were pushed out of social life, living as two separate worlds in the same settlement with whites. Blacks were legally free, but traditions that reinforced the white superiority still existed. Next to a white, a black was no different from a worthless animal.

Sexual relationships between the black and white races were also a disgrace for whites as blackness and filthiness were synonymous. The status of blacks, who were initially brought to work for a certain period, evolved into slavery in the late 17th century. Before they were bought and sold as slaves, blacks marrying whites who worked with them was not regarded as a problem for economic reasons. But after it was understood that slavery was a more profitable investment, inter-racial marriages and sexual affairs were banned to prevent blacks from making claims through marriages or blood ties. But the bans were, again, for the weak. For the white masters who abused slave women and had children from them, the laws would not work much. Such children couldn't go beyond being a property, either. However, a woman who had a relationship with a black man would be punished. This punishment would usually be whipping. But the black man could not usually escape so easily. They were often killed by lynching with various tortures.

The laws against miscegenation in the ex-British colonies continued their existence until 1967 when the Supreme Court ruled for a violation. Even today, this issue still maintains its place in public memory as a taboo. Considering that literature is a product of social memory, it is not surprising to see the authors' willingness to deal with this subject.

In the novels examined in this study, the lives that are affected as a result of contradictions between interracial sexual intercourse and social dynamics are included. In *The Known World*, the aristocrat named William Robbins has children from multiple black women. But he describes his feelings for Philomena as love, and these feelings are more intense than what he feels for his white wife. Likewise, he loves his children. And, his children love him as a father, not as an owner, as opposed to the normal of time. In this period, inter-racial affairs are seen as a sin for which various punishments are prescribed. However, Robbins does not face any punishment, thanks to his influence in the county. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Michael, and Leonie, who live together, constitute a modern example of miscegenation. They both love each other, but Leonie's love is like a manifestation of the subconscious

desire to be white. She was born black and felt that she was not in the same status as whites throughout her life. That is why she was blindly attached to a white man, whom she met while she was in high school. The relationship of this couple with their children is not as loving as the couple of William-Philomena. Leonie sees her children as an obstacle between her and Michael. Therefore, children exposed to violence instead of love from their parents.

Another similar point between the two novels is the black man who gets lynched. In *The Known World*, the slave, who had contact with his white mistress, is killed by hanging in a public place. The woman is sentenced to whipping. The relationship between the two is a hearty one. There are rumors that they had a child. But nobody is aware of the fate of the child. There is no love affair between the white woman and the black male who was lynched in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. It is more of a rape incident. Black captured by the mob is killed brutally. In fact, if his skin color was white, the crime he committed would keep him in jail for a while, while being black aggravates the punishment of the crime.

As a result, it is possible to say that interracial love affairs are seen as taboo in every period of American history. Despite this, people continued to build relationships with others with different skin colors. In any case, it is against nature to see any kind of love as taboo, particularly the ones between different races. Everything that goes against nature is doomed to disappear one day.

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