

**Zora Neale Hurston's "The Country in the Woman":
A Pluralist Approach**

by

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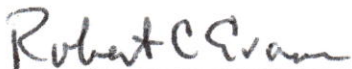
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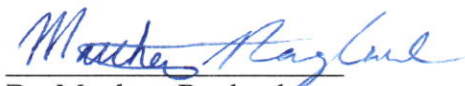
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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide a detailed pluralist literary analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's newly rediscovered short story "The Country in the Woman." The thesis consists of an introduction which gives a brief biography of Hurston leading up to the rediscovery of "The Country in the Woman" which, until now, has rarely been reprinted since its original publication in 1927. The introduction also provides an overview of the information discovered during the process of analyzing the text, such as connections to Hurston's other works, the overarching themes or issues presented in the work, and suggestions for the next steps in studying this work and giving it greater academic attention. Following the introduction is a full reprint of the story as it was originally published. Finally, the body of the thesis consists of a paragraph-by-paragraph, in-depth analysis of the text utilizing multiple critical approaches.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston's "The Country in the Woman" is a newly-rediscovered short story that was first published in 1927. While many of Hurston's better-known works—e.g., "Sweat" (1926), "The Gilded Six-Bits" (1933), and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)—have been republished in various collections and anthologies and while there is still a vibrant discourse of critical commentary on these works today, "The Country in the Woman" "remained hidden for years amid the pages of a weekly newspaper" (West 585). Thus, it has rarely been reprinted, and it has never been critically analyzed in detail. Thanks to permission granted by the Zora Neale Hurston Trust, this thesis provides one of the first reprints of the complete text of "The Country in the Woman," and it is also the first to provide in-depth, line-by-line critical analysis of the story while employing multiple perspectives of literary criticism. While this thesis by no means constitutes an exhaustive analysis (if such a thing is even possible), I am hopeful that it will open a discourse regarding this long-lost story as well as provide the groundwork for further discussion of this story and other lesser-known Hurston works.

Zora Neale Hurston (January 7, 1891-January 28, 1960) was a folklorist, novelist, playwright, and writer of short stories and essays. One of few African-American women who attended college in her day, she enjoyed a period of academic and literary success beginning at the height of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and into the 1930s. Her popularity and critical reception began to wane in the 1940s, due largely to some critics accusing her of exploiting African-American culture for personal gain or for failing to promote social and political reform that would improve conditions for African Americans. Her work was generally well-received among white reviewers, but some

African-American critics felt that Hurston's fiction—and especially her use of uncultivated Southern vernacular dialect—promoted the stereotype that African Americans were uneducated. Many other writers of the Harlem Renaissance sought to improve conditions for African Americans, and they disapproved of much of Hurston's work because they felt that it undermined their efforts. One of Hurston's contemporaries, Richard Wright, stated that “Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in [*Their Eyes Were Watching God*] the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh” (Wright 25). Similarly, fellow author Alain Locke criticized the novel, stating that Hurston failed to promote equality for African Americans:

It is folklore fiction at its best, which we gratefully accept as an overdue replacement for so much faulty local color fiction about Negroes. But when will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how to tell a story convincingly—which is Miss Hurston's cradle gift, come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification! (qtd. in Gates 18)

Today, many critics believe that Hurston's choice of dialect was simply intended to represent the authentic speech of one facet of African-American culture—a desire that was likely influenced by her background in anthropology. At the time, though, her reputation suffered greatly, and in the mid '50s, she entered a period of financial hardship

that lasted throughout the rest of her life until she died poor and was buried in an unmarked grave. Because of the cultural and political controversy, aside from her journalism, most of her work was not well-regarded at the time of her death. However, she enjoys a great deal of posthumous success today, largely due to the efforts of author Alice Walker, who published an essay titled “Looking for Zora” in 1975. In this essay, Walker discusses her attempt to find Hurston’s grave and pay honor to the woman she called “a genius of the South” (Walker 307). This essay, in conjunction with the rising interest in African-American writers and women writers in the 1970s, helped to revive interest in Hurston’s life and works.

“The Country in the Woman,” like many of Hurston’s works, focuses less on the racial struggles of urban migration and more on its effects on marriage, daily life, and the dichotomous relationships between men and women, rural and urban identity, and wealth and poverty. Though it is one of her earlier works, the story has all the trademark characteristics of a Hurston classic: the polished prose of the well-educated narrator juxtaposed with the unrefined but clever Southern dialogue of her African-American characters, the paradoxically humorous and solemn approach to the difficulties facing her characters, and the exploration of human emotions that is both specific to her individual characters and universally accessible to readers—even those a century later.

For this story, Hurston explores the lives and tumultuous relationship of Mitchell and Caroline Potts. Caroline is a strong-willed and outspoken woman who is set in her traditional “country” ways, and Mitchell is a smooth-talking philanderer who is preoccupied with how others perceive him, often to the detriment of his wife and his marriage. Mitchell’s past is littered with mistresses, each of whom ultimately faced

Caroline's wrath. Partly to make a fresh start and partly to "git de country out dat woman," Mitchell relocates his little family from Florida to the "Caribbean Forties" neighborhood of Harlem during the Great Migration, a time when hundreds of thousands of African Americans fled the racial tensions of the American South for better opportunities in the North and West. The story begins with Mitchell simultaneously scolding and placating Caroline after she has confronted Mitchell and Lucy Taylor, his newest "side gal," on the street. The remainder of the tale follows Caroline's attempts to end Mitchell's affair and Mitchell's attempts to mold his wife into his idea of what a wife should be.

"The Country in the Woman," with all its characteristic Hurston features, deserves a part in the thorough discussion and critical analysis that many of Hurston's other works already enjoy. Since this story's original publication in the 1920s, dozens of critical theories have risen into and fallen out of popularity among literary experts. While there are a few critical theories which currently dominate the field of literary analysis, now—more than ever—critics are embracing a pluralist approach to interpreting literature. By applying a variety of critical perspectives, pluralism allows for a more in-depth analysis of a written work than other methods. It also avoids problems caused by focusing solely on the approach that is currently in vogue and that could go out of style as soon as a new approach gains support. Additionally, not only does pluralism prevent one critical theory from monopolizing the discussion of a work, but it also allows for the application of multiple, sometimes contradictory, literary theories. Fortunately, one of the most fascinating aspects of well-written literature is that two or more distinct theories about a work can simultaneously be valid.

Furthermore, pluralism allows for an intense and thorough close-reading of a text. Each theory that is applied to the text acts as a special lens that reveals a hidden layer or facet of the work that other theories might have missed. The application of a single theory can provide only a limited perspective on a text, just as the testimony of a single witness to an event can provide only a fragment of the truth about that event. Therefore, employing a number of theoretical perspectives is like collecting multiple eyewitness accounts: the more data that an investigator compiles, the closer that person is to understanding the truth. The pluralist treats various theories like individual witnesses, each with their own biases, agendas, expectations, and limited perspectives. Only by considering multiple theoretical perspectives can the pluralist begin to appreciate the complexity of the text and formulate a comprehensive analysis.¹ In addition to presenting a multi-faceted consideration of “The Country in the Woman,” the pluralist analysis which makes up the body of this thesis is an attempt to span the history of critical theory from the time the work was published until its rediscovery, in a sense filling in a portion of the critical analysis it may have received had it not been lost for nearly a century.

The Country in the Woman

Z[O]RA NEALE HURSTON

“Looka heah [C]al’line, you oughta stop dis heah foolishness you got. Youse in New Yawk now—you aint down in Florida. Thaas just what ah say—you kin git a woman out de country, but you can’t git a country out de woman.”

The woman, Caroline Potts, in sloppy clothes and run-down shoes, was standing arrogantly akimbo at Seventh avenue and 134th street. She was standing between her husband, Mitchell Potts, and a woman, heavy built and stylish in a Lenox avenue way.

The woman was easing on down 134th street away from the threatening black eyes of Caroline. Mitchell wanted to vanish, too, but his wife was blocking his way. He didn’t know whether to run, to fight or to cajole, for Caroline was as temperamental as Mercury. Nobody ever knew how she would take things. Back in the Florida village from which they had migrated, Carolina Potts and her doings were the chief topics of conversation. Whatever she did was original. Mitchell was always having a side gal and Caroline was always catching him. No one besides her husband believed that she was jealous. She had an uncultivated sense of humor. She enjoyed the situation. Men and women behave so queerly when caught red-handed at anything. Sometimes when they expected fight she laughed and passed on. Sometimes she thought out ingenious embarrassing situations and engineered the two into them, with all the cruelty of the rural.

Her body was wiry and tough as nails, and she could hold up her end of the argument anytime in a rough and tumble with her husband, so he couldn’t hope to settle

things that way. All these things were in Mitchell's mind as he faced her on Seventh avenue. He saw a number of people crowding around them and he was eager to be going.

"Les us g'wan home, Cal-line."

"You wuznt headed dat way when ah met you."

"Yes, ah wuz, too. Ah just walked a piece of de way wid Lucy Taylor."

"You done walked enough 'pieces' wid dat 'oman to carry you back down home."

Mitchell caught her arm cajolingly. "Aw come on, dese heah folks is all standin' round trying to git into mine and yo' bizness."

She permitted herself to be led, but before she moved she let out: "Maybe dat hussy think she's a big hen's biddy but she don't lay no gobbler eggs. She might be a big cigar, but I sho kin smoke her. The very next time she gits in my way, I'll kick her clothes up round her neck like a horse collar. She'll think lightnin' struck her all right, now."

All of which was very delectable to the ears of the crowd on the street but "pizin" to Mitchell. He led her away to their flat in the "Car[ibb]ean Forties" with as much anxiety as if she had been so much trinitrot[o]luol.

There she grew as calm as if nothing had happened and cooked him a fine dinner which they still spoke of as supper. After which he felt encouraged to read her a lecture on getting the country out of the woman.

"Lissen, Cal'line, you oughten ack lak you did today. Folks up heah don't run after they husbands and carry on cause they sees him swappin' a few jokes wid another woman. You aint down in de basement no more—youse in New Yawk."

“Swappin’ JOKES! So you tryin’ to jerk de wool over MY eyes? New Yawk! Humph! Youse the same guy you wuz down home. You aint one bit different—aint nothin’ changed but you clothes.”

“How come YOU don’t git YO’SELF some more? Ah sho is tired uh dat ‘way-down-in-Dixie’ look you totes.”

“Who, me? Humph! Ah ain’t studying about all dese all-front-and-no-back colored folks up in Harlem. Ah totes de cash on MAH hip. Dont try to git ’way from de subjick. You better gimme dat ’oman if you dont want trouble outa me. Ah aint nobody’s fool.”

Mitchell jumped to his feet. “You aint going to show off on me in Harlem like you useder down home. Carryin’ on and cuttin de fool! I’ll take my fist to you.”

“Yas, and if you do, ah’ll up wid MAH fist and lamm you so hard you’ll lay an egg. Don’t you git ME mad, Mitchell Potts.”

“Well, then you stop running down women like Lucy Taylor. She’s a NICE woman. You just keep her name out yo’ mouth. Fack is, you oughter be made to beg her pardon.”

Caroline turned from the dishpan very coolly. That was just it—NOTHING seemed to stir her up. Even her anger seemed unemotional—a pretense the effort of a good performer.

“Ah let Lucy Taylor g’wan home today, an’ didn’t lay de weight of mah hand on her, so her egg-bag oughter rest easy. But dont you nor her try to bull-doze me; cause if you do, you’ll meet your mammy drunk. Ah ain’t gointer talk no mo.”

They went to bed that night full of feelings. No one could know what the paradoxical Caroline had stewing inside her, but all who ran might read the heart of Mitchell.

His body was warm for Lucy Taylor with all the ardor of a new affair. Caroline's encounter had aroused his protective instinct too. Moreover he was mad clear through because his vanity was injured—all by this dark brown lump of country contrariness that was lying beside him in a yellow homespun nightgown. He wanted to feel his fist crashing against her jaw and forehead and see her hitting the floor time after time. But he knew he couldn't win that way. She was too tough. Everyone of their battles had ended in a draw.

He thought too of the side gals he had had down in Florida and how his wife had not only worsted them, but had made them all—and HIM—low foolish.

1. Daisy Miller—he had bought her shoes—that which all rural ladies of pleasure crave—and Caroline had found out and had come out to a picnic where Daisy was fluttering triumphantly and had forced her to remove the shoes before everybody and walk back to town barefoot, while Caroline rode comfortably along in her buckboard with a rawhide whip dangling significantly from her masculine fist. Daisy was laughed out of town.

2. Delphine Hicks—Caroline had waited for her beside the church steps one First Sunday (big meeting day) and had thrown her to the ground and robbed the abashed vampire of her underthings. Billowy underclothes were the fashion and in addition Delphine was large. Caroline had seen fit to have her pony make the homeward trip with its hindquarters thrust into Delphine's ravished clothes.

3. She had removed a hat from the head of Della Clarke and had cleared her throat raucously and spat into it. She had then forced Della to put it back upon her head and wear it all during the big Odd Fellows barbecue and log-rolling.

Mitchell thought and his heart hardened. Everybody in the country cut the fool over husbands and wives—violence was the rule. But he was in New Yawk and—and—just let her start something!

Mitchell had changed. He loved Caroline in a way, but he wanted his fling, too. The country had cramped his style, but Harlem was big—Caroline couldn't keep up with him here. He looked the big town and tried hard to act it. After work, he affected Seventh avenue corners and a man about town air. Silk Shebas, too; no cotton underwear for him.

Time went past in weekly chunks and Caroline said nothing more, and so Mitchell decided she had forgotten. He told the men at work about it and they all laughed and confessed the same sort of affairs but they all added that their wives paid no attention.

“Man, you oughter make her stop that foolishness; she's up North now. Make her know it.”

Mitchell felt vindicated and saw Lucy Taylor with greater frequency. Much silk underwear passed under the bridge and there was talk of a fur coat for Thanksgiving. But he had ceased to meet her in 134th street. The switched to 132nd between Seventh and Lenox.

Whenever they passed his friends before the poolroom at 132nd and Seventh, the men acted wisely, unknowing Caroline would never find out thru them, surely.

One Saturday near the middle of November, late in the afternoon, Mitchell strolled into the poolroom in the Lafayette building, with a natural muskrat coat over his arm.

“Hi, Mitch,” a friend hailed him; “I see you got de herbs with you. Must be putting it over on your lifetime loud speaker.”

“You talking outa turn, big boy. Come on outside.”

They went out on the sidewalk.

“Say, Mitch, I didn’t know you had it in you—you’re a real big-timer! Whuts become of your wife lately?”

Mitchell couldn’t resist a little swagger after the admiration in his friend’s voice. He held up the coat for inspection.

“Smoke it over, kid. What you think of it? Set me back one hundred smackers—dat.”

“Boy! It[’]s there! Wife or your sweet-stuff?”

“You KNOW it[’]s for Lucy. Dat wife of mine dont need no coat like dis. But, man, ah sho done tamed her. She dont dare stick her paddle in my boat no mo—done got some of dat country out of her.”

“I’m glad to hear dat ’cause there aint no more like her nowheres. Naw sir! Folks like her comes one at a time—like lawyer going to Heaven.”

“Well, any of ’em will cool down after I massage their jaw wid mah African soup-bone, yessir! I knocks ’em into a good humor.” Mitchell lied boldly. “Heah come Lucy, now. Oh boy! She sho is propaganda!” “I’ll say she’s red hot—she just want dont for the red light!”

She came up smiling coyly as she noticed in the order of their importance to her the new fur coat, Mitchell's nifty suit, and Mitchell.

"Well, so long Tweety, see you in the funny papers."

"So long, Mitch, I'll pick you up off the junk pile."

Lucy and the fur-bearing Mitchell strolled off down 132nd street. It was nearly sundown and the sidewalk was becoming crowded.

About 20 minutes later the loungers were amazed to see a woman on Seventh avenue strolling leisurely along with an ax[e] over her shoulder. Tweety recognized Caroline and grew cold. Somehow she had found out and was in pursuit—with an axe! He grew cold with fear for Mitchell, but he hadn't the least idea which of the brownstone fronts hid the lovers. He tried to stop Caroline with conversation.

"Howdy do, Mrs. Potts; going to chop some wood?"

Very unemotionally, "Ah speck so."

"Ha, ha! You forgot you aint back down South dont you?"

"Nope. Theys wood to be chopped up North too," and she passed on, leaving the corner agog.

"Somebody ought to have stopped her. That female clod-hopper is going to split Mitch's head—and he's a good scout."

"We ought to call the police."

"Somebody ought to overtake her and take that axe away."

"Who, for instance?"

So it rested there. No one felt like trying to take an axe from Caroline. She went on and they waited, full of anxiety.

A few minutes later they saw her returning just as leisurely, her wiry frame wrapped in the loose folds of a natural muskrat coat. Over her shoulder, like a Roman lictor, she bore the axe, and from the head of it hung the trousers of Mitchell's natty suit, the belt buckle clacking a little in the breeze.

It was nearly five weeks—long after Thanksgiving—before the corner saw Mitchell again, and then he seemed a bit shy and diffident.

“Say, Mitch, where you been so long? And how's your sweet-stuff making it?”

“Oh Lucy? Aint seen her since the last time.”

“How come—Y'all aint mad?”

“Naw, its dat wife of mine. Ah caint git de country out dat woman. Lets go somewhere and get a drink.”

(1927)

Used with the permission of the Zora Neale Hurston Trust.

Critical Commentary

[1] *“Looka heah [C]al’line, you oughta stop dis heah foolishness you got. Youse in New Yawk now—you aint down in Florida. Thaas just what ah say—you kin git a woman out de country, but you can’t git a country out de woman.”*

Hurston’s characters speak (in a fashion typical of her style) in a pronounced, Southern, African-American Vernacular English dialect. The realistic but unrefined grammatical structure and credible pronunciation of the characters’ speech is especially noteworthy when juxtaposed with the proper, carefully-phrased narration.

Also characteristic of Hurston’s stories, the primary characters represent a gender dichotomy which serves as a context—and often a catalyst—for the conflict in Hurston’s writing. This story is no different, as Caroline is the story’s protagonist while Mitchell, with his offensive and belittling criticism of Caroline’s “foolishness,” establishes himself as the primary antagonist in the opening lines of the work.

The introductory dialogue does not reveal whether or not Caroline’s “foolishness” is justified or unwarranted, but later paragraphs reveal that she has a right to be upset with her husband’s behavior. Caroline recognizes his interaction with Lucy Taylor as just another episode in a long series of affairs. However, even if Mitchell had not established a pattern of adulterous relationships (as readers will later learn), Caroline is still justified in her reaction because even one affair is too many.

Mitchell has the idea that “correct” behavior changes based on geographic region; perhaps this is why the couple—more than likely at Mitchell’s insistence—moved to New York in the first place. Mitchell seems to feel entitled to have whatever he wants—

fancy clothes, affairs, a “big-city” lifestyle, etc., and he sees New York as a place where anything goes and where his dreams can become a reality. This interpretation is supported later in the story when the narration states that “the country had cramped Mitchell’s style, but Harlem was big.”

A **structuralist** critic (who is interested in the ways humans think in terms of opposites) would likely take interest in the conflict between male and female characters, the dichotomy of rural versus urban life, and the differences between the North and the South presented in the opening paragraph. **Traditional historical** critics would be interested in the fact that these characters speak authentically. Caroline and Mitchell’s dialogue—as well as the dialogue of other characters—reflects the way that many African-Americans in the 1920s actually spoke, and theorists interested in the historical accuracy of a text would likely appreciate Hurston’s use of genuine dialogue.

[2] The woman, Caroline Potts, in sloppy clothes and run-down shoes, was standing arrogantly akimbo at Seventh avenue and 134th street. She was standing between her husband, Mitchell Potts, and a woman, heavy built and stylish in a Lenox avenue way.

There is an emphasis here on Caroline’s unsophisticated appearance, especially in contrast to Lucy’s “heavy built and stylish” appearance. The fact that Caroline is wearing “sloppy clothes and run-down shoes” makes it seem like she does not care about her appearance. However, at the end of the story, when Caroline acquires Lucy Taylor’s coat, it is clear that she, too, appreciates fine things. When readers know how the story ends, they may look back upon this description and see Caroline’s appearance not as a flaw of

hers but as an indictment of Mitchell; if he cares so much about his wife's appearance and he is able to purchase finer clothing, he should be giving it to her and not to his mistresses, especially because in the 1920s, most women depended on their husbands for income. It is not as if Caroline can go out and buy herself a new wardrobe without Mitchell's involvement.

A **feminist** critic would find it significant that Caroline is initially referred to simply as "the woman." As a woman in the 1920s, she would automatically have far less power than any today; she would automatically be considered "inferior" to men (and also *by many men*). Part of the appeal of this story to **feminist** critics is that it depicts a strong, assertive woman unafraid to stand up for her rights. **Feminist** critics might also note that Hurston describes only the female characters in terms of their appearance and attire—a trend that will continue in the story with other female characters—while little to no mention is made of Mitchell's clothing or physical appearance. **Feminist** critics might argue that this disproportionate level of attention on the physical aspects of the female characters is an unfortunate representation of the inequality between men and women that existed in Hurston's time and that continues even today.

However, an **archetypal** critic (interested in traits that are common to almost all people in all times and in all places) might see the reference to Caroline as a "woman" as significant from an archetypal point of view. Women, after all, are one of the two most basic kinds of human beings. Partly for this reason, stories about relations between men and women are among the most common of all stories. And, since marriage is one of the most archetypal of all relationships, stories about marriage are also exceptionally common. Hurston, then, is writing about subjects (men, women, men *and* women, and

marriage) in which almost all readers would have a very strong interest. Furthermore, the act of adultery is a threat to any archetypal relationship. A **structuralist** critic would continue to note opposing forces here with the division of the upper and lower classes (represented by Lucy and Caroline, respectively) and the juxtaposition of refined narration with unrefined dialogue. **Traditional historical** critics would likely take interest in the geographic location mentioned here and investigate what this area of New York was actually like in the 1920s and whether or not Hurston's depiction of this area is authentic.

[3] The woman was easing on down 134th street away from the threatening black eyes of Caroline. Mitchell wanted to vanish, too, but his wife was blocking his way. He didn't know whether to run, to fight or to cajole, for Caroline was as temperamental as Mercury. Nobody ever knew how she would take things. Back in the Florida village from which they had migrated, Carolina Potts and her doings were the chief topics of conversation. Whatever she did was original. Mitchell was always having a side gal and Caroline was always catching him. No one besides her husband believed that she was jealous. She had an uncultivated sense of humor. She enjoyed the situation. Men and women behave so queerly when caught red-handed at anything. Sometimes when they expected fight she laughed and passed on. Sometimes she thought out ingenious embarrassing situations and engineered the two into them, with all the cruelty of the rural.

The word "easing" not only describes the woman's movements away from Caroline and Mitchell; it also emphasizes the level of ease the woman has in her lifestyle and the fact that, for whatever reason, she does not seem to feel threatened by Caroline.

One could speculate that she has found herself in similar confrontations before, as Caroline and Mitchell certainly have. Alternatively, the word “easing” could imply that she is moving very carefully, not wanting to provoke Caroline into action. However one chooses to interpret the word, the use of “easing” is far more suggestive than, say, “moving” would have been.

The phrase “black eyes” likely describes the objective physical appearance of Caroline’s eyes since African-American women typically have dark eyes. However, the phrase also provides an ominous sense of a metaphorical darkness which emphasizes the threatening nature of Caroline’s gaze. Moreover, the phrase may also foreshadow the potential harm that can come to these adulterers. Foreshadowing, of course, is interesting to **formalist** critics, who are interested in the ways that the individual parts of a text work together in a complex yet unified way.

Mitchell often wants to “vanish,” a common desire for people who feel ashamed; unfortunately, based on what readers learn about Mitchell’s tendencies and behaviors, his desire to “vanish” is likely due to the fact that he is embarrassed by Caroline’s actions and not from any sense of shame or guilt for his own. A **psychoanalytic** critic would be interested in Mitchell’s desire to vanish and would likely want to investigate his motivations. More specifically, a Freudian **psychoanalytic** critic, who believes that sexual desires often drive or influence human choices, would also be interested in Mitchell’s long string of affairs, while a **Darwinist** critic might suggest that Mitchell’s affairs are to be expected because males are naturally and biologically inclined to pursue multiple sexual partners.

Caroline “blocking” Mitchell reveals that, despite the fact that men are typically larger than women in stature, she is formidable, strong, and probably threatening. Her strength is further emphasized throughout the story when Caroline is described as having a “wiry” frame.

The idea that Caroline is unpredictable is contradicted by the sentence “Mitchell was always having a side gal and Caroline was always catching him.” It seems that both Mitchell and Caroline have predictable behaviors. Additionally, Caroline’s displeasure with her husband’s affairs is predictable because most people would be unhappy with a cheating spouse.

The claim that “Nobody ever knew how she would take things” is contradicted by the following events of the story. Mitchell’s later reminiscences about previous affairs reveal that Caroline reacted consistently in each of those situations, and her actions toward Lucy and Mitchell later in the story also suggest a consistent reaction toward her husband’s affairs. Furthermore, despite the claim that Caroline is “as temperamental as Mercury,” she never reacts with violence or physical aggression without first giving a warning. She even emphasizes this fact later in the story when she tells Mitchell, “Ah let Lucy Taylor g’wan home today, an’ didn’t lay de weight of mah hand on her, so her egg-bag oughter rest easy. But dont you nor her try to bull-doze me; cause if you do, you’ll meet your mammy drunk. Ah ain’t gointer talk no mo.” Mitchell is a grown man with plenty of experience dealing with Caroline’s reactions to his affairs. Surely by now he should recognize the triggers for her anger as well as the fact that she has followed through with her unheeded threats in the past and will likely do so again in the future.

Deconstructionist critics would likely be interested in the contradictions presented in this paragraph because they believe that language—the tool through which people experience reality—is full of inconsistencies. On the one hand, the narrator presents Caroline as inconsistent, then reveals her to be consistent, then nevertheless surprises readers by the sheer unpredictability of Caroline’s final response. Caroline might even seem mentally unstable, but in other ways she is by far the most rational of any of the characters presented. Similarly, **postmodernist** critics, who think that no “grand narrative” can explain every specific situation, would be interested in the seemingly contradictory correlations between morality and social class. Most people would expect the refined upper class to have a similarly refined sense of morality, while many people might assume that the lower class’s understanding of morality should be as uncultivated as other aspects of their social status. However, this text reveals that Caroline, who is viewed by the other characters as a lesser member of society because of her “country” ways, seems to have a stronger sense of what is right than the upper-class adulterers with whom she interacts throughout the story. Then again, because **postmodernists**, like **deconstructionists**, focus on the inherent contradictions in language and reality, they are mistrustful of any text that makes assertions about objective “truths.” Therefore, they would caution against viewing the characters as morally correct or incorrect. In some ways, Caroline—the most violent character—is the most moral, while Mitchell, who merely threatens physical violence, is the least moral. There is, then, no necessary correlation between morality in one respect (the morality of non-violence) and morality in another respect (the morality of marital faithfulness). Because **postmodernists** believe that reality is ever-changing and often random, they

also believe that an objective, consistent understanding of morality would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

The phrase “temperamental as Mercury” has multiple possible implications. Firstly, it may imply the fluid and adaptable metal which reacts to changes in temperature. This interpretation suggests Caroline’s ability to be emotionally “hot” one moment and “cool” the next, an ability which she demonstrates by calmly preparing a meal for Mitchell shortly after her fiery confrontation on the street. However, this interpretation likely also suggests that Caroline handles change well. Paradoxically, like mercury, Caroline is able to adapt to her relocation while remaining essentially the same person just as quicksilver changes states (i.e. from solid to liquid) while remaining unchanged at the atomic level. Caroline, too, has changed states (from Florida to New York), but she remains true to who she is. For both the woman and the element, it is the basic structure and essence—not the current state—which establishes identity. Additionally, the term—especially because it is capitalized—may also refer to the Roman God Mercury, from whose name the term “mercurial” is derived in reference to his ability to travel quickly, but whose name also suggests quick-wittedness. **Aristotle** and **formalists**, again, would appreciate this choice of wording because of the multiple possible interpretations that it entails, especially since none of the interpretations conflicts with or contradicts the others. Instead, taken together, they add to the complex unity of the text. Likewise, **Longinus**, who views the author as a master craftsman seeking to achieve the elevated or sublime, would appreciate Hurston’s use of the simile “temperamental as Mercury” because it not only shows the author’s understanding of the technical aspects of writing (such as simile and allusion) but also displays an elevated

level of artistry because it contains a variety of implications in only a few words. The allusion to classical myth is almost by definition elevating, especially in contrast with the colloquial slang and mundane phrasing used elsewhere in the story.

Caroline's "ingenious embarrassing situations" probably take less thought and deception to invent than Mitchell's sneaky, adulterous dealings do. The phrasing in this paragraph suggests that Caroline's actions are *attacks* upon Mitchell and his mistresses rather than punishments or retaliations. The focus is taken away from Caroline's attempt to enact justice and placed upon Mitchell's status as a victim. Even the active verb choice that Caroline "engineered" these situations suggests that Caroline actively plots to humiliate Mitchell and his mistress while also implying that "the two" adulterers are unfairly manipulated into the situations. At no point does the text explicitly state that Caroline would never act in this manner if Mitchell did not repeatedly commit adultery. This theme of adultery is consistently addressed throughout this story, as well as in other Hurston works, such as "The Gilded Six-Bits." **Thematic** critics would certainly take note of this theme and use it as a lens for understanding the text as a whole. **Dialogical** critics, who are interested in dialogue both within and between texts, might consider how this story relates to Hurston's other works, especially "The Gilded Six-Bits" (which was published six years later) because the earlier work may have inspired the later work or because the latter may, in some way, respond to the former.

Caroline's sense of humor, like her appearance and her speech, is "uncultivated." Again, **structuralists** would point out that she is contrasted with Lucy Taylor and, in some ways, with Mitchell. However, though Mitchell aspires to be cultivated, his speech

is similar to Caroline's in its ungrammatical structure, incorrect pronunciation, and frequent use of Southern idioms.

Again, a **feminist** critic would point out that Lucy Taylor is referred to simply as "the woman," just as Caroline was in the previous paragraph.

[4] Her body was wiry and tough as nails, and she could hold up her end of the argument anytime in a rough and tumble with her husband, so he couldn't hope to settle things that way. All these things were in Mitchell's mind as he faced her on Seventh avenue. He saw a number of people crowding around them and he was eager to be going.

Feminist critics would note that Caroline is not only physically strong; she is also at least as intelligent as her husband. The opening sentence of this paragraph also reveals that Mitchell has resorted to physical violence in past conflicts with his wife. The fact that "all of these things" are in his mind also demonstrates the fact that violence is not only *one* of Mitchell's tactics but also one of the *first* ideas that comes to his mind. The use of the word "settle" does not in any way imply compromise for Mitchell. His definition of "settl[ing] things" likely consists of him completely getting his way.

[5] "Les us g'wan home, Cal-line."

It seems that Mitchell only expresses a desire to be home with Caroline when others are watching. If there were no audience present, he would likely prefer to remain with Lucy Taylor, a fact that Caroline does not leave unaddressed in her response.

[6] "You wuznt headed dat way when ah met you."

Caroline is quick both to see through Mitchell's attempts at placating her and to ignore Mitchell's concerns with what the onlookers think. Caroline herself may be concerned with the opinions of the observers but not for the same reasons as Mitchell; his concern stems from his desire to project sophistication and respectability, while hers is precisely the opposite because she knows that by making a scene, she is damaging Mitchell's projection of his personality and revealing the truth behind his suave façade.

[7] "Yes, ah wuz, too. Ah just walked a piece of de way wid Lucy Taylor."

Mitchell's need to lie to Caroline is interesting considering the fact that—as readers will discover later in the story—Caroline has already caught him cheating several times before.

[8] "You done walked enough 'pieces' wid dat 'oman to carry you back down home."

Despite Mitchell's lies, Caroline's jealousy and suspicions are based on a well-established history of Mitchell's infidelity. Additionally, the word "home" may refer to the couple's apartment in Harlem or their home in Florida. The apartment in "the Caribbean Forties" is only a few blocks from where Caroline confronts Mitchell and Lucy, but Caroline's phrasing here suggests that she knows that Mitchell has spent a lot of time with Lucy. The fact that she may be referencing Florida when she says "home" is further supported by her use of the word "down." Their apartment is located east of this street corner, but Florida is south of, or "down" from, their current location. If Caroline does indeed mean Florida when she says "down home," her word choice reinforces the idea that she does not feel at home in New York and that she misses her old home. For

better or worse, Caroline is defined by her Southern identity (among other things), and, as Mitchell claims, “you kin git a woman out de country, but you can’t git a country out de woman.”

[9] Mitchell caught her arm cajolingly. “Aw come on, dese heah folks is all standin’ round trying to git into mine and yo’ bizness.”

As usual, Mitchell’s concern is not based on what is morally right or what will make his wife happy. Instead, he is focused only on the opinions of others and the way that he appears to them. He enjoys being in the public eye and showing off, but he views Caroline as an embarrassment because of her interference with his affairs and because of her refusal to give up her “country” ways. Mitchell wants people to be interested in *his* “bizness”; he just does not want people knowing about his interactions with his wife.

[10] She permitted herself to be led, but before she moved she let out: “Maybe dat hussy think she’s a big hen’s biddy but she don’t lay no gobbler eggs. She might be a big cigar, but I sho kin smoke her. The very next time she gits in my way, I’ll kick her clothes up round her neck like a horse collar. She’ll think lightnin’ struck her all right, now.”

A “biddy” literally refers to a type of fowl, but the term was also used in Hurston’s time as a derogatory description for a meddlesome woman. The word “gobbler” refers to a turkey. Here, Caroline implies that Lucy Taylor thinks very highly of herself but that she is not as important as she thinks she is and that Caroline sees through Lucy’s self-important air. Idioms relating to farm fowl often have connotations of arrogance (e.g. “cocky,” “the cock of the walk,” “rule the roost,” etc.), and these

dialectical euphemisms are no exception. Additionally, by using phrases relating to farming and rural life, Caroline further exhibits characteristics of a “country” woman and, perhaps unintentionally, calls attention to her foreignness to the big city and its inhabitants.

By using the term “big cigar,” Caroline claims that Lucy Taylor thinks of herself as a symbol of luxury and power. Caroline’s claim that she “sho kin smoke” Lucy Taylor suggests her ability to destroy Lucy and enjoy the process since cigars are items designed to provide pleasure. Smoking cigars is also typically considered a masculine activity, so this statement implies that Caroline has masculine characteristics, an implication that might interest **feminist** critics as well as **deconstructors**, both of whom are interested in the breakdown of simple categories grounded in clear opposites.

Interestingly, Caroline threatens Lucy and Mitchell with the warning that she will act “the very next time [Lucy] gits in [Caroline’s] way.” True to her word, the next interaction that Caroline has with Lucy is at the end of the story when she finally confronts the couple with an axe. This later incident further reinforces that Caroline is honest, even in her threats, and that Mitchell is foolish for ignoring her warning, especially when he has seen how she reacts to his affairs and humiliates him and his mistresses.

Caroline’s threat that she will “kick [Lucy’s] clothes up round her neck like a horse collar” is consistent with her other reactions, in which she “thought out ingenious embarrassing situations and engineered [Mitchell and his mistresses] into them.” In fact, readers later learn that Caroline once knocked one of Mitchell’s mistresses, Delphine

Hicks, to the ground and took her undergarments and put them on a horse to humiliate the two cheaters. In the process, Delphine's clothing probably was "kick[ed]...up round her neck" to expose her undergarments to onlookers. For repeat readers of Hurston's tale, Caroline's threat to Lucy calls the incident with Delphine to mind both because she plans to attack Lucy in the same way that she attacked Delphine and because she mentions a horse, a central figure in her humiliation of Delphine. **Aristotle, formalists, Horace, and Longinus** would likely appreciate the way that Hurston weaves the various parts of her story together, providing a subtle and intricate level of interconnectedness that bolsters the strength and complex unity of the work.

[11] All of which was very delectable to the ears of the crowd on the street but "pizin" to Mitchell. He led her away to their flat in the "Car[ibb]ean Forties" with as much anxiety as if she had been so much trinitrot[o]luol.

Here, the narrator reveals the intrusive curiosity of the city people as well as Mitchell's reaction to Caroline's outburst. However, the narrator does not state whether or not Mitchell actually used the word "pizin" (or "poison") in this particular exchange. It is possible that Mitchell simply thinks to himself that Caroline's words are poison. Moreover, the use of the word "pizin" may allude to the countless previous arguments that the couple has had and about which the reader will soon learn. Perhaps Mitchell has not uttered the word "pizin" in this specific instance, but his penchant for overdramatic reactions to Caroline's anger suggest that he has used this word before in a similar context.

It is interesting that Mitchell views Caroline's words as poison, typically considered one of the sneakiest ways to kill someone, since she is completely transparent about her anger and since he is the one who is sneaking around. **Psychoanalytic** critics might argue that perhaps he subconsciously displaces his own characteristic duplicitousness onto Caroline since it is common for people who feel guilty to project their own flaws onto others, such as the way that an unfaithful person may become overly jealous or suspicious of his or her spouse's fidelity simply because of the guilt the adulterer feels and despite the fact that the spouse has given no reason for doubt.

Caroline is frequently associated with danger; both "pizin" and "trinitrot[o]luol" (or TNT) can be used to cause fatal damage to a person. It is fascinating that, despite Caroline's history of destroying Mitchell's affairs and despite his perception of her as dangerous, Mitchell has remained relatively unharmed compared to his mistresses, and he does not expect the growing threat that continues to build throughout the story and that he ultimately faces in the story's climax.

Traditional historical critics would likely want to research the Caribbean Forties neighborhood of Harlem to find out more about what it was like in the 1920s because understanding the "Great Migration" of African Americans from the rural South to cities in the North can be useful in better understanding the characters and the story. **New historicist** and **Marxist** critics, who are interested in studying power struggles, might want to analyze the marginalization of the African-American characters, particularly the oppression of African-American women in the story. **New historicists** might stress the power struggles the story reveals *within* the African-American community, while **Marxists** might emphasize the economic disempowerment of most African Americans in

general. Even the wealthiest African Americans in the story would probably seem of a lower economic class than most white Americans.

[12] There she grew as calm as if nothing had happened and cooked him a fine dinner which they still spoke of as supper. After which he felt encouraged to read her a lecture on getting the country out of the woman.

Caroline still provides for her husband and fulfills her wifely duties to him despite the fact that he has broken his commitment to her.

The fact that “they” still say “supper” indicates that perhaps Mitchell is not as distanced from his Southern lifestyle as he thinks he is. Both he and Caroline maintain aspects of their Southern culture and traditions, so Caroline is not the only person who still has “country” habits.

It is interesting that Mitchell waits until after his meal to begin his lecturing. Perhaps if he had chastised Caroline before or during her meal preparation, he would have gone hungry or had to fend for himself. Also, it is clear that Caroline does not actively “encourage” him to lecture her; more likely, Mitchell has to build up his courage to confront his wife.

[13] “Lissen, Cal’line, you oughten ack lak you did today. Folks up heah don’t run after they husbands and carry on cause they sees him swappin’ a few jokes wid another woman. You aint down in de basement no more—youse in New Yawk.”

Mitchell reveals that he believes that people should change who they are and how they act to match their environment. He desperately wants to be seen as an upper-class,

respectable man, but he undermines his own desires by being disingenuous and two-faced. For some reason, he thinks that geographical location should change a person, but just as Caroline remains true to herself and her values regardless of her state of residence, Mitchell has not changed either.

Clearly, Mitchell values New York above Florida, not only because he chose to relocate his family there but also because he refers to the South as “de basement” as if his former environment relegated him and his wife to a lower-class position. He has romanticized life in New York to the point that he cannot view his life objectively, so he does not acknowledge that, other than his place of residence, his life has hardly changed—and certainly not for the better.

[14] “Swappin’ JOKES! So you tryin’ to jerk de wool over MY eyes? New Yawk! Humph! Youse the same guy you wuz down home. You aint one bit different—aint nothin’ changed but you clothes.”

Caroline is not naïve; she has both the intelligence and the past experience to know what Mitchell is doing with Lucy Taylor. Her incredulity is obvious, as is her frustration. The emphasized words, especially, point to her understanding of the situation. She knows that Mitchell’s interactions with Lucy go far beyond simply sharing a harmless chat. She accuses Mitchell of trying to trick her, and when she says, “you tryin’ to jerk de wool over MY eyes,” the emphasis on the word “my” perhaps implies that it is not Caroline, but Mitchell, who is deluded. Caroline knows not only who Mitchell truly is but also how he sees himself and how he wishes to be perceived by others. She sees through his charade, though, and tells him that it will take a lot more than a costume

change for him to become who he wants to be. The emphasis on the word “my” also suggests that she is the person being hurt and adversely affected by the situation.

Mitchell either does not realize or chooses not to accept the fact that his geographic location has little to do with who he is, who his wife is, or who he desires to become. Caroline realizes that Mitchell has not changed, despite the fact that his state of residence and his wardrobe are different. Interestingly, Mitchell’s desire to reinvent himself is undermined by his failure to change his behavior in any way after arriving in New York. Furthermore, had he truly wanted to change who he was, he could have begun to conduct himself in a respectable manner without ever leaving the South. He escaped his philandering reputation in Florida only to immediately reestablish that reputation in New York. Mitchell is not seeking to change himself; instead, he is searching for an environment which will allow, or even condone, his misbehaviors, and he wants to find a way to change his wife’s attitude toward his actions. Unfortunately for him, if Mitchell had wanted a wife who was meek and subservient, he should have married someone else. Ironically, by trying to control Caroline and suppress her disapproval, Mitchell is keeping her “down in de basement” regardless of where they live.

[15] “How come YOU don’t git YO’SELF some more? Ah sho is tired uh dat ‘way-down-in-Dixie’ look you totes.”

Rather than face the truth of Caroline’s statement, Mitchell deflects her accusations by insulting his wife and trying—and failing—to fix her the same way he tried to change himself. Again, he foolishly assumes that a change of clothes evokes a deeper change in personality. Mitchell thinks that if only Caroline would adapt her

wardrobe, then perhaps she would also adapt her personality and way of thinking. He should know better since he himself is no different despite the fact that he has changed the way that he dresses, but it seems that Mitchell has to learn lessons the hard way—if he ever learns them at all.

Additionally, it is important to note that Mitchell is acting on his own agency when he tries to change himself. However, by imposing his own desires on his wife, he attempts to quell her self-sovereignty. The desire to change oneself for the better may be admirable, but the desire to change others to meet one's own standard is far less commendable. **New historicist** and **Marxist** critics would certainly take interest in Mitchell's oppression of Caroline, which occurs within the context of the oppression the two already experience—as African Americans—from society as a whole. Furthermore, **psychoanalytic** critics might try to explain Mitchell's desire to control Caroline as an attempt to alleviate the oppression that he feels from society, much as a child who is abused by his parents may bully another child in an attempt to regain some semblance of power.

[16] “Who, me? Humph! Ah ain’t studying about all dese all-front-and-no-back colored folks up in Harlem. Ah totes de cash on MAH hip. Dont try to git ’way from de subjick. You better gimme dat ’oman if you dont want trouble outa me. Ah aint nobody’s fool.”

Caroline does not even attempt to hide her disdain for the duplicity of the people she has encountered in Harlem, her husband included. The phrase “all-front-and-no-back” indicates a façade without any support or substance behind it. **Dialogical** critics,

with their interest in intertextuality, might point out that Hurston's stories often feature characters of this sort. For example, "The Gilded Six-Bits" has the two-faced Slemmons, who defrauds people using gold-plated coins, and the story's female lead, Missie May, insists that she is "a real wife, not no dress and breath" (Hurston 88) to show that she is substantial, not "all-front-and-no-back."

It seems that Caroline dislikes Harlem and its residents as much as Mitchell dislikes life in the South. However, Caroline's preference seems more justified than Mitchell's. He simply wanted to get away from the South to elevate his own self-worth and status, as well as to try to force Caroline to yield to his wishes and allow him to engage in his extramarital affairs. Caroline, on the other hand, prefers a slower-paced life with traditional, conservative values such as honesty and integrity (although Caroline has had plenty of experience with her husband's infidelity in the South, as well).

Caroline's distrust of Harlem and the people who live there is further emphasized when she says, "Ah totes de cash on MAH hip." Figuratively speaking, Caroline probably means that she is prepared for a variety of unexpected situations and that she can handle herself. **Feminist** critics might note that the emphasis on the word "MAH" further highlights her independence, perhaps even suggesting that she does not need Mitchell to advise her. From a more literal perspective, Caroline is saying that she prefers to have cash on hand rather than spending it on unnecessary and overpriced clothing. Additionally, by stating that she keeps the cash "on [her] hip," Caroline may be implying that she wants to keep her money physically close to her to prevent any "all-front-and-no-back" people from trying to take it from her. True to her style, in one short sentence,

Hurston allows Caroline to convey multiple layers of meaning, all of which debunk Mitchell's arguments and concerns.

Caroline is well-equipped to identify when she is being misled or manipulated, especially because of her past experience with Mitchell. In fact, during this very conversation, she realizes that Mitchell is trying to distract her from the big issue—his infidelity—by bringing up a far more trivial and inconsequential topic—her attire. Caroline is quick to recognize this diversion for what it is, though, and she breezes right over Mitchell's attempts at distraction and tells him not to “try to git 'way from de subjick.” She brings the argument back into focus, making a final demand and warning Mitchell of what will come if he does not give in. She also asserts that neither Mitchell nor anyone else will make a fool of her. Just as she sees through the two-faced people of Harlem, she sees through Mitchell's attempts at distraction and deception.

Caroline's warning—“You better gimme dat 'oman if you dont want trouble outa me”—is another testament to her constancy and honesty. The beginning of the story claimed that Caroline is unpredictable and temperamental, but her statement provides readers and Mitchell with an understanding of what will come if Caroline does not get her way. Based on Mitchell's past humiliations, which readers learn about later in the story, he should be well aware that Caroline is not afraid to follow through with her threats.

Some readers may at first think that Caroline is pitching a fit to try to get what she wants, an act that would make her seem every bit as childish and guilty as Mitchell. However, what she wants is for her husband to be faithful, certainly a request that is not

too much to ask. Mitchell, on the other hand, wants free rein to have as many affairs as he wishes and to do it publicly. He either does not realize or does not care that his anger at being humiliated is hypocritical because surely his public affairs are at least as humiliating to Caroline as her retaliation is to him. Furthermore, he would not be humiliated in these situations if he did not first humiliate her.

[17] Mitchell jumped to his feet. “You aint going to show off on me in Harlem like you useder down home. Carryin’ on and cuttin de fool! I’ll take my fist to you.”

Mitchell’s reaction likely stems either from his anger at the prospect of being embarrassed again or from his recognition that he has lost the rational argument with Caroline and now feels the need to resort to physical violence. Readers likely feel even more sympathetic toward Caroline at this point because now they know that Mitchell is not only a philanderer but also that he is an abusive husband. Even if he never physically abuses his wife, his threat of violence is, at the very least, emotionally abusive.

[18] “Yas, and if you do, ah’ll up wid MAH fist and lamm you so hard you’ll lay an egg. Don’t you git ME mad, Mitchell Potts.”

Caroline does not hesitate to respond with her own threat of violence, although her response can be viewed as a form of self-defense rather than aggression. Again, readers see Caroline acting in the same way as Mitchell; both argue to get what they want, and both try to intimidate each other with humiliation and physical violence. However, their motivations create an important distinction. Mitchell desires to control his wife so that he can do whatever he pleases while Caroline acts the way she does out of self-defense or retaliation against her husband. At no point in the story does Caroline

instigate a fight or try to manipulate her husband. She plainly states her thoughts and desires as well as what her responses will be if her desires are not met. Again, the distinction between their motivations is that Mitchell wants to be adulterous, deceitful, manipulative, and self-important regardless of who he harms in the process. In fact, he is willing to threaten harm against his wife just for the *opportunity* to act the way he wants. Conversely, Caroline's motivation aligns with what is morally acceptable: she exhibits faithfulness, honesty, integrity, and humility. Readers can appreciate Caroline's bravery here and her unwillingness to back down. She is standing up for herself and for what is right regardless of the harm her husband inflicts or threatens to inflict upon her.

Structuralists would certainly find the distinctions between the two main characters interesting. Similarly, **deconstructionists** would note the paradox that arises from the fact that the characters' actions—arguing and threatening physical violence—are alike while their motivations are distinct. **Deconstructionists** would further suggest that paradoxes such as this one make it difficult to identify an objective reality because each character's external impact on the physical world—violence against another person—is an expression of disparate internal motivations. Caroline is a woman who sometimes displays characteristics (such as self-assertion and aggression) often associated with men, whereas Mitchell is a man who often seems intimidated and even frightened by his wife. The complex relationship between Caroline and Mitchell would suggest, to a **deconstructor**, that simple distinctions and explanations are rarely satisfactory.

[19] “Well, then you stop running down women like Lucy Taylor. She’s a NICE woman. You just keep her name out yo’ mouth. Fack is, you oughter be made to beg her pardon.”

Mitchell quickly backs down, either because he is afraid of what Caroline will do or, more likely, because yet again his outward personality does not match the person he is within. Just as Mitchell puts on a fancy wardrobe to make himself seem like an upper-class man, he puts on a pretense of toughness. It is as if Mitchell believes that a costume can change the person wearing it. Interestingly, Hurston never clearly reveals whether Mitchell is aware that he does not measure up to the person he claims to be or whether a lifetime of trying to convince others of his status has simply led to him deceiving himself.

Perhaps the biggest insult of the story is Mitchell's implication that Caroline is not worthy even to speak the name of the woman who is having an affair with her husband and that she should apologize to Lucy. While readers do not know what Caroline said to Lucy (since the story begins with Mitchell intervening and leading Caroline home), Caroline does clarify later that she did not touch Lucy. Mitchell clearly thinks that he and Lucy were embarrassed by Caroline's public confrontation; however, what they felt was not embarrassment but shame—a subtle but important distinction. Based on Mitchell's history and Caroline's experience recognizing his infidelity, her confrontation is likely justified, especially since the narration later reveals that Mitchell goes to bed with a body “warm for Lucy Taylor with all the ardor of a new affair.” The two are romantically involved, thereby disproving Mitchell's claim that Lucy is a “NICE woman.”

The fact that Mitchell calls Lucy Taylor “a NICE woman” further emphasizes his focus on peoples' external qualities. Liars and adulterers are not typically considered “nice” people, but Mitchell is not judging Lucy based on her actions; he values her not for who she is but for how she looks and for her ability to play the part of the fancy,

upper-class woman. Even if Lucy Taylor has the financial means to be a part of the upper class, she does not have the values that are typically—and often erroneously—associated with wealthy people. Superficial politeness does not equate to moral uprightness just as a nice suit cannot make Mitchell a gentleman.

[20] Caroline turned from the dishpan very coolly. That was just it—NOTHING seemed to stir her up. Even her anger seemed unemotional—a pretense the effort of a good performer.

This description of Caroline's constancy, even in anger, again contradicts earlier descriptions of her temperamental and unpredictable behavior. Perhaps Mitchell's insulting attitude has left her speechless.

[21] “Ah let Lucy Taylor g’wan home today, an’ didn’t lay de weight of mah hand on her, so her egg-bag oughter rest easy. But dont you nor her try to bull-doze me; cause if you do, you’ll meet your mammy drunk. Ah ain’t gointer talk no mo.”

Caroline reminds Mitchell that she has done nothing wrong but that she can be dangerous to him and Lucy. She also reinforces her dominance in this argument by ending the conversation on her own terms and with the last word. The statement, “Ah ain’t gointer talk no mo” may not only refer to this particular conversation but may also serve as a warning to Mitchell. After this fight, Caroline never speaks to Mitchell again about Lucy; instead, her next action to stop his affair is at the end of the story. At this point in the story, Caroline is done talking. **Aristotle** and **formalists** would likely appreciate the complex way in which this short, seemingly insignificant statement actually foreshadows Caroline's retaliation at the end of the story. This statement

connects Caroline and Mitchell's first argument in the story to their final confrontation in the story's climax.

[22] They went to bed that night full of feelings. No one could know what the paradoxical Caroline had stewing inside her, but all who ran might read the heart of Mitchell.

Again, Mitchell does not try to hide his feelings. However, the narration again suggests that Caroline is unpredictable and "paradoxical." Much of the narration about Caroline seems to be limited to Mitchell's perspective of his wife. However, it is quite interesting that while the narration seems to be filtered through Mitchell, most readers likely sympathize with Caroline and view Mitchell as the story's antagonist.

[23] His body was warm for Lucy Taylor with all the ardor of a new affair. Caroline's encounter had aroused his protective instinct too. Moreover he was mad clear through because his vanity was injured—all by this dark brown lump of country contrariness that was lying beside him in a yellow homespun nightgown. He wanted to feel his fist crashing against her jaw and forehead and see her hitting the floor time after time. But he knew he couldn't win that way. She was too tough. Everyone of their battles had ended in a draw.

Regardless of whether or not his affair with Lucy has culminated in a physical act of adultery, Mitchell is clearly being emotionally unfaithful to his wife. His familiarity with "the ardor of a new affair" implies that this is not the first affair he has had, as the narration will shortly reveal.

Mitchell's "protective instinct," interestingly, does not apply to protecting and maintaining his marriage. Instead, he feels protective of his relationship with Lucy; most likely, though, his "protective instinct" is simply his sense of self-preservation. Unfortunately, his anxiety about what Caroline may do is not enough to dissuade him from continuing his affair with Lucy.

The narration directly addresses the cause of Mitchell's emotional state: he is angry "because his vanity [is] injured," a fact made even worse because Caroline, a woman he perceives as being lower-class, is the one who has injured it.

The description of Caroline as "a dark brown lump...in a yellow homespun nightgown" not only serves as yet another insult aimed at Caroline by the narration and its emphasis on Mitchell's perspective; it also distracts from the fact that, at least at one point, Mitchell likely found Caroline attractive but now can only see her as an unpleasant obstacle to his happiness.

Once again, Mitchell's thoughts turn to violence—a dark fantasy of spousal abuse. The phrase "But he knew he couldn't win that way" suggests not only that he has tried violence in the past—only losing because Caroline "was too tough"—but also that he would likely try again if he thought he *could* "win that way." He has certainly tried multiple times, as evidenced by the phrase "everyone [sic] of their battles."

Plato, who promoted logic and ethics over passion and emotion, would likely reprimand Mitchell for letting his anger and frustration with Caroline and his excitement and lust for Lucy determine his actions instead of rationally considering his behavior and its consequences.

[24] He thought too of the side gals he had had down in Florida and how his wife had not only worsted them, but had made them all—and HIM—low foolish.

It seems that Mitchell, even while lying in bed next to his wife, can only think of other women. However, he may not have very high opinions of these other women since he refers to them as “side gals,” an objectifying term with far more negative a connotation than “mistress” or even “girlfriend.”

Again, Mitchell places the blame for his humiliation on Caroline. He does not see that Caroline’s actions were direct reactions to his adultery. Hurston’s emphasis on the word “HIM” also serves to remind readers that Mitchell cares more about himself and his own reputation than about others. It bothers him that Caroline interfered with his relationships and embarrassed his “side gals,” but it angers him more that he, too, ended up looking like a fool.

[25] 1. Daisy Miller—he had bought her shoes—that which all rural ladies of pleasure crave—and Caroline had found out and had come out to a picnic where Daisy was fluttering triumphantly and had forced her to remove the shoes before everybody and walk back to town barefoot, while Caroline rode comfortably along in her buckboard with a rawhide whip dangling significantly from her masculine fist. Daisy was laughed out of town.

Here, Mitchell begins a list of his past affairs, and at first it seems as if he will be recalling fondly the women he desires. However, the list quickly changes tone. Rather than listing off good memories, or even his own misdeeds, Mitchell is recounting all of Caroline’s offenses.

Mitchell's numbered list of past mistresses further reveals how low his opinions are of women, a fact that would certainly not be lost on **feminist** critics. Here, Mitchell is not simply recalling past relationships; he is checking off a list of conquests. It is possible that the women are listed randomly; on the other hand, **structuralists** might suggest that there may be some significance to the order. Mitchell may be recounting the chronology of his affairs or arranging them in order of his degree of humiliation, or worse, he may be listing a hierarchy of his favorites.

In his usual fashion, Mitchell deflects guilt. He claims only to have bought Daisy shoes, but the fact that Daisy was a "side gal" suggests that the nature of their relationship extended far beyond exchanging gifts. Mitchell remembers the pleasure he experienced from his misdeeds and his chagrin when Caroline interfered with his enjoyment, but he thinks nothing of the humiliation Caroline must have felt at being deceived or at having Daisy "fluttering triumphantly" and rubbing her affair with Mitchell in Caroline's face—at a public picnic "before everybody," no less. In fact, Mitchell seems to be completely ignorant to the fact that Caroline has any feelings at all other than anger and stubbornness. The phrase "Caroline found out" implies that Mitchell kept his relationship with Daisy a secret in the first place. **Psychoanalytic** critics might point out that Mitchell's deception reveals that, at least subconsciously, he understands that his affairs are wrong, which is why he feels the need to keep them a secret from his wife. His superego (the seat of morality) is in conflict with his id (the seat of desire), and his ego (the seat of rational decision-making) leads him to believe that it is rational to keep his affair secret from his wife.

Mitchell's reference to Daisy as a "rural lady of pleasure" may imply that she is simply a woman who enjoys the finer things in life, such as a nice pair of shoes.

However, it may also be a polite way of calling Daisy a prostitute. Readers know that at least two of Mitchell's mistresses receive gifts—Daisy's shoes and Lucy's muskrat coat later in the story—which could be viewed as payment for sex.

Traditional historical, new historicist, and Marxist critics might point out the fact that "Daisy was laughed out of town" but that Mitchell was able to keep his home, his marriage, and—presumably—his status. This unequal treatment is not only a testament to the historically harsh treatment of women in extramarital relationships (while the men in these affairs typically escaped with little or no punishment) but also an indication of Mitchell's callousness. He is upset that Daisy was forced to leave town, but it is not immediately clear whether or not his distress is sympathy for Daisy or—more likely—disappointment that he has been embarrassed and that his "side gal" is gone. What is immediately clear, though, is that Mitchell's distress is definitely not any form of remorse or even sympathy for his wife; he blames Caroline for the bad things that have happened to him and to Daisy, and he refuses to acknowledge any responsibility in this situation at all, let alone responsibility for his infidelity. He further strokes his own ego by suggesting that he knows what "all rural ladies of pleasure crave" and that he has the means to satisfy their cravings. According to Mitchell's recollections here, his only role in the entire situation is being a generous and desirable man who has received unjust attacks on his dignity.

Structuralist critics might suggest that the language in this paragraph further emphasizes the contrast between Caroline and the type of women to whom Mitchell is

attracted. The verb “forced” and the description “masculine fist” imply Caroline’s physical strength—a characteristic usually attributed to men. Meanwhile, Daisy’s “fluttering,” her stereotypical interest in shoes which she shares with “all rural ladies of pleasure,” and her inability to resist Caroline emphasize her femininity—and, by contrast, Caroline’s masculinity.

[26] 2. Delphine Hicks—Caroline had waited for her beside the church steps one First Sunday (big meeting day) and had thrown her to the ground and robbed the abashed vampire of her underthings. Billowy underclothes were the fashion and in addition Delphine was large. Caroline had seen fit to have her pony make the homeward trip with its hindquarters thrust into Delphine’s ravished clothes.

Here, Mitchell further shifts the focus from his own actions, instead highlighting the mistress herself and Caroline’s reaction to her. Mitchell’s involvement is not even mentioned in this second entry on his list.

Delphine, like Daisy, is interested in being fashionable, wearing the “billowy underclothes” that were popular at the time. Interestingly, it is important to Delphine to wear the most fashionable underclothes, even to church where it is certainly not appropriate for anyone to be seeing them. It is unclear whether or not any of Mitchell’s “side gals” is married; if Delphine is married, another layer of infidelity is added to the affair, and if she is not married, traditional Christian values and the social mores of the early 1900s would emphasize that certainly no one should be seeing her underclothes. Interestingly, Delphine has no problem attending church despite carrying on an active

affair with a fellow congregant, one whose wife is also in attendance, no less. It is easy to assume that Mitchell, too, feels no shame at attending church or having an affair.

Again, Caroline planned to hold her confrontation in public, just as she did with Daisy and as she does with Lucy Taylor. At first, one may think that Caroline confronts these women in full view of the public because she wants to humiliate them and Mitchell, but perhaps her motivation is to give Mitchell a taste of his own medicine; if he carries on with his affairs in public, then she punishes him and his mistress in public. Perhaps she would be more discreet if Mitchell gave her the same consideration.

Strong action verbs such as “thrown,” “robbed,” “thrust,” and “ravished” emphasize Caroline’s strength, even compared to the strength of a “large” woman like Delphine. Also interesting is the use of the phrase “abashed vampire” to describe Delphine. The narrator is recounting Mitchell’s thoughts and memories, but this language suggests that the narrator is on Caroline’s side. It is unlikely that Mitchell sees Delphine as an “abashed vampire.”

[27] 3. She had removed a hat from the head of Della Clarke and had cleared her throat raucously and spat into it. She had then forced Della to put it back upon her head and wear it all during the big Odd Fellows barbecue and log-rolling.

The shift of focus continues even further with this entry. Again, Mitchell is not mentioned, and even the mistress is not the first person to be mentioned. By starting with the pronoun “she” and breaking from the structure established in the previous two memories, the narration puts the focus directly on Caroline.

Again, readers see in Della a woman who is interested in her appearance. Though Hurston does not describe Della, it is fair to assume that the hat in which Caroline spat was fashionable and unlike anything Caroline herself owns.

Structuralists and **deconstructionists** alike would likely notice the fact that the actions described in Mitchell's list fall into rather clearly-defined categories of masculine and feminine behavior. **Deconstructionists** would further point out, though, that Caroline undermines this simple, conventional structural division by behaving in a more masculine way despite the fact that she is a female. The raucous throat clearing and spitting are typically considered more masculine actions, further separating Caroline from Mitchell's feminine ideals. Caroline uses force here, as she did with Delphine and Daisy, further implying her strength and masculinity.

The fact that Caroline makes such a show out of her public punishments leads readers to think that perhaps she takes pleasure in them; they are creative and humorous, after all, and they are elaborate enough that one may suspect premeditation. Then again, it may be that Mitchell and his mistresses are so audacious as to air their affairs in places where the whole town is in attendance—at a picnic, a Big Sunday church meeting, and at the Odd Fellows barbecue—that Caroline cannot contain her anger anymore, so she acts then. **Psychoanalytic** critics would describe Caroline's actions in terms of her responses to the promptings of her id, ego, and superego; she maintains composure, using her sense of morals (or superego) and her rational mind (or ego) to keep her emotions in check, but eventually, she gives in to her baser impulses (or id) and acts out violently against Mitchell's mistresses.

In all three of these memories—and it is unclear whether or not these are all of Mitchell's mistresses or if he simply only thinks of these three—Mitchell torments his wife by rubbing her face in his affairs. However, beneath the amusement and satisfaction Caroline may feel from her revenge, Hurston has subtly hinted at Caroline's own humiliation and pain.

Furthermore, **Longinus**, **Aristotle** and **formalists** might note the alliteration in the names of Mitchell's mistresses: Daisy, Delphine, and Della. Hurston does not explicitly reveal if there is any significance to the fact that all three of these women's names begin with the same letter. However, **Aristotle** and **formalists** might suggest that there is an important correlation. Firstly, the fact that these women's names all begin with the letter *d* further solidifies the fact that Mitchell has a "type" when it comes to his mistresses; these women are so similar that even their names begin with the same letter. Furthermore, Lucy Taylor is the only one of Mitchell's mistresses mentioned in the story whose name does not begin with the letter *d*. Perhaps this variance subtly suggests that Mitchell's affair with Lucy will be different from these previous affairs. Certainly, Caroline's later response to this affair is more extreme than the already violent reactions she has had to previous affairs, and at the end of the story, it appears that Mitchell may have finally had a change of heart. Regardless of whether the alliteration is an intentional choice by Hurston or simply a coincidence, critics can admire the fact that the alliteration at least sounds interesting and makes the mistresses' names easier for readers to remember and at best creates an almost subliminal correlation between these three women and provides significant foreshadowing into Mitchell's future.

[28] Mitchell thought and his heart hardened. Everybody in the country cut the fool over husbands and wives—violence was the rule. But he was in New Yawk and—and—just let her start something! difference

The fact that Mitchell's heart is hardening only now is noteworthy because it seems that a man who is capable of multiple affairs and who seems so oblivious to his wife's suffering—even with her repeated warnings—must already be hard-hearted.

Once more, Mitchell reveals that he believes that a change of location can also change a person's values and behaviors despite the fact that moving to New York has not changed him at all. However, even with his dissatisfaction, he does not threaten Caroline aloud.

[29] Mitchell had changed. He loved Caroline in a way, but he wanted his fling, too. The country had cramped his style, but Harlem was big—Caroline couldn't keep up with him here. He looked the big town and tried hard to act it. After work, he affected Seventh avenue corners and a man about town air. Silk Shebas, too; no cotton underwear for him.

Readers may scoff at the sentence "Mitchell had changed" because it certainly seems that he has not. Even though he has changed his residence and his demeanor, deep down—or perhaps not so far beneath the surface—Mitchell is the same adulterous and neglectful husband that he was in the South. The first and second parts of the second sentence contradict each other. If Mitchell truly did love his wife, perhaps he would not desire other women time and time again. Mitchell knows that "Caroline [cannot] keep up with him" in New York, yet he moved her there—probably against her wishes—anyway.

Perhaps he knew beforehand that the distance between him and Caroline would grow larger in New York, but either he did not care or he hoped for this outcome.

It is unclear whether it is Mitchell or the narrator who realizes that he is only playing a part, looking and acting as he thinks he should and putting on an air of sophistication that he truly lacks. Like Delphine, it is important to Mitchell that every detail of his ensemble, even down to his underwear, fit the part of a “man about town.” He certainly is not wearing “Silk Shebas” for Caroline, though.

[30] Time went past in weekly chunks and Caroline said nothing more, and so Mitchell decided she had forgotten. He told the men at work about it and they all laughed and confessed the same sort of affairs but they all added that their wives paid no attention.

Mitchell “decide[s]” that Caroline has forgotten about his affair with Lucy Taylor, but the author’s choice of words makes it unclear whether or not he truly believes that she has or simply if enough time has passed that he feels safe to make a move again. It is worth noting that Mitchell waited weeks before resuming with Lucy, so at the very least, he is intimidated by Caroline. **Psychoanalytic** critics might suggest here that Mitchell’s ego and superego are insufficient at keeping his id in check since only the constant threat of Caroline’s actions and their consequences prevents him from pursuing his affair with Lucy; as soon as he believes that he can get away with it, Mitchell resumes the relationship.

Surely not all men in New York at the time were having affairs, so it is interesting that all the men with whom Mitchell associates are also adulterers, willing to laugh off Caroline's suffering and the suffering of their own wives.

[31] “Man, you oughter make her stop that foolishness; she’s up North now. Make her know it.”

Here, readers are presented again with the idea that geographic location shapes behavior and identity and that adultery and misogyny are acceptable as long as one is in the North. The words of Mitchell's coworkers support male-dominated relationships, even to the point of controlling women's actions and emotions. In a twisted sense of justice, these men think that protecting a marriage and upholding vows of faithfulness are “foolishness” while having an extramarital affair is not only acceptable but expected and justified.

[32] Mitchell felt vindicated and saw Lucy Taylor with greater frequency. Much silk underwear passed under the bridge and there was talk of a fur coat for Thanksgiving. But he had ceased to meet her in 134th street. They switched to 132nd between Seventh and Lenox.

In the beginning of the story, Caroline confronted Mitchell and Lucy at the intersection of Seventh Avenue and 134th street. Changing their meeting place to “132nd between Seventh and Lenox” only puts the adulterous couple two blocks away from where Caroline previously discovered them. The Lafayette building, which is referenced in the next few paragraphs, is visible from the corner of Seventh and 134th. To add insult to injury, this new meeting place is actually closer to the Potts' residence, a flat in the

“Caribbean Forties” in East Harlem. Clearly, Mitchell is not afraid of Caroline finding out about his affair despite the fact that he has taken very little effort to hide it. In fact, by moving his meetings with Lucy closer to his home, he is perhaps challenging Lucy or exhibiting his overconfidence in himself and his right to do as he pleases.

The phrase “under the bridge” may give readers the impression that Mitchell and Lucy are meeting in a place that is dark, damp, and dirty—a place where less-than-reputable people gather and participate in immoral acts. The two adulterers fit right in. The exchange of “much silk underwear” suggests that Mitchell is spending more than a small sum of money on Lucy. Readers do not know exactly what Mitchell’s occupation is, but it is reasonable to assume, based on their modest apartment and Caroline’s lack of finery, that they are not wealthy, especially since Mitchell is only playing the part of the “man about town.” The promise of “a fur coat for Thanksgiving” further establishes Mitchell’s extravagant spending on his mistress and provides a greater contrast to his spending on his wife. Perhaps Caroline would dress in a way that is more pleasing to Mitchell if he would lavish her—rather than his mistresses—with gifts. **Marxists** might argue that Mitchell feels compelled to pretend to be wealthy because he lives in a capitalistic society in which people’s “value” is often judged in terms of the number and nature of their material possessions.

Also of note is the fact that the couple is planning ahead with their affair and that they have no intention to stop any time soon. Their meetings are not momentary lapses of judgment or weakness that lead them to give in to temptation; the interactions are premeditated and deliberate. **Plato** would consider this fact evidence of their perversion

of reason: instead of using reason to control their emotions, they are using it to plan irrational, immoral behavior.

[33] Whenever they passed his friends before the poolroom at 132nd and Seventh, the men acted wisely, unknowing Caroline would never find out thru them, surely.

Again, this poolroom is in the Lafayette building, a building which is mentioned in the next paragraph and which would be visible (a **traditional historical** critic might note) from the intersection of Seventh and 134th—the street corner where the story begins. It is interesting that Mitchell's friends assume that "Caroline would never find out thr[ough] them" and for obvious reasons; firstly, Mitchell is making very little attempt to keep his affair secret since so many people know about it, and secondly, he is meeting with his mistress within a short walking distance from his home, despite the fact that Caroline has already discovered him with Lucy in this same area. Also noteworthy is the fact that Mitchell and Lucy's new meeting place at 132nd Street is located south of their previous rendezvous at 134th Street. Perhaps this move to a more southerly location indicates that Mitchell, too, maintains the same mindset that he had when he was in the South and that Caroline is not the only person who is unchanged by the couple's new geographic location. Mitchell's bold, unapologetic stubbornness is his defining characteristic in the story.

[34] One Saturday near the middle of November, late in the afternoon, Mitchell strolled into the poolroom in the Lafayette building, with a natural muskrat coat over his arm.

Mitchell is delivering on his promise of “a fur coat for Thanksgiving.” Rather than treating the holiday season as a time to be thankful for what he has—including a wife who cares for him—Mitchell is spending time with his mistress and spending money on her. The image of a “natural muskrat coat” may be humorous to readers who might have expected a more extravagant or luxurious fur. Even the word “muskrat” has connotations of odorous rodents, and many readers (a **reader-response** critic might note) may be thinking that Mitchell, too, is a smelly, dirty rat for the way he is behaving.

It is important to Mitchell that others know of his affairs. When he was involved with Daisy Miller, Delphine Hicks, and Della Clarke, everyone in town knew of their relationships because he paraded his affairs around with pride. In New York, Mitchell is no different. All of his friends know of his affairs, and Mitchell takes every opportunity to show off even more. Both **Darwinist** and **feminist** critics might note that Mitchell feels some need to advertise his affair to other men.

[35] “Hi, Mitch,” a friend hailed him; “I see you got de herbs with you. Must be putting it over on your lifetime loud speaker.”

Though it is unclear what Mitchell’s friend, who readers later discover is named Tweety, means when he says “I see you got de herbs with you,” a **traditional historical** critic would try to determine the meaning of this phrase in the 1920s. In any case, it is safe to assume that he thinks that Mitchell is broadcasting his actions “on [his] lifetime loud speaker” (a phrase that would also interest **traditional historical** critics since loud speakers were recent inventions in the 1920s.) This assumption makes sense given Mitchell’s frequent desire to be seen in public. However, Mitchell’s response that Tweety

is “talking outa turn” suggests that his statement might be an insult, perhaps one made in jest.

[36] “You talking outa turn, big boy. Come on outside.”

It is not enough for Mitchell to be seen inside the poolroom; he must stand on the street to talk to Tweety, possibly hoping to catch the attention of several passers-by.

Psychoanalytic critics might interpret his behavior as a sign either of security or insecurity, and **reader-response** critics would argue that readers are free to interpret his behavior in either way or both.

[37] They went out on the sidewalk.

Mitchell stands on the New York City sidewalk, which is probably bustling with people on a Saturday, and brazenly shows off the coat he has bought for his mistress, even knowing that Caroline could show up at any moment.

Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and formalists would likely appreciate that a brief, objective, and seemingly insignificant sentence can reveal a great deal of information about Mitchell’s internal motivations and character. This type of revelation—especially in such a short sentence—is a testament to Hurston’s expert craftsmanship and her ability to manipulate language for maximum effect.

[38] “Say, Mitch, I didn’t know you had it in you—you’re a real big-timer! Whuts become of your wife lately?”

Tweety’s surprise at Mitchell’s purchase of the muskrat coat encourages the latter in his philandering. Mitchell probably feels vindicated now that he has proven to his

friend that he is “a real big-timer,” especially since Tweety “didn’t know [he] had it in [him].” Interestingly, Tweety immediately thinks of Caroline when he sees the coat.

Psychoanalytic critics might speculate that Tweety’s conscience (rooted in his superego) is secretly bothering him despite his open support of “Mitch.” Perhaps it is his conscience that leads him to think immediately of Caroline when he sees the newest evidence of Mitchell’s adultery.

[39] Mitchell couldn’t resist a little swagger after the admiration in his friend’s voice. He held up the coat for inspection.

Mitchell’s gratification at Tweety’s remarks shows that his affair is not just about the pleasure or attention he gets from his mistress but also about the admiration and envy he inspires in others. He wants power over others, over his mistress, and over Caroline.

Darwinians—who stress competition between males for females—might readily explain Mitchell’s need to advertise his possession of more than one woman.

Rather than responding to Tweety’s question about Caroline, which he may have asked out of genuine curiosity or out of politeness, Mitchell ignores the question and proceeds to display the coat for Lucy.

[40] “Smoke it over, kid. What you think of it? Set me back one hundred smackers—dat.”

Mitchell cannot help but show off the coat, knowing that Tweety will approve and further stroke his ego. The coat, even if it is muskrat and not a finer fur, still cost \$100 in the 1920s, an amount that (**traditional historical** critics would point out) is well over \$1000 USD today. Furthermore, a **Marxist** critic might be critical of the extravagance of

the coat since Mitchell could have found an equally utilitarian coat for a far better price. However, **Marxists** would likely suggest that Mitchell feels the need to purchase such luxuries because of the pressures put upon him by a competitive, capitalistic society. At the very least, in such a society, Mitchell's sense of self-worth—and the way that others perceive him—is affected by the monetary value of the items he possesses, and his social status is further strengthened by the fact that he can buy luxury items and then give them away as gifts.

[41] “Boy! It[']s there! Wife or your sweet-stuff?”

Tweety is impressed, but again, he brings up Caroline. **Feminists** would point out that the reference to Lucy as “sweet-stuff” further objectifies her, emphasizing that her purpose is pleasure. It also shows that Mitchell does not view his wife as his “sweet-stuff” but rather as someone—or *something*—unpleasant. The fact that Mitchell uses pet names for his mistress but not for his wife emphasizes the contrast between the two women and the way that Mitchell views them.

[42] “You KNOW it[']s for Lucy. Dat wife of mine dont need no coat like dis. But, man, ah sho done tamed her. She dont dare stick her paddle in my boat no mo—done got some of dat country out of her.”

Mitchell scoffs at the fact that Tweety could even believe that the coat is for Caroline. He says she doesn't “need no coat like dis” despite the fact that it is mid-November in New York and winter is approaching. An **archetypal** critic might point out that shelter and protection from the harsher elements of nature are universal human needs. Arguably, no one *needs* a coat like the one Mitchell has purchased for Lucy. The

coat is an extravagance beyond a less-expensive yet equally effective winter coat. Again, a **Marxist** would point out that Mitchell's compulsion to buy such an expensive gift is due to the pressure of a capitalistic society. By buying a coat for Lucy, Mitchell literally and figuratively provides warmth for Lucy while leaving Caroline in the cold. **Thematic** critics, on the other hand, might view the approaching winter in a metaphorical sense. In winter, nature slows down and many living things die or go into hibernation. Along this line, **formalists** might suggest that the change of seasons might foreshadow that Mitchell's affair will soon come to an end.

Formalists might suggest that the claim that Mitchell has "tamed" Caroline serves as foreshadowing for the events at the end of the story; however, in an ironic twist, which formalists would also appreciate, it is Mitchell—not Caroline—who is "tamed." If they could not before, readers can now clearly see Mitchell's arrogance, and **reader-response** critics might note that many readers may wish for his comeuppance. Besides, Mitchell is the one behaving like an animal, so perhaps it is he who needs to be tamed. Furthermore, Mitchell boasts that he has "done got some of dat country out of her" and that she now minds her own business and "dont dare stick her paddle in [his] boat." However, many might argue that Mitchell's affairs—both his everyday business and his extramarital affairs—are her business as well. Aristotle might point out that Caroline has been consistently headstrong and unflinching, like Mitchell, so it might be hard for readers to imagine something that Caroline would not "dare" to do if she so pleased. Paradoxically, Caroline and Mitchell are similar in that both exhibit the characteristics of stubbornness and boldness, but they are different in the ways that they employ these traits—Mitchell to participate in immoral acts that destroy his marriage and Caroline to

correct Mitchell and end his affairs. **Deconstructors** would take note of this paradox as an example of the inconsistencies and blurred distinctions present in a text and in reality.

[43] “I’m glad to hear dat ’cause there aint no more like her nowheres. Naw sir! Folks like her comes one at a time—like lawyer going to Heaven.”

Tweety views Caroline as a one-of-a-kind woman, which could be interpreted as a compliment. His comment also further emphasizes that Caroline is out-of-place in New York and that Harlem is not used to a “country” woman like her despite (as a **traditional historical** critic would note) that many people were migrating from the American South at the time in which the story takes place. It has already been established, though, that Caroline’s behavior was not unusual in the South: “Everybody in the country cut the fool over husbands and wives—violence was the rule.” Still, at this point in the story, Harlem and its city-dwellers have not adjusted to a woman like Caroline, and she certainly has not adjusted to Harlem.

Also interesting (a **traditional** historical critic might point out) is that the stereotype of lawyers being corrupt was popular even in the 1920s. However, it does seem hypocritical that Tweety is so quick to make sweeping generalizations and pass judgment on an entire group of people when he is actively condoning and encouraging Mitchell’s adultery. **Deconstructors** would take interest in the idea that a lawyer, whose very purpose is to uphold justice, is viewed as immoral. They might also note Tweety’s inconsistent response to immorality as a sign that people often have skewed or contradictory perceptions of reality and morality.

[44] “Well, any of ’em will cool down after I massage their jaw wid mah African soup-bone, yessir! I knocks ’em into a good humor.” Mitchell lied boldly. “Heah come Lucy, now. Oh boy! She sho is propaganda!” “I’ll say she’s red hot—she just want dont for the red light!”

Once again using dialectical euphemisms, Mitchell promotes the idea that violence is the answer; to him, beating someone into submission is preferable to using logic and reason to persuade. **Darwinists** might suggest that Mitchell’s aggression is a result of the primitive origins of humans, an evolutionarily advantageous trait which would have allowed him to assert dominance over his mate and over any other males competing for her attention. **Darwinists** might further explain that though such aggression may no longer be necessary at the current stage of human evolution, the characteristic is nevertheless biologically ingrained in human males and may still elicit positive responses from human females who are similarly biologically conditioned. On the other hand, the author reveals here that Mitchell is fully aware that he is simply putting up a front. Not only does this self-awareness make him seem cowardly, but his lying also reveals that he is not completely fooled by his own act. Earlier in the story, it is possible for the audience to think that perhaps Mitchell truly believes that he is the persona that he projects, that he is buying into his own con. Here, however, readers can see that Mitchell is aware that he is not the man he pretends to be, although he may be living with a fake-it-‘til-you-make-it philosophy, acting and dressing the part until he becomes the man he wants to be.

Plato would likely find Mitchell and Tweety’s objectifying outburst about Lucy to be troublesome. Indeed, **Plato** might encourage Mitchell to rationally consider his

attraction to Lucy and to reject any cause for his attraction that is based purely in emotional or physical desires. Similarly, **Plato** would hope that readers would view Mitchell's attraction to Lucy as something far removed from real love, rather identifying it as a cheapened version of the pure, rational, and morally commendable ideal of "true love." **Plato** would also likely be displeased with Mitchell's talk of violence because it stems from irrational and emotional desires rather than rational and logical thought.

[45] She came up smiling coyly as she noticed in the order of their importance to her the new fur coat, Mitchell's nifty suit, and Mitchell.

Until this point in the story, there was little mention of Lucy's motivations for participating in the affair with Mitchell. A **reader-response** critic might suggest that more empathetic readers may have given Lucy the benefit of the doubt, perhaps allowing themselves to believe that Lucy was with Mitchell because she loved him. This sentence, though, makes it clear that Lucy's motivations are just as selfish as Mitchell's since material goods are more important to her than people, and her coy smile suggests that she is fully aware of the way that she manipulates Mitchell. **Formalists** would likely appreciate the way that Hurston has implied, rather than overtly explained, Lucy's motivations because they value the distinction between direct and indirect characterization. **Longinus**, too, would respect the subtlety of Hurston's characterization because by implying, rather than explicitly stating, Lucy's motivations, Hurston expertly displays her understanding of literary technique and of human nature.

[46] "Well, so long Tweety, see you in the funny papers."

Lucy does not even speak to Mitchell or Tweety, and Mitchell's abrupt departure reveals that he is far more interested in Lucy than in his friendship. **Darwinists** and Freudian **psychoanalytic** critics might suggest that Mitchell is responding to his innate sex-drive, one of the most powerful of human motivations. The entire time he is with Tweety, he is showing off and talking about Lucy, and as soon as she arrives, he deserts Tweety for her company. **Thematic** critics might point out the recurring theme of undependability that Mitchell maintains by abandoning his friend just as he has frequently abandoned his wife.

[47] "So long, Mitch, I'll pick you up off the junk pile."

Tweety seems unfazed at Mitchell leaving immediately when Lucy arrives. He has probably had several encounters with Mitchell just like this one since Mitchell has a tendency to show off and likely goes to the poolroom often before his meetings with Lucy. **Formalists** might note the vividness of the phrase "I'll pick you up off the junk pile." **Psychoanalytic** critics, on the other hand, might suggest that Tweety uses this seemingly harmless colloquialism because he subconsciously has a low opinion of Mitchell, perhaps viewing his friend as "junk" or garbage.

Much like the dialogue in the first half of the story, this section of dialogue would certainly catch the attention of **multicultural** critics, who are interested in the ways that various culture groups are represented in a text. Though it is not clear whether Mitchell and Tweety are both Southerners who have moved to New York, it is evident that the language they use together implies a shared cultural experience, whether that shared

experience is racial, geographical, temporal, social, or some combination of these cultural aspects.

[48] Lucy and the fur-bearing Mitchell strolled off down 132nd street. It was nearly sundown and the sidewalk was becoming crowded.

Because **Aristotle** and **formalists** emphasize design, especially the ways in which endings can echo beginnings, they might note that once again, Mitchell is walking with Lucy close enough to his home to be caught by Caroline, but he is also close enough that he can use the excuse that he was on his way home. Also similar to the beginning of the story is the fact that it is late afternoon or early evening, and Caroline is surely expecting Mitchell to arrive home soon for dinner. Another similarity to the beginning of the story is how crowded the sidewalk is. As before, Caroline's confrontation with Mitchell will have quite the audience.

Formalist critics might suggest that the sunset may also symbolize that the sun is setting on Mitchell and Lucy's affair, and the encroaching darkness may represent the trouble that will soon befall the adulterers upon Caroline's arrival.

[49] About 20 minutes later the loungers were amazed to see a woman on Seventh avenue strolling leisurely along with an ax[e] over her shoulder. Tweety recognized Caroline and grew cold. Somehow she had found out and was in pursuit—with an axe! He grew cold with fear for Mitchell, but he hadn't the least idea which of the brownstone fronts hid the lovers. He tried to stop Caroline with conversation.

Mitchell's lateness likely alerted Caroline about her husband's activities, and despite the fact that she has not mentioned Lucy in several weeks, she is fully aware of

Mitchell's whereabouts. **Darwinists** might suggest that Caroline's protectiveness of her marriage and her desire for a loyal mate stem from her biological need to provide a stable family environment, which would be ideal for raising a child. **Darwinists** might even propose that Mitchell's infidelity and the unpredictable situation that it creates is one reason why the couple does not have any children already. Then again, a **Darwinian** perspective may also explain Mitchell's adultery as a result of his inherited impulse to reproduce with as many suitable mates as possible in order to ensure the survival of the species, and **Darwinists** may even argue that the couple's lack of children might be one reason that Mitchell is seeking out other mates in the first place since he has had no success fathering any offspring with Caroline.

Caroline suspects—and rightly so—that Mitchell is in the same area where she last confronted him and Lucy. Her leisurely stroll combined with the axe paradoxically reveals a woman who is both calm and enraged. **Psychoanalytic** critics might suggest that Caroline's calm demeanor is evidence that her ego, or rational mind, is keeping her id, or emotional impulses, in check. However, they might also question whether it is her id that is actually in control since she is about to commit an act of violence. **Feminists**, on the other hand, might commend Caroline for her confidence, assertiveness, and self-control as well as her willingness to fight for what she believes is right. She is furious with her husband, but she is deliberate with her actions. True to her earlier promise, she has not spoken about Lucy since the beginning of the story. **Aristotle** might note that Caroline maintains her consistent character since she gave Mitchell fair warning in their last argument, and now (true to her word) she is acting on her warning.

How Caroline discovered Mitchell's infidelity may be a mystery to Tweety, but it is no great mystery to readers. Mitchell has been far from discreet with Lucy, meeting frequently in public, purchasing extravagant gifts for her, showing off and bragging to his friends, and failing to arrive home when he is expected. His impulses (**psychoanalytic** critics would suggest) are much stronger than his reason not only because he is having an affair in the first place but also because he cannot help but broadcast his affair even though it is unwise to do so. Some critics might even suggest that Mitchell seems to want to be caught, possibly because he likes the attention or possibly because he feels guilty for his actions.

The fact that Caroline is carrying an axe may be frightening to the people on the street, but (as **formalists** might note) it is an even more serious piece of foreshadowing for readers who have already learned about Caroline's past violence against Mitchell's mistresses. Many readers may be suspecting that Caroline has finally snapped, leading to a gruesome end for the lovers. **Psychoanalytic** critics might explain such violence as the id overpowering the ego, and they might further suggest that the ego breaking down in response to betrayal of a sexual nature is an expected psychological response since sexuality is one of the most powerful human motivations.

Also worth noting is how quickly Tweety jumps into the situation to try to cover for Mitchell. **New historicists** might explain his defense as part of the power conflict that exists between the sexes; perhaps Tweety protects Mitchell because they are on the same side—the male side—of that conflict. Mitchell's affair or his relationship with Caroline are none of Tweety's business, and it might be wiser for him to leave Caroline alone since she is justifiably angry and carrying an axe.

[50] “Howdy do, Mrs. Potts; going to chop some wood?”

Tweety tries to distract Caroline with small talk, but she is undeterred. **Thematic** critics might suggest that, continuing with the theme of deception, even Tweety’s harmless conversation is dishonest because he likely has no desire to speak to Caroline and is only doing so because he has an ulterior motive—protecting Mitchell and Lucy.

[51] Very unemotionally, “Ah speck so.”

Caroline’s lack of emotion further emphasizes that her actions are deliberate. **Psychoanalytic** critics might suggest that her dispassionate response is proof of her ego maintaining control over her id. From the beginning of the story, readers know that Mitchell views Caroline as overemotional and temperamental, but here she is calm and collected—a woman on a mission. **Formalists** would be interested in Mitchell’s opinion of Caroline since he, paradoxically, is the character who is truly unable to control his emotions.

Though she may not know exactly how the confrontation will play out, Caroline (because she has been a consistent character all along) likely has a plan for what she wants to do to Mitchell and his mistress. The question about chopping “wood”—a word which for centuries (as **traditional historical** critics might point out) has doubled as a slang term for male genitalia—foreshadows Caroline’s attack on Mitchell, especially since she ends up with Mitchell’s pants and belt hanging from the end of her axe. **Aristotle** and **formalist** critics would likely appreciate this bit of foreshadowing.

[52] “Ha, ha! You forgot you aint back down South dont you?”

A **structuralist** critic may note that, as Caroline's neighbors and husband have continually done since the couple moved to New York, Tweety yet again calls attention to the differences between the North and the South and to Caroline's foreignness.

[53] "Nope. Theys wood to be chopped up North too," and she passed on, leaving the corner agog.

Undeterred, Caroline continues on her mission. Her statement that "Theys wood to be chopped up North too" contradicts Tweety's statement which emphasized the differences between the North and the South, emphasizing her belief that geography does not change morality or character. The statement also suggests that she knows that a change of scenery makes no difference to her husband, and her business of ending his affairs is the same in New York as it was in Florida. Once again, **Aristotle** would admire the consistency of these two characters.

[54] "Somebody ought to have stopped her. That female clod-hopper is going to split Mitch's head—and he's a good scout."

The observers, despite their fear for Mitchell's well-being, only have suggestions for what "somebody" should do. A Freudian **psychoanalytic** critic might say that subconsciously their fear—rooted in their ids—leads them in fact to do nothing to help their friend. As Mitchell does with Caroline, these passers-by are placing responsibility on others instead of doing the right thing themselves. These people may not have the most trustworthy sense of morality, though, if they believe that Mitchell is "a good scout." Additionally, **traditional historical** critics may call attention to the use of the phrase "good scout" and its possible connotations relating to World War I. **Formalists**,

on the other hand, might suggest the phrase has a dual meaning; not only does the phrase suggest camaraderie, but perhaps it also implies that Mitchell has served as a “lookout” for his friends just as they are doing for him now.

[55] “We ought to call the police.”

Again, witnesses only say what should be done, rather than actually doing anything. Even the use of the first-person plural “we” removes responsibility from the speaker and places it on the group, alleviating any one person from the obligation to act. **Formalists** might note the importance of this one word and the paradoxical way in which the suggestion that all should act results in no one acting at all.

[56] “Somebody ought to overtake her and take that axe away.”

The repetition of the word “ought” is interesting because several people are more than willing to say what “somebody” should do, but they are unwilling to act themselves. **Thematic** critics might note that hypocrisy is a running theme in the story, and even these random witnesses are no exception.

[57] “Who, for instance?”

The fact that none of the several witnesses has taken action is an example of bystander apathy, a phenomenon that would surely be of interest to **psychoanalytic** critics. Also known as diffusion of responsibility, this socio-psychological term refers to the theory that the more witnesses there are to a crime or accident, the less likely it is that any one person will assume responsibility for intervening or reporting it. **Traditional historical** critics might note that the theory began to be formally studied in the mid-20th

Century, but cases have been reported in various cultures and for several centuries, including the highly-publicized 1964 stabbing death of a woman named Kitty Genovese. In Ms. Genovese's case, which also happened in New York City, dozens of witnesses failed to intervene, and only one reported the attack to the police. Perhaps the earliest known example in literature would be the Biblical "Parable of the Good Samaritan." Just as several passers-by ignore a wounded and dying man in the parable—whether for fear of being attacked themselves or because they assume someone else will help—the people who have the chance to stop Caroline fail to do so. Of course, Hurston could not have predicted the attack on Ms. Genovese or of the increase in popularity of this socio-psychological theory in the years following the publication of "The Country in the Woman," but it is very likely that she was familiar with the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" or the concept of deindividuation. **Traditional historical** critics would argue that she most certainly knew the Bible, if only because her father had been a preacher, while **dialogical** critics would be interested in any dialogue between her text and the Christian scriptures. Additionally, Hurston was a keen observer of human behavior, a fact that is demonstrated time and again in her writing.

[58] So it rested there. No one felt like trying to take an axe from Caroline. She went on and they waited, full of anxiety.

It is possible that these witnesses did not believe that Caroline would actually harm anyone, though no one is sure enough to try to interfere. **Psychoanalytic** critics might note that their anxiety, however, is enough to keep them waiting to find out what happens rather than continuing on in whatever they were doing before. **Structuralist**

critics, interested in contrasts and opposites, would contrast their inactivity with Caroline's *very* active nature.

Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and formalists would likely appreciate the tantalizing suspense that Hurston has created by leaving not only Tweety and the other witnesses, but also the reader, "wait[ing], full of anxiety." **Horace** might also commend Hurston for providing readers with a satisfying reward for enduring the suspense, simultaneously demonstrating her prowess as a writer and encouraging the admiration of her readers, who will hopefully be persuaded to explore her other works.

[59] A few minutes later they saw her returning just as leisurely, her wiry frame wrapped in the loose folds of a natural muskrat coat. Over her shoulder, like a Roman lictor, she bore the axe, and from the head of it hung the trousers of Mitchell's natty suit, the belt buckle clacking a little in the breeze.

For the first time, Mitchell is the one on the receiving end of Caroline's wrath. In the past, it has always been his mistresses who were humiliated and assaulted, but this time, Mitchell takes a direct blow. Additionally, since his trousers and belt now dangle from the head of the axe, one can assume that Caroline swung her axe below the belt, trying to chop some "wood" after all. This change in targets perhaps indicates a positive change in Caroline and may signal a change in their relationship and in Mitchell's level of respect for his wife. Taking Mitchell's pants leaves him exposed and humiliated, his embarrassment likely heightened (as **archetypal** critics, with their interest in the relationships between humans and nature, might note) by the cold November air, especially since all that now protects him is a thin pair of silk underwear. **Formalist**

critics might note how this outcome echoes one of Caroline's Southern victories, although there it was a woman's underwear, not Mitchell's, that was exposed. Caroline, on the other hand, is warmed by her newly-claimed muskrat coat and by her victory over Mitchell. Her leisurely walk and her proud axe-and-trousers banner clearly reveal her to be the winner of the altercation. Both **feminist** and **Marxist** critics might celebrate her victory over the man who has oppressed her, the first because she is a woman and the second because she is poorer than Mitchell.

The fact that Caroline is willing to wear the luxurious coat, one which Mitchell deems worthy of a high-class woman, shows that she, too, enjoys the finer things in life and would likely have been willing to dress in the way that Mitchell desired if only he had been willing to purchase a new wardrobe for her rather than spending money on mistresses. While **traditional historical** critics might note that the word "natty" means "neat" or "snazzy" in this context, **reader-response** critics might mention that the word "natty" has recently acquired a much less flattering connotation, which creates a contrast between Mitchell's trousers and Caroline's fine, new coat.

Furthermore, by having the confrontation itself take place out of the view of readers, Hurston builds suspense (which **formalists** would applaud) and provides a hilarious image of Caroline's triumph. Once again, the author deals with a serious issue in a simultaneously grave and humorous manner.

Critics who agree with the teachings of **Horace** believe that positive reception from the audience is the ultimate measure of a work's success. Therefore, these critics would likely appreciate that Hurston has given many readers what they want in the

story's climax. As the story has progressed, readers have witnessed Mitchell's betrayal and neglect of Caroline, so many readers may have been hoping for Mitchell's comeuppance. By delivering a sense of justice, Hurston has satisfied many of her readers. A **reader-response** critic, on the other hand, might point out that some readers may be disappointed by the story's climax because they might have been hoping for a more gruesome meeting between Caroline's husband and her axe. Still other readers may view Caroline's actions as expected, just the latest retaliation in a long string of affairs and public spectacles. Even further, some modern readers may have been hoping that Caroline would leave her husband completely—an act that would have far more serious social implications in the 1920s than it would today—instead of continuing on in a marriage when he has so frequently and shamelessly broken his vows.

[60] It was nearly five weeks—long after Thanksgiving—before the corner saw Mitchell again, and then he seemed a bit shy and diffident.

Mitchell's changed demeanor seems to imply that Caroline's actions—and the fact that they were directed at him instead of his mistress—have made an impact on him. Never before have her antics dissuaded him from his pursuits; perhaps he did not care a great deal about Daisy Miller, Delphine Hicks, or Della Clarke, but her attack on him and his physical and metaphorical manhood has finally gotten through to him.

[61] “Say, Mitch, where you been so long? And how's your sweet-stuff making it?”

Reader-response critics might argue that the tone of the second question could be read either as sarcastic or as genuinely sympathetic. **Archetypal** critics can explain both tones as reflecting the deep-seated traits of human nature.

Whether his absence is due to his humiliation or because Caroline has assumed control over Mitchell, he has been gone for quite some time, and even his male friends have not seen him. It is unclear whether or not Mitchell has truly had a change of heart or if his lack of social activity is typical for him following Caroline's intervention in his affairs. Hurston does not reveal what Mitchell's behavior is usually like after his affairs end. However, because this account is the first instance that readers see of Caroline retaliating directly against Mitchell, rather than his mistress, it is reasonable to assume that perhaps she has finally gotten through to him, especially because this retaliation is far more extreme than any of her previous actions, violent though they were.

[62] "Oh Lucy? Aint seen her since the last time."

The fact that Mitchell has not made contact with Lucy again indicates that he may be a changed man. Perhaps Caroline has finally made an impact on her husband. Mitchell uses the words "the last time" to describe the day that Caroline and her axe made their way down Seventh Avenue. He may use this phrase because that event was so memorable that he does not need to be specific when he describes it. More likely is that any further description will embarrass him, and both **Darwinian** and **archetypal** critics would be able to explain why one man would not want to be embarrassed in front of others. Even though five weeks have passed, he surely still feels the sting of Caroline's attack.

[63] "How come—Y'all aint mad?"

Oddly, Mitchell's friend assumes that the reason Mitchell has not seen Lucy is because the two are having a lovers' spat. Mitchell's reputation and his earlier boasts may have made the friend think that nothing could deter Mitchell from doing as he pleased.

[64] "Naw, its dat wife of mine. Ah caint git de country out dat woman. Lets go somewhere and get a drink."

Mitchell seems resigned to the fact that Caroline will not change. His determination is gone, and now he admits that he cannot change Caroline, no matter how hard he tries. Caroline does not have a total victory here, though. Mitchell may be broken, but he clearly still resents Caroline and her country ways and wishes that he could change her.

The author does not reveal whether Lucy Taylor is Mitchell's last mistress or if he will return to his philandering ways after some time has passed. However, the fact that Mitchell decides to go have a drink with his friend rather than seeking out another woman may suggest that he has given up on keeping company with other women and has submitted to Caroline's ways. In the kind of irony that **formalists** would appreciate, Mitchell's desire to move to New York for a chance to start anew and redefine himself has worked—just not in the way that he hoped.

Though the tides have turned in Mitchell and Caroline's marriage, the relationship is still dysfunctional. While some readers may see this ending as a victory for Caroline, **deconstructionist** and **postmodernist** critics might point out that the victory simultaneously creates new problems for the couple. Just as Caroline felt oppressed and betrayed by Mitchell, Mitchell is now resentful of his wife and the fact that she has

usurped his power. Indeed, the couple's relationship has changed, but there is still an imbalance of power, an overuse of force, and a deep-seated unhappiness for both Mitchell and Caroline. Ending the latest of Mitchell's affairs is not enough restitution for him having the affair in the first place, let alone compensation for all of his previous affairs. Caroline's actions in preventing his adultery will not suddenly make Mitchell fall madly in love with his wife again, nor will it make Caroline forgive her husband. Even if readers view the ambiguous ending to the story as a win for Caroline (or for the couple and their marriage), it is merely a small step in the right direction—far from a fairytale ending. While **Horace** might suggest that readers appreciate “happily-ever-after” endings without any loose ends left unaddressed, **Aristotle**, **Longinus**, and **formalists** would appreciate the paradoxically optimistic and troublesome ending and Hurston's ability to craft a story that reflects the complexities of real marital relationships.

Interestingly enough, of all the varieties of recent literary theories, **multiculturalism** seems at once the most relevant and the least relevant to this story. **Multiculturalists** would be very interested that every character seems to be an African American, but they would also be interested that race, as such, plays such a small role in the story. While most “Great Migration” literature focuses explicitly on the disenfranchisement of African Americans, “The Country in the Woman” takes a different approach. Instead of depicting black people interacting (and conflicting) with whites or struggling for racial equality and all that it entails, this work—like much of Hurston's other fiction—focuses on the problems facing a specific married couple, on the challenges of marriage, on the innately human desire to belong and to be respected, on the complex nature of morality, and on the themes of betrayal and revenge. Of course,

this work is in many ways influenced by the larger-scale societal issues of its time. The author, characters, and settings are all African-American, and the struggle between Mitchell and Caroline can in some ways be viewed as a microcosm of the racially-charged power struggle that, unfortunately, still exists to some degree today. The story, therefore, is a useful tool in understanding the social, political, and economic issues of the 1920s, but its intimate focus on a single couple and on individual human experiences contributes to the story's relevance for readers of any cultural background even a century later.

¹ For a full discussion of pluralism and the other theories discussed in this text, see Evans, *Perspectives*, and the other relevant works cited therein.

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