

THE BLACK AMERICAN WOMAN'S LITERARY TRADITION AND THE CULT OF "TRUE WOMANHOOD" ¹

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"The novel," writes Annis Pratt, "has been a perennially social form, a literary convention that, for all of its flights into romance and fantasy, is grounded in social reality." ² Therefore, in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the literature of Black American women, a tradition which until fairly recently was unknown and unimportant to the greater critical community as well as to the general public, it is imperative to situate their works within the context of Black women's relationship to a culture which inevitably imposed its value system. There are many, many ways, some subtle, some blatant, in which this mechanism insinuated itself into the lives and literature of these women, but here I wish to examine one of the most important and potentially harmful; that is, the definition of the "ideal woman" and the degree to which that definition was absorbed and/or rejected by black authors according to their time, as well as the problems it caused in establishing a strong sense of identity and self-worth.

In the eyes of white historians and sociologists the conditions of servitude in the 19th century were not propitious to the consolidation of any positive sense of self, given the inhumane treatment of black women, the arbitrary selling of their children and husbands, and repeated sexual abuse. Reduced to animal status in the eyes of her white owners, the black woman performed the same jobs as her mate in the fields and kept up the domestic end of the bargain as well, circumstances which helped give rise to both the myth of the black matriarch and that of the extraordinary strength of black women. Writes Angela Davis,

In order to function as slave, the black woman had to be annulled as woman, that is as woman in her historical stance of wardship under the entire male hierarchy. The sheer force of things rendered her equal to her mate. ³

Thus when Sojourner Truth took to the platform to defend women's rights in 1852, recounting her proficiency in "men's work" in her most famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?", the men present accused her of not being a woman at all, whereupon she rent open the front of her dress to dispell any doubts.⁴

This tradition of both physical and psychological strength is one of which modern black feminists are most proud. Yet in the 19th century it ran totally contrary to the prevailing "cult of true womanhood", as defined by Patricia Graham: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity".⁵ How to be pious when white professors of Christianity denied them their human dignity? How to be pure when slaveowners repeatedly violated their integrity? How to internalize submissiveness, except as a coping mechanism before whites, when there was no assurance that one's mate would even be there the following day and when the weight of the survival of the whole race was planted squarely on their shoulders? How to be domestic when required to labor in the fields or tend whites' houses and children to the detriment of their own?

Eugene Genovese, Mary Burgher, Deborah Gray White and other black historians make it clear that in order to survive with a strong sense of identity in tact, slave women depended on each other to define their humanity and womanliness via a support system that continues to be of primary importance in the black community today.⁶ Yet the conflict of what the dominant society held to be ideal in a woman and what the black woman knew herself to be created an ambivalence which is not only reflected in the novel of the era but also explains some of its contradictions.

Perhaps the main difficulty of black authors of the last century was in trying to write about black experience for a white audience which, for women writing about other women, meant creating a black heroine who conformed as closely as possible to the norms of the sentimental novel of the era in order to be published and accepted by the white reading public. Because of the connotations associated with dark skin —sensuality, lewdness, lasciviousness and wantonness⁷— Barbara Christian finds that, apart from the tragic implications of a woman rejected by a culture that has engendered her (and hence a strong bid for sympathy), the choice of the mulatta as protagonist is a concession to the prevailing white standards not only of beauty but of purity, nobility of spirit and other traits considered necessary for a true heroine.⁸ Thus it is interesting to note that Harriet E. Wilson's apparently *autobiographical* novel *Our Nig* (1859) portrays Frado, the protagonist, as the very light-skinned mulatta daughter of a white mother and black father. (Frado is in fact almost as light as her nemesis, Mary Belmont, a fact which incenses the latter's mother who obliges Frado to spend as much time in the sun as possible so as to darken her skin.⁹) Yet Henry Louis Gates, whose conscientious research documents Wilson's life as closely as possible, given the scant records available, and compares the information found with the novel, found two entries for the birth of a Harriet E. Adams (the author's maiden name) both of which recorded her race as *black*, not mulatta.¹⁰

Gates speculates that the novel's scant success and subsequent obscurity may have had to do with several factors which did not conform to the reading public's expectations. First, Wilson's frank treatment of racism in the North conceivably could have irritated abolitionists who preferred to associate the evil with the South; secondly, her sympathetic view of "amalgamation", the unspeakable horror of miscegenation, on the part of a white woman was an offense to white sensibilities (Frado's parents live together peacefully until her father's death); thirdly, the uncharitable personality of Mrs. Belmont who professed herself to be an exemplary Christian; and lastly, the exposure of a "fugitive slave", who lectures to Northern abolitionists on the evils of slavery, as a hoax.

I would add to these, two more reservations with respect to Frado as an ideal 19th-century heroine. Firstly, her piousness is at best questionable in that she not only quickly points out the discrepancy between Mrs. Belmont's Christianity and her inhumane treatment of her young charge, but also embraces the faith as a means to assure her entrance into heaven —purely because in heaven she would be with the dying James for all eternity and James was the one person who offered her affection and protection from his tyrannical mother. This piousness with an ulterior motive could hardly qualify as ideally characteristic of "true womanhood". In the second place, Frado's experience makes it clear that submissiveness is a coping strategy for the powerless and in no way reduces the lively, rebellious mind even as the body must submit. This vivid portrait of a superficial submission provided an unsettling glimpse of what was really going on in the minds of "socially inferior" beings —be they blacks or women. Moreover, it is precisely Frado's defiance of Mrs. Belmont's orders one day that paradoxically improves her situation in the house —a revolutionary concept, most unbecoming to an ideal heroine created for the benefit of the patriarchy.

One can only speculate on the author's veiled reference to things unmentionable in her past which would only horrify her readers (p. 130). Given her status as a black woman in a hostile society it is not unreasonable to imagine men trying to take advantage of her situation although she may have chosen not to include these incidents as too offensive to the obligatory concept of a single woman's chastity. And, of course, a woman forced to earn her own living has little to say with respect to domesticity. If, as in the case of Frado, she is on the verge of starvation, she will work at whatever task provides her with enough income to support herself and later her small son.

Thirty years later Iola Leroy (Iola Leroy, or the Shadows Uplifted ¹¹) is still battling with some of the same questions though the focus has changed somewhat. Not only is Iola "a tragic mulatta"; she believes herself to actually be a white woman, and as such receives the appropriate education, until on her father's death a conniving cousin has her mulatta mother's marriage annulled and returns them to slavery. Iola, then, has been immersed in the cult of true womanhood as a white woman up until her graduation. Contrary to Frado, she is sincerely religious, and virtuous, but because of her being reduced to slavery she must renounce all pretense

of submissiveness precisely in order to preserve her chastity. She becomes so feisty that no white man can have his way with her and manages to “save herself” for her eventual marriage to another disinherited mulatto of noble bearing, to whom we may suppose she will be more submissive. Iola must have had a certain appeal to the nineteenth-century reader for although the pseudo-sentimental tale of family lost and found is steeped in moralizing and proselytizing, the protagonist did embody many of the characteristics expected of the novelistic heroine. Yet the author, Frances E. Harper, had worked assiduously in the South during reconstruction and was fully aware of the problems facing black people everywhere. Not only did she favor women’s suffrage but she also advocated economic independence for young women as well. Thus her character’s adamant insistence on finding a job and providing for herself even when “she did not have to”, since her uncle could well afford to support her if she chose to stay at home. With so much to be done and the vulnerability of their position, black women could ill afford to embrace domesticity at the expense of economic and social necessity. Iola’s main concern is that of usefulness to her people, but she also includes personal self-development and intellectual independence even as she expounds the importance of the role of mothers and the family as the foundation for black community life. Harper never really questions the main precepts inherited from the white patriarchal system but she does modify the terms enough to make a little room for the special circumstances of black women. Intent upon uplifting her race to meet the white standard, she nonetheless created a heroine for the “upper strata” (well-educated mulattos) with whom the vast majority of black women could scarcely identify.

The white norms for beauty and femininity continued to dominate the literature of black women well into the 20th century though the features of the ideal woman were altered somewhat. Graham finds that for the first half of the present century the emphasis was centered on youth, appearance, acquiescence and domesticity,¹² and certainly the mulatta heroines of Jessie Fausset’s *The Chinaberry Tree*¹³ and *There is Confusion*¹⁴ conform to the pattern even as they continue to forge a career for themselves (one sews and the other dances). Fausset’s aim is still acceptance by white society and full integration; hence the apologist literature would naturally follow the norms.

A fascinating exception to the rule is the heroine of Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*,¹⁵ Helga Crane, whose youth and attractive appearance are clouded by her inability to adapt either to white or black society. Unable to reconcile herself to either way of life and having lost the man she finally admits to herself that she is in love with, Helga embraces both religion and a man culturally, socially, and intellectually inferior to herself in an effort to end her personal torment. In a denouement which is at once tragic and vividly modern, Larsen lambasts the myths of both acquiescence and domesticity and calls into question the superficial appearance of things. Instead of holding fast to her own independence, however shaky and unsure of herself she was, Helga has acquiesced to a God she finds to be meaningless and

to a man with whom she can share nothing. Convalescing from a difficult delivery, her fourth child having died shortly after birth, she swears she will pull herself up out of the quagmire into which she has sunk. The only impediment to her running away is her love for and loyalty to her children whom she cannot willfully abandon to a lonely childhood such as she herself has had. She determines to think of a solution once she is completely well, yet no sooner is she on her feet again than she becomes pregnant with her fifth child. Larsen's novel is not only an indictment of the social structures that divide whites from blacks, rich from poor, it is also an attack on the black middle class' acceptance of white patriarchal norms and in particular defies its definition of womanhood as acceptable. Larsen was not just a novelist; she was a registered nurse who had seen the real lot of black women and was not deluded by idealistic inventions.

The optimistic flush of the Harlem Renaissance which cradled both Fausset and Larsen gave way to the Great Depression, which hit blacks especially hard, and the consequent rise of protest literature. Zora Neale Hurston was criticized at the time for writing a love story in black folk narrative rather than towing the obligatory political line, and more recently for having bowed to the patriarchal colorist norm of using a mulatta woman with long straight hair as her heroine. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note just how little the protagonist of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*¹⁶ conforms to the social expectations of the era. Janie spends twenty-five years acquiescing to what is expected of her—first her marriage to an older man because her Granny wants her to be secure, and then to Joe Starks who promises her love but only uses her as a decoration for his manhood and status, allowing her no personal development whatsoever. Joe requires Janie to keep her lovely hair tied up in a kerchief so that other men will not admire her; at the same time he refuses to let her participate in the life of the community because she is the mayor's wife and as such must maintain a certain distance from other blacks. Here the importance of "appearance" takes on a double meaning. Not only must Janie be attractive as a wife and a complement to her husband, but she must keep up appearances before the rest of the town as well. The fact that Hurston knew this to be the lot of women in general is apparent in her description of Janie's acquiescence:

So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush. The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again. So she put something in there to represent the spirit like a Virgin Mary image in a church. The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired.¹⁷

Janie will maintain appearances until the day she defies Joe's criticism of her as old and ridicules him before his friends, attacking his aura of masculinity. The rules broken, appearances become secondary. Joe eventually takes sick and dies.

This nascent rebellion on Janie's part initiates an upheaval of the other precepts as well. Upon Joe's death she lets her hair down, objectively takes stock of herself, and begins to take charge of her own life. Two years later Tea Cake comes to Eatonton and in him Janie finally finds her youthful dreams fulfilled. But notice the affront to convention. Janie at this point is forty years old—no longer young by the standards of the 1930s—and Tea Cake merely twenty-nine. The stage is set for the snickering typically reserved for an older, economically well-off woman who falls for a younger man. Yet Janie finds in this man everything she has longed for—someone who will complement not dominate her, someone who will allow her to grow and be herself. She throws off any attempt to conserve appearances and leaves a domestically secure life to pursue an adventure with Tea Cake on the muck in Florida. While it is true that Janie submits to Tea Cake's fury over an imaginary attraction to another man, it is also true that she fights back physically when another woman attempts to interfere with her relationship with him. Janie's stature reaches heroic proportions when she takes it upon herself to kill her lover after a rabid dog has bitten him and he himself has gone mad. She returns to her community dressed in overalls, having rejected in her own life those prescribed ideals of the "true woman" and having achieved her own personhood and independence.

Janie's refusal to abide by the rules of being a proper woman in order to achieve her own independence and personal growth is contrasted with Lutie Johnson of Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946). Though Lutie is a brownskinned woman she fits the stereotype of the tragic mulatta and has been described as having the "soul of Iola Leroy".¹⁸ But in Petry's portrait of a world in which the black community has broken down, a virtuous woman comes up against impossible odds. Apparently the author's purpose in part was to counteract two prevalent myths. The first one, expounded from the times of Frances Harper and furthered by such educators as Charlotte Hawkins Brown held that if the black woman would just "act like a lady" she would be treated as such. But Lutie as a beautiful woman is lusted after by black and white men alike and her clinging to her own integrity in fact only helps to bring about her tragedy. Lutie counters the idea that lower-class black women are whores, but since she is black and poor "no one else relates to her as a decent woman."¹⁹ *The Street* as protest novel documents the futility of trying to adhere to norms which are continually invalidated by conditions in the black ghetto.

In the second place while domesticity for a black woman was early discarded in favor of participation in the job market (almost always because of economic necessity), Petry also contradicts the concept prevalent in the Harlem Renaissance that by working hard lower-class blacks can be admitted into the American mainstream. Lutie's double jeopardy of being black and a woman of the working-class means that she is hard put to rise above the status this society has allotted her.

With the appearance of *Maud Martha*²⁰ the pretense of complying with white norms of true womanhood is finally abandoned. For the first time in the Black

American woman's literary tradition there appears a very dark-skinned woman as protagonist, perhaps because she embodies nothing particularly heroic. Maud Martha (possibly an autobiographical portrait of the author, Gwendolyn Brooks), is simply a girl-woman growing up in an urban community "loved by her family and nurtured by their community rituals".²¹ In breaking with the mulatta heroine, however, Brooks analyzes the grief caused to the black-black woman by colorism within the black community. Maud Martha struggles to maintain her own sense of self-worth even as she recognizes the powerful allure of light-skinned women, a concept of beauty by this time so internalized by black people that she can look on her husband's dilemma almost without bitterness:

...But it's my color that makes him mad. I try to shut my eyes to that, but it's no good. What I am inside, what is really me, he likes okay. But he keeps looking at my color, which is like a wall. He has to jump over it in order to meet and touch what I've got for him. He has to jump away up high in order to see it. He gets awful tired of all that jumping.²²

The problem of appearance is a central one here, in that Maud Martha must reject the norm imposed by society in order to define herself positively. Although superficially she seems to acquiesce to her husband, internally she refuses to be drawn into a cycle she sees to be unrealistic and pernicious. In this sense the protagonist is a much more modern heroine than the others since her struggle is a mental one and her heroism is no more nor less than that of every black woman making a life for herself against all odds. Nor is her life more or less tragic than the next-door neighbor's. According to Barbara Christian, Brooks created here a new type of black woman character, deflating the "mystique of heroism and grand defeat by illuminating the commonplace."²³ Maud Martha thus opens the way for the ordinary black heroine prevalent in contemporary novels of many Black American women.

Released from the obligation to make black protagonists palatable to white audiences, black women writers turned their attention to discovering the meaning of growing up black and female in a white society. Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1953)²⁴ deals with a closed Barbadian community in New York. Nevertheless, white culture and white norms pervade the atmosphere to such a degree that Selina Boyce, the young protagonist struggling through adolescence, feels stifled, her life conditioned by circumstances she cannot control. Selina adores her happy-go-lucky father who is apparently unable to look at life realistically, preferring to live on dreams of some future success. But Selina eventually comes to understand this attitude as a cover-up for his profound disillusion over being denied his "manhood" by a white society which obliges him to take menial rather than fulfilling jobs. His irresponsible squandering of the large amount of money which was to be the deposit on their house is seen not only as revenge for his wife's having secretly sold the plot of land in Barbados, and his last dream of grandeur,

but also as his one chance to be “esplendido”, a “Big man” lavishing expensive gifts on the family that he loves.

In stark contrast to the figure of Deighton Boyce is his wife, whose sole objective in life is to “buy house” which for her as well as the other members of the community signifies security and upward mobility in American society. In spite of their basic love for one another this divergence in criteria creates a rift which becomes unbreachable, culminating in their mutual betrayal of the other’s dream and Deighton’s suicide. Selina’s devotion to her father and her resentment toward her mother is something she must deal with as she grows up between two strikingly different ways of life. Her own run-in with racism which leaves her hurt and humiliated finally brings her to understand her mother’s position as well as that of her community. Yet that understanding does not blind her to the perniciousness of acquiescence to her expected role in life. She feels increasingly estranged from her best girlfriend as the latter conforms more and more to the ideal vision of a young woman —preoccupied with lovely clothes and boyfriends and being a social success, even as she heads for a career.

Though Selina has never got on well with her sister, she is nonetheless distressed to see her headed for a secure yet passionless marriage with a nice Barbadian boy who will provide her with everything she needs except the joy and “sun” that Deighton had always brought into their house. She also grieves for the young Barbadian girl who is obliged to relinquish her love for a black boy from the South whom her parents consider to be socially inferior to the Barbadian boy they have chosen for her. In the throes of rebellion against what society expects of her, Selina allows herself to be seduced by another rebel from the community and initiates what she knows her mother would consider to be a scandalously illicit love affair with him. The sensual pleasure of sex plus her relationship with another outcast are important milestones on the way to her self-definition. Although she does arrive at greater understanding of all the people in her life and thus matures far beyond even her lover and soulmate, Selina nevertheless rejects those precepts which attempt to define and hence confine her identity as young Black woman.

While Selina’s quest is incomplete one still is optimistic that she will mature even more fully into a woman with a strong sense of self-worth. But in Toni Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)²⁵, white concepts of beauty and worth permeate black culture to such an extent that the effects can only be tragic. While the spunky young narrator is nurtured by a strong black mother, whose sense of self and community mean psychological security for her two daughters, Pecola is the offspring of a woman for whom the move North has meant her severing from meaningful Black life. Pauline evades the dourness of her own drab life by going to the cinema where for a short time she can image herself to be as lovely as the white heroines on the silver screen. This illusion, though, is cruelly and definitively destroyed the day one of her rotten front teeth falls out, effectively ending any possibility of identity with the white heroines she loved to watch.²⁶ The only sense of self-worth she can find is in her role as maid to a fashionable white family on

whose daughter she lavishes all her affection. Pauline has no strong sense of identity to pass on to her own daughter Pecola whose misfortune it is not only to be black but also ugly and awkward:

All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. ²⁷

Claudia and her sister have enough strength of character to contemptuously dismiss the light-skinned, curly-haired Maureen Peal, who is fawned over by adults and youngsters alike simply because she approximates the Shirley Temple ideal of girlish beauty. But poor Pecola accepts her cruelty to her as more proof of her own ugliness and worthlessness. She comes to believe that if she only had blue eyes she would be more acceptable to her mother and peers, and when, after being raped and becoming pregnant by her own father, she goes mad, it is easy for the town trickster to “make her eyes blue” in exchange for a favor.

“White as norm” continued to plague Black heroines right up into the sixties as Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976) ²⁸ documents. The massive influx of idealistic young whites from the North during the Civil Rights Movement threw young black men from the South into intimate contact with what had been the most pervasive taboo of the black male psyche—the white woman. Anger on the part of Black women in the movement smoldered as they saw themselves relegated to the social sidelines while their men chose to go out with white women. One of the many problems *Meridian* must deal with is Truman’s leaving her, after a brief affair in which he unwittingly gets her pregnant, for Lynne, a white Jewish girl from the North. Only after “Black becomes Beautiful” does Truman leave Lynne and beseech *Meridian* to marry him and have his “beautiful black babies”.

Black pride in their own culture finally liberates Black women from their excessive preoccupation with “ideal woman” as defined by a white canon. Freed from a slavish devotion to an impossible beauty, the Black woman can now comply with the characteristics of the modern-day woman—“active, attractive, ambitious, and ambivalent” ²⁹—and like the white woman, break down the old patriarchal modes in an attempt to establish her own independence and self-worth. The Black woman can consider herself attractive because of the newly found pride in her African heritage; ambitious and active because she is now able to move into the new space opened up by Black Nationalism and the Women’s Movement; and yet, in spite of everything, ambivalent because in the midst of these new possibilities, new technologies, new tensions, new objectives she is still searching to define herself and her relationship with her family, her community and her culture.

Several heroines of Alice Walker’s short stories embody these characteristics (particularly in “The Abortion”, “The Lover” and “A Sudden Trip Home in the

Spring''³⁰), as does Velma Henry in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. Velma is a very modern Black woman if we consider her past dedication to the Civil Rights Movement and her present involvement in pressing social issues. But the pressures of such stringent activism and the ambivalence it creates in her have undermined her psyche leading her to attempt suicide. *The Salt Eaters*³¹ turns on the ritual held by members of The Master's Mind in order to cure her while it examines the internal and external life of Velma and other characters and their relationship to each other and their community.

Velma stands in direct contrast to Jadine, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Tarbaby* (1981).³² Jadine, an international model, is a perfect example of the active, attractive, ambitious woman, the ideal of beauty incarnate in a Black woman. Jadine's ambivalence, however, returns us to the conflict between Black culture and the white world into which she has been assimilated and in which she has triumphed. Or almost. She wonders if the man she loves and whom she wants to marry—a white man—loves her for herself or is only looking for any Black girl. One day in the supermarket in Paris she is mesmerized by a very tall, extremely black woman dressed in a brilliant yellow dress, under which there was "too much hip, too much bust", a fact which in no way detracts from her striking beauty. On leaving she turns to look at Jadine and shoots "an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement".³³

Even though the incident unsettles her, Jadine continues her luxurious lifestyle, later visiting her aunt and uncle at the house of her white benefactor on the island of Dominique in order to rest and quietly meditate the important decisions she must make. Into this bourgeoisie setting comes Son, a wanted criminal, vulgar, violent and disparaging, with whom she eventually falls in love. Son represents the heritage of the Black race which Jadine has rejected and between them ensues a struggle which symbolizes the revindication of Black culture as opposed to the assimilation of Black people into white society. Jadine wants Son to pursue his studies, get a good job and live with her in New York. Son, for his part, gets Jadine to accompany him to Eloë, his native town in Florida, whose social atmosphere is for her at once hostile and stifling.

One restless night she finds her room full of women, the woman in yellow and her mother among them, who stare at her accusingly. Anxiously she asks them what they want from her, but they only answer by showing her their breasts. Jadine insists that she has breasts as well, but "They didn't believe her".³⁴ Jadine flees Eloë back to New York. Son follows her but their fighting only increases. The model returns to Dominique and then to Paris. Son hesitates and then pursues her, but Therese, a black islander, advises him to forget her because "she has lost her ancient properties".³⁵

Paradoxically Morrison, in creating the "ideal woman" according to white standards, destroys the myth that was so coveted and yet so out of reach for the Black woman for almost two hundred years. For the first time a Black heroine demonstrates that the Black woman cannot internalize a myth propagated by white

culture without betraying herself and her people. For Morrison and for the majority of contemporary Black women authors the search for identity can only take place within the context of the Black Community. The essence of true womanhood must be based on her own ethnic values and her sense of self-worth must be developed without interference from the dominant culture. Only then will she be able to help forge her own future and that of her race.

Notas

¹ This article was originally published in Spanish included in *La Mujer en el mundo de Habla Inglesa: Autora y Protagonista* Servicio de Publicaciones, Diputación de Málaga, 1989).

² *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), p. 21.

³ "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves", *Black Scholar* (December, 1971), p. 7.

⁴ Citado en Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1981), p. 160.

⁵ "Address upon the installation of Sara Simmons Chapman as Dean of H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College", in *Under the Oaks*, vol. 8, n° 1 (Winter 1984), p. 18.

⁶ Eugene GENOVESE, "The Slave Family, Women, A Reassessment of Matriarchy, Emasculation, Weakness", *Southern Voices*, vol. I, n° 3 (Aug./Sept., 1974), p. 9; and Deborah Gray WHITE, "The Lives of Slave Women", *Southern Exposure: Liberating Our Past*, vol. XII, N° 6 (Nov./Dec., 1984), p. 35.

⁷ See Winthrop D. JORDAN, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1968* (University of North Carolina Press, 1968): as well as Leslie FIEDLER, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

⁸ *Black Women Novelists* (Westport, Connecticut and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 22.

⁹ (London: Allison and Busby, 1984).

¹⁰ "Chronology", in Wilson, p. xxvii.

¹¹ (New York: AMS Press, 1971.)

¹² Graham, p. 19.

¹³ (New York: AMS Press, 1969).

¹⁴ (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1974).

¹⁵ (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

¹⁶ (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

¹⁷ Hurston, p. 111.

¹⁸ Christian, p. 65.

¹⁹ Christian, p. 65.

²⁰ (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953).

²¹ Christian, p. 68.

²² "If You're Light and Have Long Hair" in Mary Helen Washington, *Black-Eyed Susans* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), p. 41.

²³ Christian, p. 71.

²⁴ (New York: Randon House, 1959).

²⁵ (Great Britain: Triad/Granada, 1981).

²⁶ Alice Walker speaks eloquently of this same type of evasion in her own mother who for an hour each day would "lose herself" in television soap operas. See "The Civil Rights Movement: What God Was It?", *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (The Women's Press, 1983, pp. 122-124.

²⁷ Morrison, *Eye*, p. 189.

²⁸ (London: The Feminist Press, 1982).

²⁹ Graham, p. 22.

³⁰ *In You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (London: The Women's Press, 1981).

³¹ (London: Women's Press, Limited, 1982).

³² (London: Triad/Panther, 1984).

³³ Morrison, *Tarbaby*, p. 42.

³⁴ Morrison, *Tarbaby*, p. 261.

³⁵ Morrison, *Tarbaby*, p. 308.