Rufuf Journal — Laboratory of Algerian Manuscripts—Volume – 11number –01(January 2023)-page**1304/1325**
ISSN: 2335-1381 **EISSN: 2602-5949** **LegalDeposit: 2013-6352**

Transcending Dichotomies and Challenging Black Womanhood and Motherhood Stereotypes in Toni Morrison's*The Bluest Eye*

تجاوز التقابلات وتحدي قوالب الأنوثة والأمومة السوداء في رواية "العين الأشد زرقة" للروائية طوني موريسون

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Received: 22/10/2022	Accepted: 22/11/2022	Published:22/01/2023

Abstract: This paper proposes to explore the treatment of the issues of black womanhood and motherhood as part of Morrison's portrayal of female characters in her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970). It takes as a core argument the stereotyping of black women in white hegemonic discourse and the way Morrison combats it through the elaboration of a counter narrative that relies on the use of paradox and ambiguity to defy easy categorisation. A backward glance at the roots of black female stereotypes is briefly evoked for the sake of underscoring Morrison's approach to female characterisation as a challenge to reductive critical views,which underlie a biased discourse that seeks to perpetuate a negative vision of black women. The character of Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* serves as an example to illustrate this challenge.

Keywords: womanhood, motherhood, stereotypes, paradox, ambiguity, *The Bluest Eye*.

الملخص: يمثل هذا المقال محاولة لاستكشاف كيفية تناول الروائية طوني موريسون لقضايا الأنوثة والأمومة من حيث تصويرها لشخصيات النساء في رواياتها، "العين الأشد زرقة" (1970). يركز المقال على قضية قولبة النساء السوداوات في خطاب الهيمنة البيضاء وطريقة موريسون في مقاومته من خلال بناء سرد مضاد يرتكز إلى المفارقة والغموض ليتحدى التصنيف البسيط. كما يلقي المقال نظرة ارتجاعية سريعة على بدايات قولبة النساء ليؤكد على مقاربة موريسون لقضايا تشخيص النساء، وهي مقاربة تسائل وتتحدى المواقف النقدية الاختزالية الكامنة في خطاب متحيز يهدف إلى تكريس واستمرار النظرة السلبية للنساء السوداوات. وتمثل شخصية "بولين" في رواية "العين الأشد زرقة" مثالا يوضح هذا التحدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأنوثة، الأمومة،القوالب النمطية، المفارقة،الغموض،"العين الأشد زرقة".

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1. Introduction

Contrary to many other novelists who centred their plots around male protagonists who successfully overcome all sorts of hindrances they encounter in their way for self-realisation, Morrison concerned herself with issues related to females' existence and chose to portray black women's journeys towards self-affirmation.Morrison opted for female-centred plots to shed light on the dilemma that accompanies black females in their quest for identity and self-realisation. The double oppression black females experience, being subjugated to both racism and sexism engenders a lived duality, which justifies Morrison's use of ambiguity and paradox as her narrative discourse in the treatment of the female characters of her fiction.

In her endeavour to explore the intricate issues related to black womanhood and motherhood, and the stereotypical representations associated with their condition as a minority section in the United States, Morrison relies on the presentation of a large spectrum of female characters. She proceeds in such a way for the sake of displaying a multiplicity of black women images that resist their reductive production of types in white hegemonic discourse. Thanks to this approach, which widens the scope of black female womanhood/motherhood, Morrison challenges and deconstructs the long-held images of black women shaped by racist stereotypes that viewed them as docile mammas, domineering matriarchs emasculating their husbands, hypersexual creatures, irresponsible mothers, and unfeminine women, to cite just a few of the prevailing clichés conveyed by white racist ideology. On these grounds, Morrison's treatment of black women in her fiction represents acounternarrative to the white discourse dominance by offering alternative visions of black women that break the circle of stereotypes encapsulating them and point to a promise of a liberation from the painful legacy and the devastating effects of white stereotyping.

A backward glance at the production of prevailing white stereotypes of black females is meant to sustain the argument of how Morrison employed the narrative tools of paradox and ambiguity to combat them by endowing her characters with features that defy categorisation. My choice of the focus of this paper on the character of Pauline is motivated by Morrison's portrayal of this

woman as a complex personality. Pauline underscores most of the hopes and fears that reflect black womanhood and motherhood, and, thus, constitutes a real challenge to easy critical categorisation.

2. Review of the Prevalent Black Female Stereotypes in White Hegemonic Discourse

Stereotypes are "cognitive structures that contain the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about human groups" (Peffley et al, 1997, p. 42). White people have always endorsed negative stereotypes on blacks. Even after the abolition of slavery, the white hegemony kept on promoting negative stereotypes of black men and women through its literature and media as well. According to Frantz Fanon, the coloniser generates negative perceptions of the colonised to make the act of colonisation justifiable. The coloniser not only creates negative images of the colonised but drives the colonised themselves to believe in these negative perceptions and this is perhaps the most damaging effect of colonisation. Frantz Fanon went deep in analysing the devastating psychological effects of such practices; in *Les Damnés de la Terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), Fanon initiates the chapter "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" explaining, "For many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonialist onslaught" (1961, p. 181). For many post-colonial critics, the dissemination of pejorative images of the colonised as being 'barbaric' or 'uncivilised' is a way for legitimising colonisation as an intervention to improve, civilise and humanise the colonised. Yancy argued:

> In short, there is a violent geo-spatial dimension of colonial territorialization and a violent form of psycho-cultural territorialization, both of which are interwoven. The latter is designed to place the colonized in a pathological relationship to him/herself. This is accomplished not simply through geo-spatial modalities of incursion and usurpation, but also through the process of getting the colonized, through processes of ideological inculcation, to internalize the stereotypic image in terms of which they are depicted by the colonizer.(2008, p. 1)

Hence, the coloniser's strategy is not limited to classical forms of colonisation but it is extended to more complex forms of oppression that affect the colonised sense of self and identity.

It is important to note, however, that the black community suffered from colonisation and more importantly from racism which makes its experience unique compared to other communities. The black man's humanity was even suspect for the white hegemony. The black was not perceived as an individual being that carries personal features; he was rather denied individualisation and subjectivity and was only seen through the lenses of generalisations, prejudices and stereotyping; Memmi can be cited in this context, he refers to this process of 'depersonalization' as the 'mark of the plural' (1991, p. 12). Yancy further explains the white coloniser's strategy of creating myths about whites' superiority over blacks and establishing dichotomies as white/black, good/evil, civilised/savage…etc to persuade black people and make them believe in the necessity and legitimacy of white colonisation:

> The white colonialist strategy was to get the colonized Black (or native) to undergo a process of epistemic violence, a process where the Black begins to internalize all of the colonizer's myths and thus begins to see his/her identity through the paradigm of white supremacy/Eurocentricity. Indeed, the objective of the colonialist was to get the Black (or native) to become blind to the farcicality of the historical "necessity" of being colonized. (2008, p. 1)

Therefore, by creating stereotypes about black people and imposing them on the black community, the coloniser aims at maintaining his domination of blacks' consciousness even after officially abolishing slavery. Pieterse asserts"…the idea here was to get the native, and in this case the Black, to conceptualize his/her identity/being as an ignoble savage, bestial, hyper-sexual, criminal, violent, uncivilized, brutish, dirty, inferior, and as a problem" (1992, pp. 310-311). The construction of negative stereotypes about black people was a policy and a stratagem for upholding their oppression to take more and more advantage from the situation. Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* explains the logic behind the negative representation of black women and argues "no system of oppression can work without powerful ideological justification" (2000, p. 69). Thus, the

perception of black women as 'other' is actually the first step towards their oppression.

The black community as a whole was subjected to negative stereotyping, nevertheless, the black woman was the most vulnerable section victimised by such discriminatory attitudes. Being black and female, the black woman underwent the double oppression of race and gender. Black women were attributed some odd derogatory images that were the inheritance of a long history of segregation and chauvinism. Julia Jordan Zachery sheds light on the contribution of the stereotypes as to "function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations that normalizes the inequitable position of black woman" (2008, p. 26). There are some prevailing racial and stereotypical images of black womanhood that date back to the era of slavery and that lived through the antebellum era as well. Patricia Morton mentions four main stereotypes: "the 'inept domestic servant' (the mammy), the domineering matriarch, the sex object (the Jezebel), and the tragic mulatto" (1991, p. 7). The hegemonic discourse either in media or in literature relied on the creation of a dichotomy that defines black womanhood in sharp contrast with white womanhood. While white womanhood was granted all the positive and ideal traits such as delicacy, freshness, domesticity, piousness, respect, passionlessness and moderation; black womanhood was, exclusively, attributed all the pejorative features, aberrations and excesses that might typify a woman. The black woman is presented as savage, dirty, hyper-sexual, unfeminine and physically strong and also highly authoritative.

A large spectrum of negative representations of the black woman infiltered American literature and contributed largely in depriving black women from any positive traits as Patricia Morton puts it"all except Mammy had profoundly derogatory, dehumanizing characterization" (1991, p. 36). The prevalence of such representations in media and literature affected the treatment of black women in real life; hence, the stereotypes associated with black women were not restricted to caricatures encountered in movies and books but were thought to be real beings that threatened the American society as a whole; Morris observes:

> Caricatures of Black femininity are often deposited into distinct chambers of our public consciousness, narrowly defining Black female identity and

> movement according to the stereotypes… As such, in the public's collective consciousness, latent ideas about Black females as hypersexual, conniving, loud, and sassy predominate. (2016, p. 27)

Therefore, the black woman cannot be perceived as a unique or an exceptional person or individual, she is not allowed to be outside the vicious circle of stereotyping and prejudice. Many psychologists claim that what is consumed via media and literature has a direct influence on people's conceptualisations about racial groups and minorities. Bandura elucidates: "human nature is a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and observational experience into a variety of forms within biological limits" (2001, p. 266). So, the perception of black women has always been affected by what is promoted in media and literary texts.

3. Black Female Stereotypes in the Mainstream Representations: The Mammy, the Jezebel and the Sapphire

The first stereotype that prevailed in literature dealing with black womanhood was the 'mammy' or the 'black mama' because this figure represented the old slave. The big mama is generally characterised by certain physical traits as being dark-skinned, thick lipped, ugly and obese. She does not constitute any threat to her white mistress who is more likely to meet western standards of beauty. Being unattractive, but resilient, she has the ability to serve everybody around her without complaining. She is the ideal servant who perfectly performs all domestic chores. She is portrayed as a highly devoted and loyal mother for both the white children of her masters and her own children as well. She is a superwoman; an all-embracing mother who incarnates the image of perfect motherhood. Given the quality of having a strong physical condition, the black mama is indirectly defeminised and masculinised; this aims at creating the dichotomy of the unfeminine black woman versus the delicate highly feminine white lady. Furthermore, the mammy being strong-bodied is more likely suitable for heavy chores than is her white counterpart. The black mama never gets exhausted from the drudgery she is assigned to perform the whole day; she is presented as the ideal servant and mother who enjoys serving everybody around her.

Besides, the black mama is presented as asexual; she never displays any interest in sex and she does not have a sexual life. Her most sacred priority in life is taking care of others without leaving an intimate space for her life as a woman. This was a way for the white hegemony to normalise slavery and the physical exploitation of black slaves. To free itself from any remorse of conscience, the white hegemony set an image of the black slave and mother who has all the physical capacities of enduring tiring activities while feeling content and fulfilled; she constitutes no threat to the established social order because the obedient black mama internalised and accepted her own subordination, as Hooks puts it: " the Mammy was designed to be so nurturing and loving because it epitomized the ultimate sexist-racist vision of ideal black womanhood – complete submission to the will of whites" (1981, p. 84).

Moreover, normalizing slavery and romanticising the relationship between blacks and whites aimed at maintaining the institution of slavery and whitening its image. Portraying a harmonious life between blacks and whites and masking the inhuman side of slavery aimed at legitimising slavery. Thus, the presentation of the black mama as a woman who thrives in a white environment benefiting from a relatively more prestigious status than other black women in the plantation fields is a camouflage of the true condition of black women. What remains astonishingly ironical and paradoxical is the accentuation of motherhood instincts within this stereotype and character of the mammy who strangely accepts and bears the separation from her children by sale at any moment. *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell is one of the most far-reaching presentations of the stereotype of the mammy; a stereotype that lived long in the memory of white Americans. Harper Lee is a pertinent example of white writers who skilfully crafted the stereotype of the black mammy through the character of Calpurnia; a prototype of the docile mama who enjoyed her role of caregiver. Calpurnia from the perspective of a white writer is the incarnation of the loyal and devoted mammy who worships her white master's family and whose role in the upbringing of Finch's children is just crucial.

Another stereotype that infiltered American literature is the Jezebel. She was a light-skinned, gracefully lean Mulatto girl with long straight hair and fine traits. In sharp contrast with the asexual mammy, the jezebel is presented rather as hyper-sexual. She is portrayed as a mid-aged frivolous woman who does not

hesitate to give her body to anyone willing to share a sexual adventure with her. Her lasciviousness is accentuated in all the portrayals she incarnates.Thus, the sexuality of black women, in American literature is depicted as unbalancedkeeping a fluctuation between the two extremes;the asexuality of the mammy and the hyper-sexuality of the Jezebel. Jezebel is the prototype of the immoral black woman who uses her body as her only qualification for success in life. White women also believed that Jezebels were a real threat for them because they claim that this category of black women infatuates white men using their bodies for certain ends like gaining freedom for themselves and their progeny.

The attribution of hyper-sexuality and lustfulness to the Jezebel was a way for white men to deviate attention from their sexual exploitation and sexual aggression of black women. The Jezebel stereotype attempted at reversing things; the white sexual assaulter becomes ironically the victim of the lascivious, seductress and provocative black Jezebel. The white hegemony aspired at clearing white men of any responsibility or guilt concerning the sexual victimisation of black women, who in this case, as Goingsputs it "were asking for it" (1994, p. 67). Therefore, black women were blamed and were driven to feel responsible for their rape and thus, they were indirectly silenced.Fearing misjudgement and accusation, black women chose to refrain from revealing the truth behind their sexual exploitation and even their rape.

The Sapphire or 'matriarch' is another stereotype that has been promulgated in American literature. Contrary to the docile mama or mammy, the sapphire is hot-tempered and unpredictableas she is described in Tyree's words "an emasculating, controlling, and contemptuous woman who berates her male loved one" (2011, p. 398). A nervous wreck, the Sapphire lacks the softness and quietness commonly associated with delicacy and femininity. The angry sapphire stereotype was created in an attempt to mask the atrocity and brutality of the institution of slavery; which is the reason behind the harsh socio-economic condition of black people. To get rid of its guilt, the white hegemony blamed it all on the aggressive sapphire, who failed at providing the appropriate upbringing to her children who subsequently become vain members of society later. The mainstream discourse has always disseminated the stereotype of the angry

sapphire without revealing the grim reality behind this anger. This anger is a manifestation of the grief and agony black women constantly live because of the sales of their husbands and offspring. Projecting images of black women as domineering and emasculating in their relationships with their male counterparts serves to show once again that sapphires do not fit the white womanhood norms. Inversing gender roles created some humour in some scenes in novels and movies portraying black people. However, mixing humour with sarcasm aimed at making irony of the black community that remains far from reaching the model behaviour of the white hegemony.

Stereotypes and caricatures of black men and women have their roots in slaverywhich remains the main cause behind their victimisation. Black women in particular suffered the double oppression of race and gender. The mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire and other black female stereotypes lived also through the antebellum era and even later,and had a crucial influence on people's conceptualisation of black womanhood and motherhood.These clichéic representations gave rise to a plethora of negative but pervasive portrayals that remained and still remain to a certain extent embedded in the white hegemonic culture and literature. The pejorative perceptions associated with black women affected their treatment in different aspects and domains of their daily lives for long decades. Morrison is one of the most devoted black women writers who endeavoured to bring into question the legitimacy of such stereotypes by creating a large web of complex female characters that resist simplistic categorisations.

4. Morrison's Fiction and its Endeavour to Challenge Black Female Stereotypes

By adopting a narrative of paradox and ambiguity, Morrison is able to illustrate black women's concerns and attitudes, with, as a result, a representation of a diversity of beliefs and standpoints. These standpoints range from females accepting to assume the expected societal roles of wife and mother, to others rejecting them and challenging the traditional codes established by society which they regard as obstacles to their self-assertion. By contrasting their ways and their rapports towards themselves and others, Morrison seeks to insist on the necessity to view the black woman through no reductive lenses that can result only in stereotypes. Thus, tackling binary concepts is an essential element of her narrative discourse which aims at disrupting established and stereotyped beliefs

for the sake of letting newer and fresher meanings emerge.Consequently, Morrison's use of dichotomies should not be regarded simply as a dualistic mode of thought since dichotomies themselves are transcended by the subverting process of paradox and ambiguity.SilviaChirila has a most illuminating comment regarding Morrison's intricate narrative strategies:

> Narrative identity is shaped inToni Morrison's work through the interplayof binarieswhite/black, male/female, individual/collective, centre/margin,civilization/wilderness,continuity/fragmentariness…etc.). However,thisoccurs in a process in which mere dichotomy is subverted in favour of ambivalence, hybridity, or hyphenation.In Toni Morrison's novels dualistic, polarized structures often become synergistic and binary logic is disrupted through multiplicity, inconsistency and paradox, while tension between opposing ideologies, perspectives, or (self-) images can be catalytic, leading to a redefinition of values and to a revision of meaning.(2012, p. 13)

Morrison's use of antithetical concepts, characters or situations may be misleading to those who think in binary terms and thus tend to adopt categorising positions. The contrastive approach she adopts by opposing characters, for example, as is the case of Claudia and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* or Sula and Nel in *Sula* is soon deconstructed through the subversive effects of paradox and ambiguity to avoid reduction to stereotypes. Consequently, further insights in those characters are gained which contradict their initial antithetical selves. Thus, characters who are initially made to appear totally different and each epitomising certain values end up through the process of deconstruction having a great deal in commonthrough the process of deconstruction.Terry Otten makes an insightful comment regarding Morrison's special use of dualism:

> In characterisation as well as in narrative structure, Morrison defies all attempts to resolve the duality and moral uncertainty of character or action. She has called her fictional characters "the combination of virtue and flaw, of good intentions gone awry, of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them by the best they have done, they are wonderful, if you judge them by the worst that they have done, they are terrible".(1993, p. 662)

Morrison makes it clear that her adoption of such a complex narrative discourse, based on the articulation of antagonistic concepts and contradictory elements, aims at supplying a plurality of views that defy the dominant white discourse, and consequently undermine the very foundations of white stereotyping of black womanhood and motherhood. Paradox and ambiguity, serve in this context, to establish a projection of African American women in terms of a binary approach that emphasises the complex reality of their status and existence with the aim of shifting paradigms and changing perspectives and ways of looking through the lenses of the dominant culture. "From her earliest fictional work", Terry Otten rightly observed, "Morrison cultivates an aesthetic of ambiguity". (1993, p. 663) We see it at work, to effectively combat age old stereotypes of black women.

5. Deconstructing Black Female Stereotypes to Reconstruct Black Womanhood and Motherhood in *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison's fiction is mainly concerned with issues related to race and gender; however, her main contribution is her endeavour to deconstruct the prevailing stereotyped perceptions of black womanhood and motherhood. Morrison, along with Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker to cite just a few of the major female figures of African American literature, rewrote the story of the black woman from within. She dealt with black womanhood and motherhood from her own perspective and experience of a typical black woman and mother who has all the parameters that interfere in the construction of black women's identity and existence. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison gives a close insight into the devastating effects of racism and sexism. She chooses to portray the unique journey of black women in a hostile discriminatory environment through the experience of a young girl protagonist, Pecola. Morrison examines the condition of different female characters in her novel with a particular focus on Pecola Breedlove and her family. She asserts:

> I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take roots inside the most delicate member of the society: a child, the most vulnerable member: a female. In trying to dramatize the devastation that even casual racial contempt can cause, I chose a unique

> situation, not a representative one. The extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family- unlike the average black family and unlike the narrator's.But singular as Pecola's life was, I believed aspects of her woundability were lodged in all young girls. (*The Bluest Eye*, 1994, p. 210)

The Black American family, for Morrison, is unique and connot be aligned with whitearchetypes. Morrison's attempt to tackle the critical question of black womanhood and motherhood started with her presentation of a variety of black families that do not fit in the Dick and Jane paradigm, with a particular emphasis on the Breedloves who paradoxically 'breed hatred'.Pauline's dysfunctional family underscores the particular condition of the black family. By accentuating the large discrepancy between the Breedloves and the Dick and Jane model, Morrison calls attention to the complexity of the act of mothering within the black American family that lives in a totally different socio-economic context. Therefore, the act of mothering within the double oppression of race and gender becomes for Pauline Breedlove a challenging experience. By establishing the dichotomy of the Dick and Jane Family and the Breedloves, Morrison stresses the effects of the internalisation of this white model of the perfect American family on black Americans who could in no way recognise themselves in it.

Morrison employs the delicate and controversial relationship of Paulinewith her daughter Pecola to accentuate the tragedy of her protagonist. She presents a complex web of incidents in their lives to display the intricacy that characterises mother/daughter relationships in the segregated black community. The novel presents many shocking scenes between Pauline and Pecolawhichunveil a great deal of domestic violence that marks the daily life of the Breedloves. The parents abuse each other and abuse their offspring. The novel does not provide any scenes of love and affection between Pauline and her daughter.The mother seems completely absorbed by her own personal life and priorities. Being abandoned by her drunkard husband Cholly, who set the house of the family on fire, Pauline went to work as a maid for the Fishers, a rich white family. Pecola went to live with the MacTeers, a black family that accepted to provide some help for Pecola, until Pauline finds a solution for her disastrous situation after the desertion of her husband.

Morrison, creates a binary opposition between the MacTeers and the Breedloves to defy categorisation concerning American families. While the Breedloves are presented with extreme negativity, the MacTeers are attributed a more positive portrayal. However, this binary opposition does not exclusively aim at establishing contrast, but it was a way for Morrison to subvert and disturb assumptions that typecast the black American family. A large discrepancy is set between the life styles and attitudes of the Breedloves and the MacTeers which might initially lead to perceive them as binaries. However,the multiplicity of perspectiveMorrison adopts in the narration of the story engages the reader in a reconsideration of his initial interpretation and a questioning of his set conclusions. She relies on paradox and ambiguity to shake the reader's reductive perceptions by creating some ambivalence that challenges stereotyped reflections.

Pauline Breedlove is, in fact,a round, a complex and a controversial character full of contradictions. She is first presented as a harsh mother who does not display affectionate motherly feelings towards her black daughter Pecola;but paradoxically, she adores the little white daughter of her white employer. The novel presents a significant scene that underscores the atypical relationship between Pauline and her daughter. On one occasion, Pecola went with her best friends Claudia and Frieda MacTeer to visit her mother in the Fisher's house and at this stage the reader is exposed to one of the most appalling scenes of the novel. First of all, the girls were astonished to see another Pauline; a docile one that is nicknamed by the little pink and white girl of the Fishers as 'Polly' while her own daughter did not dare to call her 'mama' as they do with their mother. Pecola, regrettably, calls her mother Mrs. Breedlove; an attitude which exhibits the distance and coldness that mark their relationship.Pecola accidentally knocks over the berry cobbler in the Fishers' kitchen; whereupon Pauline bitterly abusesher and tenderly comforts the little blond girl even though it was Pecola who was painfully burned and the Fishers' girl was only slightly stained. Angrily Claudia reports this scene:

> In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication.

> "Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you... work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor." Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread.*(The Bluest Eye*, 1970, p. 109)

Pauline's attitude carries a lot of paradox; instead of expressing worry and sympathy toward her own daughter, she rather invests all her maternal concern in comforting the little white girl of the Fishers; "Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it"(*The Bluest Eye*, 1970, p. 110).Besides, when the little blond girl asked 'Polly' about the girls, she refused to give any answer. She denied her own daughter Pecola;

> "Who were they, Polly?"
>
> "Don't worry none, baby."
>
> "You gonna make another pie?"
>
> "Course I will."
>
> "Who were they, Polly?"
>
> "Hush. Don't worry none," she whispered, and the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake. (p. 109)

It seems thatPaulineis struggling to suppress anything or anybody that disrupts her routine in the Fishers house. She enjoys the white and beautiful house of the Fishers to the point that she considers it hers. She is an ideal servant for the white Fishers, a highly devoted maid who does her work perfectly to satisfy her employers who recognise her qualities;"We'll never let her go. We could never find anybody like Polly. She will not leave the kitchen until everything is in order. Really, she is the ideal servant"(p. 129)Even, when she makes shopping for the Fishers, she always makes sure everything is just perfect "She refused beef slightly dark or with edges not properly trimmed. The slightly reeking fish that she accepted for her own family she would all but throw in the fish man's face if he sent it to the Fisher house" (p. 128). Thus, Pauline at this stage becomes the stereotypical image of black docile mama for the Fishers and the domineering angry black woman for the Breedloves.Morrison complicates the issue furtherby displaying once more Pauline's negligenceof her daughter at a very sensitive phase of her life. In a crucial scene that revolves around Pecola's first experience with menstruation, Morrison alludes to the consequences of

Pauline' carelessness vis-a-vis her daughter's life. In a critical scene in the novel, Morrison portrays the panic and loss Pecola experiences when she saw the first drops of blood of her first menstruation:

> Suddenly Pecola bolted straight up, her eyes wide with terror. A whinnying sound came from her mouth.
> "What's the matter with you?"
>
> Frieda stood up too. Then we both looked where Pecola was staring. Blood was running down her legs. Some drops were on the steps. I leaped up. "Hey. You cut yourself? Look. It's all over your dress."
>
> A brownish-red stain discolored the back of her dress. She kept whinnying, standing with her legs far apart.
>
> Frieda said, "Oh. Lordy! I know. I know what that is!"
>
> "What?" Pecola's fingers went to her mouth.
>
> "That's ministratin'."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "You know."
>
> "Am I going to die?" she asked.
>
> "Noooo. You won't die. It just means you can have a baby!"
>
> "What?" (p. 28)

Lamentably, Pauline did not prepare her daughter for menstruation; a significant neglect which emphasises once again her absence of concern with a crucial event in the girl's awareness of her femininity. It is noticeable, however, that Frieda contrary to Pecola knows about menstruation, and when asked by Claudia she responds that her mother told her:

> "How do you know?" I was sick and tired of Frieda knowing everything.
>
> "Mildred told me, and Mama too."
>
> "I don't believe it."(p. 28)

So, by creating contrast between Pecola's and Freida's reaction, Morrison makes a statement about black American mothers; if Mrs. Breedlove ignores her daughter, Mrs. MacTeer rather assumes her role of a mother.

Moreover, Pauline's relationship with her daughter is not the only dysfunctional one in her life. Her conjugal relationship is also marked by defiance. Cholly behaves violently with Pauline who reacts the same way.Pauline and her husband's brutal and cruel treatment of each other proves that each one is using the other to release his or herinner wrath against the injustices of life within a racist society. It is important to note, however, that the relationship between Pauline and Cholly started with romantic and sincere love. They lived their most beautiful days before they moved to the north where their life has drastically changed, the pink dreams turned to nightmares. Morrison sheds light on the different factors that affected their lives when she shifts the perspective to Pauline who unveils a lot of details about Cholly's early lifewhichgive some close insight to the process of his personality-formation.

The important part of the narrative that was consecrated to Pauline takesthe reader back to her early childhood, her adolescence and her first encounter with Cholly, and more importantly,to their journey to the north and all that ensued. The background of Pauline's life might explain the particular process of her personality-formation and the life philosophy she adopted.The engaging narrative techniquethat Morrison employsprompts the reader to question the unidimensional readingof Pauline.She relies on flashbacks and stream of consciousness techniques to unveil her inner thoughts and feelings. One of the passages that disturb the reader's precedingassumptions about Pauline is when she reflectsher very first emotional state when she learntabout her pregnancy; she reports a friendly talk she had with the coming baby:

> But that second time, I actually tried to get pregnant. Maybe 'cause I'd had one already and wasn't scairt to do it. Anyway, I felt good, and wasn't thinking on the carrying, just the baby itself. I used to talk to it whilst it be still in the womb. Like good friends we was. You know. I be hanging wash and I knowed lifting weren't good for it. I'd say to it holt on now I

> gone hang up these few rags, don't get froggy; it be over soon. It wouldn't leap or nothing. Or I be mixing something in a bowl for the other chile and I'd talk to it then too. You know, just friendly talk. On up til the end I felted good about that baby. (p. 124)

Paradoxically, this enthusiasm and warmth did not last long. When Pauline finally gave birth to her daughter, her ambiguous feelings started to fluctuate between attraction and repulsion. She could not experience the natural happiness and release mothers feel after they deliver their babies. She was troubledby the physical appearance of her daughter in a strange way;

> Anyways, the baby come. Big old healthy thing. She looked different from what I thought. Reckon I talked to it so much before I conjured up a mind's eye view of it. So, when I seed it, it was like looking at a picture of your mama when she was a girl. You knows who she is, but she don't look the same. They give her to me for a nursing, and she liked to pull my nipple offright away. She caught on fast. Not like Sammy, he was the hardest child to feed. But Pecola look like she knowed right off what to do. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her. You know they makes them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly. (p. 126)

The passage exhibits the paradoxical feelings of Pauline who weirdly admits the ugliness of her own daughter. The use of the word 'pretty' and its opposite 'ugly' highlights the extent to which Pauline is disturbed and ambiguous. She sees in Pecola the image of the 'mama' but at a young age. Pecola' face is familiar to Pauline, she directly recognises her ugliness because, it is for Pauline, the ugliness of an entire race. Pauline's antagonistic feelingsdisclose the complexity and ambivalence that mark her motherhood experience,which seems heavily affected by her internalisation of white standards of beauty.The devastating consequences of the white hegemonic discourse and the damaging white standards of beauty made Pauline hate her blackness and the blackness of her own children. In this regard,in her book *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness*" Denise Heinze examines the maiming effects of the internalisation of beauty stereotypes by asserting "Idealized beauty has the power

to disenfranchise a child of mother love, to psychically splinter an entire race identity, and to imprison ail human beings in static and stagnant relationships" (1993, p. 15). Pauline's intoxication with ideas about white standards of beauty results in her worshiping of all what is white and hating all what is black for she, automatically, associates whiteness with beauty and blackness with ugliness. So, her family environment becomes for her the ugliest setting of her life.

By digging deep into the internal life of Pauline, Morrison aims at dropping the veil on the harmful feelings of alienation and low self-esteem experienced by black people in racist America. Pauline's obsession with the white ideology raised in her adetrimental complex of inferiority and self-loathing that she,regrettably,generates later to her own children. Pauline does notaccept and embrace her own blackness, so, how can she do it with her children"…into her son she beat a fear, a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of people, fear of life(*The Bluest Eye*, 1970, p. 102). Besides, Pauline, has a deformity in her foot;thus, being black, a female and lame, she internalised a destructive feeling of low self-esteem that manifests itself later in violence as the only way for self-assertion.Moreover, Pauline was depraved of love and attention in her own family due to her deformity; she was responsible for all the domestic chores while everybody was outside. She saw in Cholly the hope for a better life, but unfortunately, the romantic love disappeared soon leaving place for deception and despair. Life in the north was not fruitful for the couple; the hostility of both whites and blacks stood in the way of their dreams. Morrison makes a statement on the attitude of blacks in the north who were equally antagonistic as their white counterparts. Black women in the north mocked the appearance and 'funkiness' of Pauline which pushed her to a radical change on both her physical and moral sides. She changed her look and started to straighten her curly hair to fit in the white standards of beauty. Abandoned by her husband and rejected by the members of her own black community, Pauline found solace in the world of movies. She used to go regularly to the cinema to watch movies populated with white actresses. It is there where she learned much more about the white standards of beauty and confirmed her firm exclusion from them.

The Fishers' house was for Pauline the white world she encounters only in the cinema. This might explain her full attachment to the Fishers' house that serves as a substitution for the inaccessible white world of the cinema. Morrison provides some significant comments about the attitude of whites to highlight the dilemma Pauline is caught in: "The creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers" (p. 128). So, by including such a comment, Morrison challenges the stereotypical reading of Pauline as a submissive black mammy and drops the veil on the significant factors that participated in pushing Pauline to behave in such a way. Pauline gains respect and consideration only when she denies her black identity. The paradox and ambiguity that mark Pauline's attitudes might find their roots in the double consciousness she experienced everywhere in racist America.

To accentuate the intricacy of Pauline's condition, Morrison includes a noteworthy scene where Pauline undergoes a harsh moment of extreme discrimination. The old doctor who consultedher directed severe racist slurs at her:

> A little old doctor come to examine me. He had all sorts of stuff. He gloved his hand and put some kind of jelly on it and rammed it up between my legs. When he left off, some more doctors come. One old one and some young ones. The old one was learning the young ones about babies. Showing them how to do. When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses.(p. 125)

This incident was crucial for Pauline; it further cultivates her feelings of inferiority and self-hatred which she later reroutes to her daughter.

Nevertheless, the counter-discourse Morrison employs through shifting the perspective to Pauline is an attempt to see her story from a new angle. Effectively, this narrative technique exposes the reader to further details that might be central in helping him/her avoid simplistic categorisations and reductive interpretations. The negative portrayal of Pauline as a negative stereotype of black women is deconstructed when taking into account the background of Pauline's life. It is important, however, to note that Pauline, after all, did not abandon her children, she was the one who cares about providing them with their

necessary needs. Morrison challenges gender roles stereotypes by articulating the fact that for the Breedloves, it was Pauline who was playing the role of the father. By contrast, Cholly has never assumed his responsibilities of a father.

furthermore, Pauline's dissatisfaction with her condition brings into question her association with the clichéic representations of black mamas. The black mama, unlike Pecola, adores her role as an ideal servant for the whites; she does not have any feelings of grumbling about her condition. Black mammies feel fulfilled with their roles in the white families. Paradoxically, Pauline lives a severe psychological crisis. Her split personality is an expression of the identity crisis she is living. Her disturbed maternal feelings underscore the devastating effects of racism on her. Hence, Pauline is not the all-embracing 'big mama'whose ultimate dream is to satisfy everyone around her. Pauline's violent scenes with her husband and children are a mere expression of complain and revolt about her condition.

Another crucial factor that differentiates Pauline from the stereotype of the black mama is sexuality. While the black mama is presented as asexual, Pauline is portrayed as a woman who accords much importance to the sexual life. Sex, for Pauline, is part of her self-affirmation; it is not a submission to male superiority. She finds in sex a way to self-assertion in a sexist society. She rather enjoys seeing Cholly's submission during intercourse. For her, sex is a form of empowerment as she asserts in the novel: "when he does [has an orgasm], I feel a power. I be strong, I be pretty, I be young" (p. 101). Hence, sex for Pauline is not restricted to a short moment of physical pleasure, but it is a means for self-imposition within a patriarchal ideology.

6. Conclusion

The paradox that pervades Pauline's life by being torn between a world she aspires to be part of andthebleak world she desperately aspires to desert, serves a great deal at displaying Morrison's complex stands towards black women's unique condition in racist patriarchal America. In employing multiple perspectives and fragmentation in her narrative technique, Morrison throws into confusion the reader's simplistic perception of her characters, mainly that ofPauline as a bad woman and mother. The reader's assumptions of good and bad as binary oppositions are soon brought into question as Morrison reveals

much about the contextual details of Pauline's early life. It is at this stage that things get ambiguous and paradoxical, and, to a great extent, ambivalent.

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