

Postmodern Supernaturalism: African American Women Writers and their Literary Powers

Susana Vega-Conzalez

In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale refers to postmodernist writing as a “confrontation between worlds, through transgressions of ontological levels or boundaries, or through vacillation between different kinds and degrees of ‘reality’” (232). Faithful to their cultural and ethnic heritage, contemporary African American women writers clearly epitomize, through their novels, this postmodernist subversion of ontological borders, as they posit in them the inadequacy of the traditionally received concept of reality in the Western world. The supernatural is an outstanding feature of the narrative written by many contemporary African American women writers in whose novels the dualistic vision of reality—either/or—typical of the Western culture, gives way to a symbiotic hybridity—both-and—that puts into question traditional binary opposites such as science/spirituality, natural/supernatural, good/evil, life/death, past/present. If postmodernism is concerned with the revision of previously unquestioned labels and boundaries, novelists such as Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall and Toni Cade Bambara have embarked upon the difficult task of redefining the concepts of reality and history in an attempt to pay a just tribute to unheard voices from the past and thus strengthen present and future identities.

One of the main features of the literature written by ethnic women writers is the blurring of frontiers between the supernatural world and the empirical, tangible or so-called real world. In their works there is a harmonious dialogue between both realities, moving away from the Western scientific rationalism and positivism. This is what Helen Tiffin defines as “the counter culture of the imagination” (173). It is through the imaginative act that these writers rebuild cultural values which have been subjugated by so many years of oppression, in a task that Morrison calls “literary archeology” (“Site” 112). This task consists in the reconstruction of a world that has been witness to the historical omission of some of its episodes, trying now to rescue those hidden hi(stories) by means of some historical information, memory and the use of imagination. Nevertheless, in doing this such writers are aware of the risks they run of being criticized for not

focusing on the social reality and problems of their ethnic communities, dwelling instead on demerital dealings with ghosts, superstitions, beliefs and rituals. However, they also know that the ensuing strengthening of their identity together with the empowering connection with their ancestors are worth the effort.

What this literature intends to convey is the idea that there is more than one type of knowledge and that it is necessary to accept different modes of seeing and knowing, in spite of their apparent opposition. Only by doing so will the fictionalization of the supernatural stop being evaluated as something merely fantastic, in its pejorative sense, as opposed to the formal realism prescribed by the Western canon. Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison has repeatedly highlighted the importance the spiritual, supernatural and magic components have in her fiction, which is but a reflection of her own background as an African American. This author claims a realism which is not based on the factual but on the aural and the visual where the reader can and should participate (Brown 466). In Morrison's literary creation, as well as in that of many of her contemporaries, the world we perceive around us is combined with the metaphysical world which corresponds to another type of reality and knowledge:

My own use of enchantment simply comes because that's the way the world was for me and for the black people that I knew. In addition to the very shrewd, down-to-earth, efficient way in which they did things and survived things, there was this other knowledge or perception, always discredited but nevertheless there, which informed their sensibilities and clarified their activities. It formed a kind of cosmology that was perceptive as well as enchanting, and so it seemed impossible for me to write about black people and eliminate that simply because it was "unbelievable." (Davis 144)

The fact that Morrison was unwilling to apply the label "magic realism" to her fiction is due precisely to the misrepresentation and discredit of the term "magic": "[i]t's just that when it comes from discredited people it somehow has some other exotic attachment: thus the word 'magic'" (Davis 145). Furthermore, when she refers to African American folklore and mythology, and more specifically to the supernatural, she resents their usual description as "simpleminded and not progressive" (Brown 464), as well as their common association with unreality. Through the use of fantastic or supernatural elements, African American women writers claim and therefore strengthen their connection with that too often relegated sphere.

In the introduction to *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar provide a trajectory of the ghost story as a literary genre. When referring to the 1970s and 1980s, they include the literature written by ethnic women writers as a major example of this genre:

More recently, the seventies and eighties have witnessed not only the resurgence of ghosts in popular genres such as film and television, but the reentry of the supernatural into mainstream literature. This is especially true in the case of women writers, and perhaps ascribable in part to the increased publication of women of color by mainstream presses. (9-10)

Among the writers ascribed to the ghost story, Carpenter and Kolmar mention Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall, Maxine Hong Kingston and Louise Erdrich, in many of whose novels appear characters from beyond the grave that live together with the living. On many occasions some of those characters are ghosts, such as Beloved (*Beloved*), Old Wife (*The Salt Eaters*) and Aunt Cuney (*Praisesong for the Widow*) who play an active role in the novel, while some other characters have a hybrid nature, as both human and supernatural features coalesce in them. Pilate's dubious identity in *Song of Solomon* due to her lack of navel—hence her difference from the rest of humans—is one of the most clear examples. The frequent use of supernatural elements together with the fusion of the natural and the supernatural is but a product of the authors' ultimate origins. It is a trait of African cultural traditions to keep both dimensions together, without a clear division between them. John S. Mbiti uses the term "living dead" to define the confluence of these two realms of existence. The "living dead" are the dead up to the fifth generation, who still live in the "sasa"—the present—and whose death is not yet complete. They are in fact the most immediate links between this world and the other world. The living dead are not referred to as "things" or "spirits" until their name is forgotten across several generations, but they are partly human and partly spiritual (81-84). Thus the African component of the African American cultural tradition is clearly present in the literary discourse of its writers.

The blurring of barriers present in African cosmology is transferred to the written text of the novel, where the dualistic vision of reality typical of the Western world gives way to a symbiotic hybridity which does away with binary opposites such as natural/supernatural, science/spirituality or good/evil. In keeping with the postmodernist trajectory of paradoxical fusion of opposites, in which each term of a binary opposition complements the other term, Paule Marshall advocates "the idea that a thing is at the same time its opposite, and that these opposites, these contradictions make up the whole" ("Making" 34).¹ The supernatural elements intertwine with the vital experiences of the characters. And the conversations between humans and ghosts convey a circular conception of life, in which the different stages of the vital cycle coalesce in perfect harmony. This process is effectively shown in the fiction of these novelists, in clear contrast to the linear narrative typical of the Western patriarchal canon, including a multiplicity of events and perspectives, metaphors and myths which go from the present to the past and back to the present again. Morrison compares this movement to the technique of "call and response" characteristic of blues and

which consists in an exchange or interaction between the singer/narrator and the audience/reader (Brown 465).

According to John S. Mbiti, for many traditional African peoples there is not a concept of future but all time is reduced to a present, the now or "sasa" where the living and the dead whose name is still remembered inhabit, and a past or "zamani" in which the spirits of the dead whose name has been forgotten dwell (21-23). Thus ghosts such as Aunt Cuney (*Praisesong for the Widow*), Old Wife (*The Salt Eaters*) or Beloved (*Beloved*) belong to the "sasa" since they are in a liminal position between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Their presence is crucial in the lives of living characters as providers of advice and guidance. From such relationship arises a feeling of connection to which Toni Cade Bambara refers to describe her work *The Salt Eaters* as a novel whose main goal is "to bridge the gap, to merge . . . frames of reference, to fuse . . . camps" (Tate 16). This liminal phase links instead of separating and connects instead of disconnecting across time and space. In Marshall's novel, the presence of Aunt Cuney in one of the protagonist's dreams triggers off a radical change in the spiritually dead Avey Johnson. Thanks to the ensuing connection with her ancestors, Avey will emerge from her materialistic life to be reborn to a new identity. Likewise, it is with the invaluable help given by the conjurer Minnie Ransom, but also with the advice from the ghost of Old Wife, how Velma Henry finds her way to a final healing in *The Salt Eaters*. In *Beloved*, it is the ghost of the severed daughter that, being materialized in a woman's body, makes Sethe unwillingly plunge into the abyss of memory before reconciling with the past, with the community and most importantly, with herself. Finally, the fusion between this world and "the other place" is constant in *Mama Day*. In this case, it is the practice of conjuring that brings Cocoa back to life. And the island of Willow Springs, where the action takes place, is still dominated by the invisible presence of another conjure woman called Sapphira Wade, the "Great, Great, Grand Mother" whose special powers have been passed on to her great granddaughter Mama Day.

The use of the supernatural has occasioned negative reviews² of some of these novels as well as a reinforcement of the marginal position of African American women's literary discourse.³ However, the concept of marginality, so often mentioned when dealing with ethnic literatures, has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, the supernatural belongs to a liminal space between the material and the spiritual, between the worldly and the otherworldly, between the human and the non-human. On the other hand, to this ontological marginal condition we can add a marginality produced by the rejection from the Western literary canon in what is a clear case of marginalization. The first type of marginality, as it is claimed by the aforementioned African American women writers, is based on a relationship of connection and reconciliation, whereas marginalization resides in the separation and implied discrimination present in binary opposites. In their resorting to the supernatural, these authors are advocating the legitimacy of liminal and marginal stages, thus adopting what Gloria Anzaldía terms as "la

conciencia de la mestiza": "she has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas within rigid boundaries . . . nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned . . . she turns the ambivalence into something else" (79). The marginal is therefore turned into a vital source of identity and power, as bell hooks admits in her essay "Marginality as Site of Resistance":

I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds. (341)

If we accept the margin as catalyst to resistance and defence of the different instead of a space with no voice and power, then we will be able to understand the role the supernatural plays in these writers' narrative, who see the advantages of consciously choosing marginal, alternative and even contradictory positions instead of struggling to belong to the white center. In this sense, the definition of "liminality" provided by anthropologist Victor Turner is highly relevant:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (95)

While the literature of ethnic women writers has suffered a total displacement from the center and has been marginalized until its resurgence at the very end of the 20th century, novelists like Bambara, Marshall, Morrison and Naylor contribute to the redefinition of that marginal position, going from invisibility to visibility, from death to life at the same time as they claim another reality seen with the mind's eye, demonstrating that "sight is no guarantee of insight" (Heinze 171). Apart from being a recurrent motif in African American narrative, (in)visibility constitutes an image closely related to the supernatural because it represents the invisible as opposed to the "real" or visible. As Rosemary Jackson points out,

In a culture which equates the 'real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be unseeable, can only have a subversive function in relation to an episte-

mological and metaphysical system which makes 'I see' synonymous with 'I understand.' Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the look, through the 'eye' and the 'I' of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through his field of vision. (45)

Therefore, the fantastic or supernatural necessarily acquires heavy transgressive and subversive overtones since it does away with the equations visible-real and sight-knowledge, understanding.⁴

The profusion of supernatural elements cannot be seen only as a thematic component nor as something out of the ordinary used merely to attract the reader's attention. In one of her interviews, aptly entitled "Toni Morrison's Black Magic," Morrison admits such a special relationship with the supernatural: "We were intimate with the supernatural" (Strouse 54).⁵ The stories about ghosts, omens and superstitions told by mothers and grandmothers have undoubtedly left an indelible trace on these writers. The first association this supernatural component suggests is a tribute to the ancestors; the fact that even some characters with their own voice are but spirits or ghosts implies a kind of empowerment of those ancestors in the narrative discourse. By means of ghosts dead members of a family are claimed and brought out of oblivion. This is the case of the slave Sapphira Wade in Naylor's *Mama Day* or Aunt Cuney in Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, but probably the most telling example is Morrison's *Beloved*, who represents all the ancestors who had perished under slavery and the infamous Middle Passage:⁶ the "Sixty Million and more" the author dedicates the novel to. Furthermore, the help the living receive in return for their paying tribute to the ancestors is the strengthening of their own ethnic and gender identity through the authorization of a female voice that emerges from a long imposed silence. The need to preserve the links with the ancestors and to remember an oppressed past is achieved by means of female figures such as the "mud mothers" in *The Salt Eaters*, the "swamp/tar women" or "night women" in *Tar Baby* or the blind riders in the same novel. These are all collective entities representative of the black community and the roots of the members of the African diaspora. These emblematic figures appear as a reminder of that African origin and cultural background, especially for those characters who fall victim to ethnic and cultural alienation, such as Jadine and Avey Johnson.

The supernatural functions as a narrative strategy of transgression in these writers' novels. The very act of endowing ghosts with a narrative voice distorts the received conception of reality according to formal realism, as Ruth Y. Jenkins states:

the use of the supernatural by women may also serve as a specific rhetorical strategy both to expose and counter the androcentric social and literary scripts that circumscribe "acceptable" behavior. In the Eurocentric canon, however, the presence of the superna-

tural as a plot device has traditionally marginalized the work—whether male or female authored—reflecting the dominant values of Western culture, which privilege formal realism, the understandable and ordinary rather than the unexplained and fantastic. (61)

Therefore, ghosts offer an alternative to the established reality, celebrating the diversity of the real. Literature must be pluralist, in the same way as society should be, as Morrison claims (Strouse 53). This implies the relativization of truth and reality; there is not one single reality but several realities, nor is there a single truth but several truths. On the other hand, the recurrent journeys into the past through ancestral characters and ghosts entail the breaking of a linear narrative prescribed by the Western literary canon. When Singh, Skerrett and Hogan refer to the use of memory in the literary discourse as a subversive technique which does not abide by narrative linearity, they also enumerate other strategies used by writers to achieve the same effect, being among those the myths, rituals, dreams and legends (19); and to such a list we could certainly add the supernatural. This temporal circularity is also reflected in the constant leaps between past and present in the form of multiple flashbacks and flashforwards. This pattern of fragmented narrative is precisely one of the elements that makes *The Salt Eaters* a difficult novel, where the narrative acquires a pendulum-like movement through the protagonist's mind. Likewise, the ghost of the child Beloved takes the readers and other characters back to the time of slavery, bringing to the fore memories that many just do not want to remember. Finally, one of the protagonists of *Song of Solomon*, the emblematic and ambiguous Pilate, joins in her supernatural nature past, present, and future: "the woman who had as much to do with his [Milkman] future as she had with his past" (36).

The narrative fragmentation is concomitant with the multiplicity of voices rendered in it, many of which belong to ancestors speaking through dreams or through memory. In *Mama Day* this diversity dominates the novel; the atemporal collective voice of Willow Springs speaks at the beginning from a hypothetical future:

We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where. It's August 1999—ain't but a slim chance it's the same season where you are. Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade . . . you done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas . . . (10)

The collective voice, which forms part of the collective unconscious of the whole community, transmits the legend of Sapphira Wade across generations as it does with the reader—hence the warning "the only voice is your own," referring to the reader. In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma's healing process takes place amidst a range of diverse voices across time and space—her husband, her sister, a bus

driver, the witnesses at the clinic where Minnie Ransom performs her ritual, etc. In *Beloved* the narration in third person alternates with individualized interior monologues of the three protagonists—Denver, Beloved and Sethe, whose three voices are joined together at the end of the novel.

In her article “The Metaphysical Argument for the Supernatural,” Denise Heinze argues that “Morrison finally, through fantasy, negotiates the divisiveness of double-consciousness by tapping into the animus mundi that unifies all human beings” (149). The concept of “double-consciousness,” coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, alludes to the fragmented identity of African American people, who are situated between two different worlds. On the one hand, they must adjust to the dominant white society, internalizing its values and seeing themselves through it; on the other hand, they have to deal with their ethnic condition—and the sexual one too in the case of women. By means of the supernatural, Heinze continues, “Morrison is able to some extent to mitigate the problem of double-consciousness and articulate a spiritual response to life in which human beings are treated to possibilities for growth and development denied in their real lives” (149). African Americans cannot escape that adverse reality but they can certainly manipulate it through the supernatural world. To start with, the blurring of opposed polarities this dimension implies, as it is shown in these novels, reflects a criticism of that “double consciousness.” This is why many of them can be defined as revisionist literature, since they suggest revisions and redefinitions of the established or traditionally acceptable reality, questioning terms such as “real,” “normal,” and “natural.”

We cannot conclude this essay without making a special reference to the important reevaluation of the African Americana conjure woman which all these writers accomplish in their novels. The female conjurer is represented as the embodiment of the connecting counter culture of spirituality and the supernatural, being considered as the paradigm of duality and hybridity since, like ghosts, she is in between the natural and the supernatural worlds. Conjure women, also called “healers,” “obeah women” or “midwives,” among other names, were the ones who dealt with cases of both physical and spiritual illness, using mainly herbs, plants and roots or resorting to healing rituals. However, conjuring has often been misunderstood and misrepresented as a clear sign of primitivism and ignorance typical of the ethnic “other” in a world where the very terms of magic and witchcraft have traditionally had pejorative connotations. To that already present marginalization in the Western world we have to add the stereotype of the superstitious and primitive Negro (Herskovits 22-26). Condemnation of conjuring also came from some members of the African American community itself, such as African American writer Charles Chesnutt, who linked it to the ignorance and the ensuing lack of progress of his people (Jaskoski 108; Chesnutt 372). Despite its detractors, the world of conjuring and spirituality has undoubtedly assuaged the horrors of slavery and helped black people in their survival in a hostile land, preventing them from being victims of spiritual enslavement. And female conjurers stand out as the protagonists of that peculiar

crusade of resistance, as their rescuers do now in the literary discourse. By conjuring up the ancestral connections with African roots and the spiritual milieu of their foremothers these writers attain the well-being and personal integrity of many of their characters, creating a healing narrative for African American women as true “metaphorical conjure women” (Pryse 5).

Far from being an escapist or evasive type of literature, these novels enclose the authors' compromise with and concern about the social condition of the African American woman, where the personal is at the same time political.⁷ The liminal position ghosts represent coincides with the marginality of the African American people and African American women in particular. Thus these writers see in the figure of the ghost an apologia for the hybrid and the validity of an intuitive, spiritual and ancestral knowledge. It is due to the interaction between the healer Minnie Ransom and the ghost of her friend Old Wife that Velma Henry finally manages to go out of her suffocating cocoon, becoming familiarized with the “mud mothers” from whom she had always tried to escape while she had been immersed in the Western empirical epistemology: “Something crucial had been missing . . . And what could it be?” (259). In the final reconciliation with her ancestral mothers and therefore with her self she finds the answer. A similar process is undergone by Avey Johnson and Jadine Childs. Avey is a well-off widow who has forgotten her ethnic past in a white capitalist society. But thanks to the ghost of her great aunt who appears to her in a dream, Avey will go through a spiritual rebirth at the end of the novel. The “swamp/tar women” in *Tar Baby* perform the same function as those threatening “mud mothers” of *The Salt Eaters*. Jadine's final return to Paris and its atmosphere of grandeur closes her life to any possible connection with her ancestors and a reconciliation with her ethnic self. Once again Morrison uses visions in dreams and the overwhelming presence of ghosts who take direct part in the narrative. Finally, Naylor bases her novel on the African American practice of conjuring. Furthermore, with it Naylor commemorates the African past of those who suffered the ordeal of slavery in the Americas, bringing to the fore an often forgotten past.

With their narrative emphasis on the supernatural, Morrison, Naylor, Bambara and Marshall do not merely intend to demonstrate that there is another dimension or another world which can be perceived with the eyes of the mind, but establish a continuous dialectic relation between the empirically visible and the invisible, the probable and the potential, the ensuing effect being what could be interpreted as a redefinition or a reaffirmation of an alternative reality that dilutes the negative effects of “double consciousness,” racism and oppression. In a Western culture that focuses on the tangible and visible, these writers act as what Angelita Reyes calls “technicians of the unseen—the spiritual world” (185), their novels being a challenge to the Western traditional concept of reality and the implications of literary realism. Although this challenge runs parallel to the postmodernist disintegration of absolute truths, fragmentation and pluralism, we should bear in mind that these novelists are also representing and

paying homage to their own ethnicity and culture. At the doors of the 21st century, the literary powers of these African American women make us but conclude that in our postmodern world it is necessary to open up to other ways of knowing and to alternative views of the world, all in order not to succumb to the snake's bite⁸ and to wish for the personal well-being of the African American people.

Notes

1. When establishing connections with postmodernism, we should not forget that this dialogic conception of the world obeys, as we have already pointed out, to the undeniable links with Africa. As Dorothy H. Denniston states in the introduction of her book about Marshall, the coexistence of opposites "forms the core of traditional African thought and is expressed through an acceptance of paradox as a means of achieving equilibrium" (xv). Likewise, Vernon Dixon uses the term "diunital" to refer to this barrier blurring:
American Blacks rather than Whites are more deeply attuned to a diunital [both/and] existence for two reasons. First, we live in a dual existence. We are American citizens, yet we are not . . . We have one identity that are two identities . . . Secondly, we may embody a predisposition to diunity that arises from our African identity. (qtd. in T. Smith 143)
2. See for instance Hull's and Koenig's reviews of *Mama Day*.
3. The very term "ethnic" was used mainly with the meaning of "heathen," "pagan" in its initial usage in the Christian world between the 14th and 19th centuries (Sollors 648). The heritage of such meaning has undoubtedly engulfed the life of African Americans in the United States from their first days of enslavement in the American continent.
4. Even in her speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize, Morrison once again employed the image of blindness as a metaphor for wisdom, as she had previously done in her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*, with the character Marie Thérèse and the blind riders. From the very beginning of her speech, Morrison makes reference to the lack of vision and black women: "'Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise' . . . the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town" (Peterson 267).
5. When Strouse tried to listen to the interview at home, there was nothing recorded on the tape. After telling Morrison about this she replied, "I know why. I told you something I wasn't supposed to tell you. So my father took care of it. I'm not surprised. He's done that before" (57). When she began writing *Song of Solomon*, soon after her father's death, she found in his spirit a guide with whom she could have conversations in her mind and who definitely helped her to develop her characters (Century 57).
6. The term "Middle Passage" refers to the journey slave ships made between Africa and America and which usually took between four and eight weeks. This journey meant the death of many of the slaves because of illnesses, starvation and suicide. It is estimated that at least fifty per cent of all the slaves taken through the Middle Passage died in it during the whole period of the slave trade.
7. In her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Toni Morrison advocates the political character of the work of art, which must be committed to the community

- and each one of its members (344).
8. We borrow this metaphor from Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, where she uses the image of the snake's bite to refer to the dangers of corruption and personal disintegration of the modern capitalist Northamerican society.

Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza=La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Salt Eaters*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- Carpenter, Lynette, and Wendy Kolmar, eds. *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Century, Douglas. *Toni Morrison*. New York: Chelsea House, 1994.
- Chesnutt, Charles. "Superstitions and Folklore of the South." *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*. Ed. Alan Dundes. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990. 369-76.
- Denniston, Dorothy Hamer. *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1995.
- Dixon, Vernon J., and Badi G. Foster. *Beyond Black or White: An Alternate America*. Boston: Little Brown, 1971.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bantam, 1989.
- Heinze, Denise. *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness: Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993.
- Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon, 1958.
- hooks, bell. "Marginality as site of resistance." *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornell West. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990. 341-43.
- Hull, Laurence. Review of *Mama Day*. *Library Journal* 15 Feb. 1988: 179.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. New York: Routledge, 1981.
- Jaskoski, Helen. "Power Unequal to Man: The Significance of Conjure in Works by Five Afro-American Authors." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974): 91-108.
- Jenkins, Ruth Y. "Authorizing Female Voice and Experience: Ghosts and Spirits in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Allende's *The House of the Spirits*." *MELUS* 19.3 (Fall 1994): 61-73.
- Koenig, Rhoda. Review of *Mama Day*. *New York* 8 Feb. 1988: 94-5.
- Marshall, Paule. "The Making of a Writer from the Poets in the Kitchen," *New York Times Book Review* 9 Jan. 1983: 3, 34-5.
- _____. *Praisesong for the Widow*. New York: Plume, 1983.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1989.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1987.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Plume, 1987.
- _____. Interview with Cecil Brown. *The Massachusetts Review* 36 (Autumn 1995): 455-73.
- _____. Interview with Christina Davis. *Presence Africaine* 145 (1988): 141-50.
- _____. Interview with Jean Strouse. "Toni Morrison's Black Magic." *Newsweek* 30 Mar. 1981: 52-57.
- _____. "Nobel Lecture 1993." *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Ed. Nancy J. Peterson. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

- _____. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*. Ed. Mari Evans. New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1984. 339-45.
- _____. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Ed. William Zinsser. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 101-24.
- _____. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1977.
- _____. *Tar Baby*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1981.
- Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*. New York: Vintage, 1988.
- Peterson, Nancy J. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.
- Pryse, Marjorie. "Introduction." *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. Ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. 1-24.
- Reyes, Angelita. "Politics and Metaphors of Materialism in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*." *Politics and the Muse: Studies in the Politics of Recent American Literature*. Ed. Adam J. Sorkin. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1989. 179-205.
- Singh, Amritjit, Joseph T. Skerrett Jr., and Robert E. Hogan, eds. *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1994.
- Smith, Theopus H. *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Tate, Claudia, ed. *Black Women Writers at Work*. New York: Continuum, 1984.
- Tiffin, Helen. "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23.1 (1988): 169-81.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1969.