

# Black women's 'two-ness' in african-american literature: can black and white worlds join together?

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**ABSTRACT.** The article discusses how black women keep contacts with both black and white worlds in novels written by African-American female writers. In Toni Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove keeps contact with the white world through her assimilationist behavior; in Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple*, Celie freezes herself in the black world by playing the role of the nationalist Negro; finally, in Lorraine Hansberry's (1987) *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mama Younger joins black and white worlds together when she develops a catalyst agenda, as she moves to a white neighborhood.

**Key words:** assimilationist, nationalist, catalyst, black world, white world.

**RESUMO.** A dualidade de mulheres negras na literatura afro-americana: os mundos negro e branco podem se unir? O artigo discute como mulheres negras mantêm contato com os mundos negro e branco em romances de escritoras afro-americanas. Em *O Olho Mais Azul*, de Toni Morrison (1970), Pecola Breedlove se alia ao mundo branco pelo comportamento assimilacionista; em *A Cor Púrpura*, de Alice Walker (1982), Celie se isola no mundo negro ao assumir o papel do Negro nacionalista; por fim, em *Uma Cereja ao Sol*, de Lorraine Hansberry (1987), Mama Younger aproxima o mundo negro e branco quando se torna catalista, indo morar num bairro branco.

**Palavras-chave:** assimilacionista, nacionalista, catalista, mundo negro, mundo branco.

The future of the black intellectual lies neither in a deferential disposition toward the Western parent nor a nostalgic search for the African one. Rather it resides in a critical negation, wise preservation and insurgent transformation of this black lineage, which protects the earth and projects a better world (WEST, 1993, p. 85).

## Introduction

With these words, West (1993) describes the role of the black intellectual. For him, this is a role that must consider American society as the one in which the Anglo-American and the African-American are interdependent cultures. He explains that the Negro intellectual must refuse both to freeze himself in one of these two polarized sides and to embrace 'a deferential disposition toward the Western parent' or 'a nostalgic search for the African one'. West claims that to succumb uncritically to one of these cultures is unthinkable. Instead, he proposes a sophisticated type of black intellectual, one who embraces a balanced duality and rejects to be frozen on either Anglo-American or African-American side. West calls this intellectual a critical organic catalyst Negro, and affirms that his task is to make both black and white worlds work together. West claims that this Negro of ideas and thought should display "a critical negation, wise

preservation and insurgent transformation of his black lineage" (WEST, 1993, p. 85).

West's (1993) catalyst intellectual is a Negro for the present and future times. However, in the history of black intellectuality, the assimilationist and nationalist intellectual anteceded the catalyst thinker and polarized the war of ideas and practices in the black community. The assimilationist favored submission to, and the nationalist endorsed isolation from, the white world; one ignored black culture whereas the other defended black values. The catalyst will favor neither assimilationism nor nationalism, but will project hybridity, plurality, and will critically articulate and combine the two positions.

## Negro double-consciousness

In its duality, the catalyst behavior shows similarities with Du Bois (1903) concept of 'double-

consciousness'. Du Bois defines 'double-consciousness' as a dual positioning – as a Negro and as an American –, a duplicated awareness loaded with the angst of living in the 'American world', which "yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (DU BOIS, 1903, p. 364). He characterizes the Negro 'two-ness' as: "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being asunder" (DU BOIS, 1903, p. 364-365). The central point in Du Bois words is that the American Negro wants to exist completely and live fully, as a Negro and as an American, with no unbeatable constraints to professional gains, personal self-realization and emotional affirmation.

West's catalytic hybridity and Du Bois 'double-consciousness' are not concerns of Negro intellectuals only, but are also present in the life of ordinary African-American women in literature. Among literary female characters, the critical intellectual position established by West, and the Negro duality defined by Du Bois can be found when they interact with black and white communities. In their quest for identity, self and humanity, in literature, black women keep contact with the two worlds through this duality.

In the African-American literary tradition, writers in general, and women writers in particular, create special strategies to deal with the American Negro's duality and 'double-conscious'. In their works, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Lorraine Hansberry associate the Negro 'two-ness' with 'womanism' and its conceptual and practical implications. In her insightful essay *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker (1983) defines 'womanism' as the way black women draw attention to their racial selfhood, identity and energies. She explains that 'womanism' has to do with the black woman who displays "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior", wants "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one" and is "interested in grown up doings" (WALKER, 1983, p. 11). Walker also reminds us that a womanist is "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength" (WALKER, 1983, p. 11).

In this paper, I wish to use West's (1993) duality, Du Bois (1903) 'double-consciousness' and Walker's (1983) *womanism* in order to show how three black women deal with both the black and the white worlds, in their search for identity, self and humanity. These women are Pecola Breedlove in

Morrison's (1970) novel *The Bluest Eye*, Celie in Alice Walker's (1982) novel *The Color Purple*, and Mama Younger in Lorraine Hansberry's (1987) play *A Raisin in the Sun*. I argue that in specific moments of their lives, Pecola, Celie and Mama keep contacts with the two worlds along with their search for self-realization. In their quest, they behave as three instances of Walker's womanistic ideals: (1) they display "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior" and, they love "other women, sexually and/or nonsexually"; (2) [they] "appreciate[s] and prefer[s] women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and women's strength;" (3) [they] want "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one", and are "interested in grown up doings."

The ways Pecola, Celie and Mama combine these three womanistic attitudes while dealing with the two worlds highlight specific outcomes: (1) Pecola projects a naïve submission to the white world's values of beauty; (2) Celie assumes a conscious isolation in her black culture; and (3) Mama establishes a critical integration of her black culture with the white world.

#### **Pecola Breedlove's double consciousness**

In Morrison's (1970) novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove embodies the combination of womanistic 'two-ness' with a personal search for identity, self and humanity. During her search, she develops an uncritical submission to the values of white beauty and abandons black culture. Her naïve attitudes toward the ideals of the white world echoes the intellectual Negro's 'deferential disposition toward the Western parent,' the attitude West claims to be inadequate for a Negro. Pecola aligns herself with whiteness and unwisely associates her search for identity, self and humanity with the aesthetic values of Anglo-American culture. She innocently believes that she can fuse white beauty with her black body and life simply through a strong desire to possess blue eyes. The result of her wrong aesthetic investment are the devastating consequences of her dream, which make her succumb to the damaging effects of the white values, which systematically deny black identity, self and humanity.

Wilfried D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weens (SAMUELS, WEENS, 1992) acknowledge the ruinous consequences of Pecola's investment in white aesthetic values. In the essay *The Damaging Look: The Search for Authentic Existence in The Bluest Eye*, they claim that Pecola's victimization resides in the interracial and intraracial conflicts she has to go through in her black community. They write that Pecola's victimization lies in both the white "racism

and resulting conflicts Pecola must encounter on the way to self-hood," and from "the intraracial conflicts related to color, firmly rooted in the white racist myth, subscribed to the black culture" (SAMUELS; WEENS, 1992, p. 12). In connection with what they say, Pecola's existence becomes devastatingly complex because, on the one hand, the white world does not give room for her to build sound and true identity, self and humanity and, on the other, the conflicting black community does not help her overcome her identity crisis. Pressed by the two cultures, especially by the concept of beauty subscribed by the black neighborhood, Pecola's uncritical encounter with the two worlds intensifies her identity, self and humanity crisis.

The instances of intensification in Pecola's identity, self and humanity crisis will be related to the intraracial conflicts she has to deal with in her own black community. These problems derive from the wrong views these black people have of beauty, by means of which they judge others. For instance, at school, classmates and teachers ignore Pecola and antagonize her simply because she is ugly. Teachers do not look at her and, when schoolmates want to be particularly offensive to a boy, they say: "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove" (MORRISON, 1970, p. 46). On the street, Pecola is also insulted because she is not beautiful. For instance, beautiful young mulatto Maureen Peel cries at her: "and you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I am cute" (MORRISON, 1970, p. 73). Later, at Louis Junior's house, light-skinned Geraldine finds Pecola playing with her son and insults her because of her darker skin. "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house," (MORRISON, 1970, p. 92) the mother yells. These light-or-dark-skinned blacks – the teachers, the boys, Maureen, and Geraldine – are also contaminated by Anglo-American values and, therefore, victimize Pecola and insult her ugliness, from the experience they have with white beauty. Thus, oppressed by the beauty conflicts she has to deal with in the black community, Pecola, later, re-addresses her search for identity, self and humanity and, naïvely, aligns herself with the white world.

In search for full identity, self and humanity, young Pecola embodies what Hughes claims in the essay *What the Negro Wants*. Like any black woman, Pecola wants "nothing not compatible with Christianity, nothing not compatible with sensitive, civilized living" (HUGHES, 1944, p. 265). Unfortunately, as she does not find 'sensitive, civilized living' within the black community she embraces the white world, hoping she will find it there. In her mind, she wants something only the white world can give her: blue eyes, and the elimination of her ugliness. She believes that this

sort of trade is possible, but this is not as simple as that.

Pecola's submission to the Anglo-American ideals of beauty is neither a simplistic attempt to get rid of her ugliness, nor an emancipatory way to buy 'sensitive, civilized living', but is the way she trades identity, self and humanity for beauty. Ugliness is not Pecola's solitary privilege. It covers the entire Breedlove family: the mother, the father and the brother. The narrator Claudia describes ugliness among the Breedloves, telling that "their ugliness was unique [...] [They] wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them" (MORRISON, 1970, p. 38). The narrator introduces Pecola's ugliness, saying "and Pecola. She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed – peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (MORRISON, 1970, p. 39).

Pecola starts a process of enchantment with white beauty when she spends a short time in Claudia's family. She lives with the McTeers after her father sets fire on their house. At Claudia's house, Pecola's association with white supremacist aesthetic values and capitalist society's ideals begins with her admiration of young white artist Shirley Temple, whose artistry, beauty and blue eyes become extremely appealing to her. Claudia tells that "we knew she [Pecola] was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley's face" (MORRISON, 1970, p. 23). Pecola's identification with Shirley Temple's beauty and blue eyes leads her to jump to two dangerous conclusions: (1) that she and her family are ugly; (2) that if she had blue eyes her life and her family would be different, that is, beautiful and love deserving. She feels so miserable that, in order to cease that dilacerating feeling, she will have to find a way to possess blue eyes. Claudia tells that it occurs to Pecola, from time to time, that if her eyes were different, beautiful,

she herself would be different [...] If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly – her father – would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, 'why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes' (MORRISON, 1970, p. 46).

Pecola decides, then, to act, and prays for blue eyes, fervently, every night without failure, during one year.

Next thing, Pecola looks for Soaphead Church, a magician known for his supernatural powers, a Spiritualist and a Psychic Reader. Pecola believes

Soaphead Church will give her blue eyes and beauty. In the conversation they have, Pecola demands blue eyes, but he says he is afraid he cannot help her. He pities both himself and her for his powerlessness, but what he does next is terrible. He uses Pecola's innocence to kill Bob, the dog he hates. What he asks her to do in exchange for the requested blue eyes is an evidence of his evil character, something divided between his love for the girl and hate for the dog. He tells her:

take this food and give it the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one (MORRISON, 1970, p. 175).

Pecola does as he tells her. After she gives Bob the food, she sees the dog die from the rotten food. She, then, runs away from the place, faithfully believing that she possesses the desired blue eyes.

Later on, in her house, Pecola's madness seems to become a fact, due to the strange behaviors she shows. She nonsensically talks to her supposed blue eyes in front of a mirror. Her conversation with herself, or with her blue eyes, exposes clearly the complete psychological devastation she is passing through in her search for identity, self and humanity, contaminated by a quest for the values of beauty and blue eyes. However, what is strange, or even more ironical, in her mental imbalance, is the fact that she is not sure whether her blue eyes are blue enough, or the bluest ones in town.

In her quest for the ideals of the beauty sponsored by the white world, Pecola goes through a psychological imbalance and her madness defers her dream of building her own sort of identity, self and humanity. Though deferred and symbolized in a naïve womanistic "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior", (WALKER, 1983, p. xi) to use Walker's words, Pecola's dream of 'sensitive and civilized living', associated with an uncritical quest for beauty, does not seem to have been in vain, or useless, for those who know her in the black community, as Claudia wishes to tell us:

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 some sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous (MORRISON, 1970, p. 205).

What Claudia seems to be telling us is crucial: that Pecola's search for identity, self and humanity, the madness resulting from her tragic plight, and

uncritical submission to the standards of beauty valued in black and white worlds, allow black community to re-elaborate a conscious evaluation of both Pecola's experiences and its own black image.

### **Celie's double consciousness**

In Walker's (1982) novel *The Color Purple*, Celie mixes her 'two-ness' with her search for identity, self and humanity. Her quest for self-realization is processed through an elaborate and conscious isolation from the white world. This attitude invites a 'nostalgic search for the African' parent, to use West's (1993) words. Different from Pecola, who shows an uncritical and "deferential disposition toward the Western parent" (WEST, 1993, p. 85), succumbs to the burden of the Anglo-American ideals of beauty and, therefore, perishes, Celie deals with her black culture in a conscious and growing process of maturity.

However, despite the differences that separate one from the other, it is ugliness that approximates Celie to Pecola. If Pecola's ugliness is judged in comparison with the standards of white beauty that is appreciated inside and outside the black world, Celie's ugliness is defined in relation to the black aesthetic models of beauty represented by Shug Avery. Shug's beauty is first introduced by Celie herself when she says "Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more prettier then my mama. She bout then thousand times more prettier then me" (WALKER, 1982, p. 7). In her description of Shug's beauty, Celie acknowledges her own ugliness, which later is reaffirmed by Shug herself, when the two women first meet. When Shug first looks at Celie, she reacts saying: "you sure is ugly" (WALKER, 1982, p. 48). Later in the novel, at Albert's house, Celie's ugliness echoes in Albert's voice. He curses her – now his wife – because she is leaving him and going to Memphis with Shug, yielding his anger at her: "look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman" (WALKER, 1982, p. 213).

Different from Pecola whose quest for self-affirmation is under elaboration in an environment contaminated and devastated by white-supremacist ideals of Anglo-American beauty, Celie's development of self-evaluation is fueled by the African-American culture of a black community. While in her black community Pecola does not overcome blackness, poverty and ugliness, but is victimized when she decides to trade these black elements with aesthetic ideals strange to her black culture, Celie's poverty, blackness and ugliness are neutralized by events that occur in her own community. In the essay *God is It – Reading The Color*

*Purple With One Eye on God and The Other on Man*, Ristoff (1999) explains that it is the black community itself that eliminates or neutralizes the dramatic forces that poverty, blackness and ugliness exert upon Celie's existence. Ristoff writes:

Poverty disappears when her stepfather dies and she inherits her mother's property, allowing her to live at leisure for the remaining years of her life. Her color almost ceases to be a problem when she accepts to stick to the community in which she grew up – a community, which lives in almost total isolation from the world of white Americans. Finally, her ugliness ceases to be mentioned once the years pass and she grows old and establishes herself at the center of a new extensive rural family (RISTOFF, 1999, p. 19).

Under control, the negative forces of poverty, color and ugliness are no longer obstacles to Celie's personal growth, and the elimination of their effects gives room to her complete insertion in the community.

Celie seems to be immersed in her black culture when she rejects white culture, represented in its language. She refuses to accept the white language (Standard English) when she does not accept to correct her Black English. Darlene insists in correcting Celie's words, showing her white books and models of good English. Darlene also tells Celie that if she speaks good English people will not think she is a hick, the whites will not be amused, and Shug "won't be shamed to take you anywhere" (WALKER, 1982, p. 223). Celie firmly reacts to Darlene's attempt to domesticate her linguistic ability and says: "pretty soon it feel like I can't think. My mind run up on a thought, git confuse, run back and sort of lay down [...] Look like to me only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind" (WALKER, 1982, p. 223). By refusing to replace her way of speaking, or trade it with the white version of English, Celie does not sacrifice her vernacular language and, therefore, maintains her appreciation of Black English and reinforces a personal commitment to black culture.

Celie's firm decision not to adapt her speech to Standard English affirms her decision not to take part in the white culture. Besides, this aspect also reinforces her will to develop a strong process of self-evaluation inside her black community, which takes place through a special kind of black sorority that she keeps with women like her sister Nettie, Sofia, and friend and lover Shug Avery. Sisterhood allies these women with Alice Walker's concept of womanism. Defined as the naïve, though "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior" (WALKER, 1983, p. xi), when I used the concept to show Pecola's devastating experiences,

womanism is now expanded to fit in these women's mutual assistance and support. With regard to these women, womanism also mixes audacity and courage with sisterhood and love among women. As Walker writes, the womanist is "a woman who [...] Appreciates and prefers woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility and woman's strength" (WALKER, 1983, p. 11). Nettie and Sofia are interesting instances of woman's solidarity acting in favor of Celie's personal growth. Nettie is not only responsible for Celie's literacy and learning about America, she is also the sibling who puts the sister in contact with the African culture of the Olinka people, among whom she lives with Celie's daughter and son, Olivia and Adam. Sofia is the model of black female independence and resistance to both black male oppression and white political power.

Different from Nettie, who plays the role of an informal teacher and the bearer of black culture from one continent to another, and different also from Sofia who acts like the model of black female independence, Shug is the manager of Celie's journey into self-affirmation and selfhood. The kind of sorority that goes between Shug and Celie enlarges the scope of Walker's view of womanism that has been associated with Nettie and Sofia. The womanism that relates Celie to Shug includes "a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually" (WALKER, 1983, p. xi). The kind of sorority that grows between Celie and Shug is a mutual commitment to personal growth taking place in Albert's house where Celie takes care of, nurtures and cures, a sick Shug. They share emotions, and Albert's love. Albert is not the same kind of man for them. That is, he does not behave the same way with them. He treats Shug cordially, but beats Celie, especially when Shug is not around. Celie tells Shug about Albert's behavior. "He beat me when you not here [...] for being me and not you." (WALKER, 1982, p. 78-80), she denounces. Eventually, their friendship grows and turns into a homosexual relationship, and Celie becomes strong enough to resist Albert's violence.

Shug's love teaches Celie how to deal with Albert's violence. As years pass his violence is neutralized and disappears. As Celie and Albert grow old a calm friendship seems to appear in their relationship. Mutual hate disappears due to reciprocal understanding, cooperation and support and, especially their love for Shug. Albert speaks about this new experience:

When you talk about love I don't have to guess. I have love and have been love. And I thank God he let me gain understanding enough to know love can't be halted just cause some peoples moan and

groan. It don't surprise me you love Shug, he say. I have love Shug Avery all my life (WALKER, 1982, p. 277).

As Albert explains his understanding of both his and Celie's love for Shug it seems clear that his confession comes out of experience, as both of them have grown older in the company, and friendship, of Shug. Celie also acknowledges Albert's emotional development and her own personal growth as something that has been influenced by Shug's friendship. "He ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to," (WALKER, 1982, p. 283), Celie admits.

If Shug is able to bring peace to, and create companionship in, the couple's routine, she is likely the one who is able to bring Celie a new view of God. After sharing Shug's pantheistic theology, Celie's new God is no longer the humanistic He or She, neither a black man like Albert who had oppressed her for years, nor even a "big and old and tall graybearded and white" (WALKER, 1982, p. 201). Celie's new God is a pantheistic It because, as Shug explains, It is "everything that is or ever was or will be! And when you can feel that, and be happy to ever feel that, you've found it". Shug makes it clear that, as an It, God is everything and the person who knows and lives the divine It-ness shares "that feeling of being part of everything", of being part of "the color purple in a field somewhere" (WALKER, 1982, p. 203).

### Mama's double consciousness

In Hansberry's (1987) *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mama allies her 'two-ness' with her search for identity, self and humanity through a wise interplay of both the black and white worlds. In West's words, integration between 'the Western parent' and 'the African one' is processed from the perspective of a catalyst position, which "resides in a critical negation, wise preservation and insurgent transformation of this black lineage which protects the earth and projects a better world" (WEST, 1993, p. 85).

As a catalyst black woman, Mama's experience is different from both Pecola's and Celie's isolationistic actions. Different from Pecola, who favors an uncritical and 'deferential disposition toward the Western parent', succumbs to the Anglo-American ideals of beauty and, therefore, perishes; unlike Celie, who develops a conscious isolation from the white world and is marked by a 'nostalgic search for the African' parent and, therefore, projects an alliance to the black culture on the basis of a critical and growing process of maturity; Mama's trajectory in both the black and white cultures is addressed to an interplay of the two worlds.

Yet different from Pecola's damaging and Celie's fruitful experiences, deeply marked by their ugliness, Mama's search for identity, self and humanity distances itself from black ugliness and gets closer to black beauty. In her aging life, Mama's beauty is visible in the description of her children's beauty. Mrs. Johnson, a neighbor, evaluates Walter Lee's – Mama's elder son – handsomeness: "he sure gets his beauty rest, don't he? Good-looking man. Sure is a good-looking man. I guess that's how come we keep on having babies around here" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p.101). Bennetha and Ruth – Mama's daughter and daughter-in-law – are also beautiful women. As for Mama's daughter, the narrator tells: "she is not as pretty as her sister-in-law, but her lean, almost intellectual face has a handsomeness of its own" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 35). The narrator describes Mama's daughter-in-law as "we can see that she was a pretty girl, even exceptionally so" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 24).

Together with beauty, racial pride is another quality of the Youngers. Beauty and pride define Mama's womanism as a tendency "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one", and an interest "in grown up doings" (WALKER, 1983, p. 11). Pride, beauty and womanism associate Mama and her family with the values of the New Negro aesthetics whose thoughts rest in struggle for "self-definition, self-expression and self-determination" (SING, 1997, p. 536). Amritjit Sing argues that the New Negro equates pride with spiritual emancipation which defends two things: (1) that "intrinsic standard of Beauty and aesthetics does not rest in the white race"; (2) that "a new racial love, respect and consciousness may be created" (SING, 1997, p. 536). In the play, the Youngers' pride reveals itself when Walter Lee talks to Mr. Lindner, who comes to buy the house they had bought in the white Claybourne Park. Walter Lee explains: "Well – what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride. I mean – we are very proud people. And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor – and we are very proud" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 148). Later in the play, Walter Lee tells Mr. Lindner – also the representative of white Claybourne Park community – that the family had decided to move to the house they bought in that white neighborhood.

Walter Lee is not the only person in that family who externalizes black pride. As the matriarch of the family, proud Mama's decision to move to that house is twofold: (1) the old and uncomfortable house in which the family presently lives. They want a better life. (2) The pension the family receives. They can pay the price of a better life. As

for the first aspect, the family does not seem to be proud of the house because the roaches and rats turned it out to be an unliveable place and must be abandoned. Referring to that old house as a rattrap, Ruth expresses the family's uncomfortable feeling toward it, along with her desire to move to the new house. Ruth speaks:

Lena – I'll work [...] I'll work twenty hours a day in all kitchens in Chicago [...] I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to – but we got to move. We got to get OUT OF HERE!! (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 140).

Ruth's powerful words are revealing of a soul troubled by the great expectations of a new and better life, but the family's chance to leave the old house makes a dream come true only when Big Walter's Ten Thousand Dollar pension check, anxiously expected, arrives and the Youngers feel a sense of profound relief and pride.

In fact, the New Negro Mama associates her search for identity, self, and humanity with the possession of a good house with a garden in a white neighborhood. The money that comes allows her to make an old dream come true. She tells Ruth: "you should know all the dreams I had 'about buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 45). Many years have passed since she got married and now that the money arrives the dream is about to be accomplished. The plant that she has dearly cultivated is a delicate anticipation of the garden she will have in the new house. "This plant is close as I ever got to having one" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 53) garden, Mama tells her daughter-in-law.

Despite the money, Mama's search for identity, self and humanity does not reveal material concerns, it rather shows a spiritual emancipation of the family. Mama's New Negro spiritual growth is processed through an interactive duality, allowing black and white culture to join together. Mama's attachment to her black side resides in the way she loves her family, especially her son Walter, daughter Bennie and the grandson Travis. This love of hers appears in the way she passes to the son the responsibility for the family, in the way she makes him the man of the house and gives him part of the pension for his liquor store. Mama's love is present when she saves part of the money to pay Bennie's medical studies, and buys the house, thinking of Travis's future. She also believes that these attitudes will help avoid her family fall apart. Mama expresses her anxiety with the bad situation of the family: "I-I just seen my family falling apart today [...] Just falling to pieces in front of my eyes [...]"

(HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 94). Acting so, that is, sharing the money with the family, Mama demonstrates her love for them, a love she believes she has learned how to feel with her Big Walter. She explains:

he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something, be something [...] Big Walter used to say [...] 'seem like God didn't see fit to give t he black man nothing but dreams – but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 46).

Along with her spiritual growth, suggested in the love she feels for her family, her love for plants and a garden is deeply involved in her black heritage. This love is something that connects her black culture to the white culture, symbolized in the new house in the white Claybourne Park. In the essay *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker (1983) expresses the importance that gardens have in black mothers' lives. Looking at her mother's garden, at her mother's devotion and skill to deal with flowers, Walker discovers her mother's artistry. She writes:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible – except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty (WALKER, 1983, p. 241).

Walker's association of gardening with conceptions of beauty in black women's lives is relevant here because this fits in Mama's artistry and seems to anticipate the way Mama will order the universe in her new house. The entire family is aware of Mama's love for gardening and supports it. When the money arrives, Travis, Bennie, Walter and Ruth show their support to her artistry with plants, and buy her gardening instruments. Travis gives her a gardening hat, saying: "like this ladies always have on in the magazines when they work in the gardens." (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 124). Innocent Travis is not aware his gift is a white woman's gardening hat, but contributes to the closeness of black and white cultures that is going on in the family. The other members of the family give her "a brand-new sparkling set of gardening tool" (HANSBERRY, 1987, p. 123). Besides, when the family moves to the white neighborhood Mama takes her old plant along with the move.

In his evaluation of the black intellectual and the ordinary Negro as well, West (1993, p. 85) observes that their future "resides in a critical negation, wise preservation and insurgent transformation" of the black culture if a better world is desired. In the Younger family's move to the white world, Mama negates both Pecola's strategic assimilationist

attitude and Celie's nationalist behavior in favor of a catalyst position, her 'two-ness' and, therefore, proposes a cultural integration of her black family with the white community of Claybourne Park.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the targeted audience of the study in both black and white worlds is invited to consider critically these three black women's search for self-evaluation, in three black novelists' works: Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's (1970) novel *The Bluest Eye*; Celie in Alice Walker's (1982) novel *The Color Purple*; and Mama Younger in Lorraine Hansberry's (1987) play *A Raisin in the Sun*. In their quest for self-affirmation, they established forms of managing their 'two-ness' – their Negro and American sides – so that they could create dignifying standards of life, each of the three reaching different and specific outcomes.

In her struggle for a dignifying living, Pecola Breedlove strategically aligned herself with white supremacist ideals of beauty, assumed the spell of the blue eyes, was unable to integrate the black and white worlds and was used by her community as a tragic instance of black self-image.

Different from Pecola who perished under the enchantment of whiteness, Celie strongly allied herself with her Black English, sorority and theology, sacrificed her insertion in the white world and, therefore, consciously refused to integrate the two worlds.

Finally, Mama Younger wisely avoided Pecola Breedlove's assimilationist attitude and Celie's nationalist behavior, so that she could assume the catalyst position and, thus, was able to integrate the black with the white world when she decided to move to the white Claybourne Park with her black family.

If, with Pecola and Celie, womanist behaviors caused dream deferment, with Mama the dream of a

better integration of the black 'two-ness' with the white world became a stronger and more realistic possibility.

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