



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN  
*Centro de Estudios de Postgrado*

## Master's Dissertation

# THE PRESENCE OF AFRICANISMS AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACKNESS IN CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE WRITTEN BY WHITE WOMEN

**Student: Artiles Luque, Francisco**

Tutor: Dra. Paula García Ramírez  
Dpt.: English Philology

**June, 2020**

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Introduction .....                                                                         | 3  |
| 2. Literature Review.....                                                                     | 8  |
| 2.1. Toni Morrison: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination .....                              | 8  |
| 2.2. Tradition: The African American Presence in the Canon of North American Literature ..... | 12 |
| 2.3. Exploring Whiteness: Other Theories .....                                                | 16 |
| 3. Textual Analysis .....                                                                     | 23 |
| 3.1. <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> (2001) .....                                              | 23 |
| 3.2. <i>The Help</i> (2009) .....                                                             | 36 |
| 4. Conclusion.....                                                                            | 53 |
| 5. Works Cited .....                                                                          | 57 |

# 1. Introduction

The main aim of this MA dissertation is to explore the presence of Africanisms and the representation of blackness in contemporary North American Literature written by white women. Following the pattern of research encouraged by Morrison, this thesis analyzes “the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanist presence and personae have been constructed –invented– in the United States, and the literary uses this fabricated presence has served,” in order to define whiteness (*Playing 90*). It is a fact that the canonical literary scholarship has avoided the study of the canonical texts taking into consideration the racial perspective. However, this thesis contends that it is thanks to the representations of blackness created by canonical writers that they constructed and gave meaning to their whiteness as Americans. Thus it is the purpose of this thesis to investigate the ways in which the Africanist presence continues to be a source of inspiration for the contemporary North American white women writers, whose works have had a strong impact on the literature in the United States.

In order to do so, the novels *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002) by Sue Monk Kidd, and Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help* (2009) will be taken as objects of study for this qualitative research. These two novels are chosen as representative samples of contemporary North American literature to analyze the Africanist presence in both of them, for several reasons. Both works are set in the South, during the Civil Rights Movement. This socio-historical context allows a deep exploration about the complex relationship between race and nation. In fact, these works illustrate the racist standards of conduct, encouraged by the white privilege and domination in the South, where the Africanist retentions were still alive. As Tikenya Foster states, “in the social, economic, and political order of the Jim Crow South” an invisible hand –that was white and male– ruled the lives of all the colored people (99). Therefore, both novels take also gender

and class oppression into the scene. Kidd and Stockett place women's position into the centre of their narratives, and account for the interracial relationship between these women, whose benefit are on both sides after the characters confront the white privilege of their southern society. That is why, female issues, such as nurturance as a mean of empowerment, are treated along the stories. It is thanks to the cross-racial exchange that the female characters experience, that they reshape and construct their own identity within their communities. Accordingly, these novels explore the reality and experience of the subaltern, from the perspective of being considered to be "the other."

In addition, this thesis will show how the depictions of the African American characters in these novels are linked to the writers' identities, since as Morrison came to realize –as a writer– "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (*Playing* 17). According to the concept of identity conceptualized by Satya Mohanty's Realist theory (1997), it is due to the writers' experiences in a multi-racial American society, that they might have had the need to speak the unspoken, to express what has not been told yet about the interrelationship between races. Nevertheless, this approach has to face some pitfalls due to the problematic nature of the concept of race. Because silence and evasion have ruled racial discourses, Kidd and Stockett have to overcome critical debates about whether they are –or not– authorized to reveal the unspoken dynamics of racism. Thus, scholars meditate about the moral nature, the force of the imaginative act, and the inadequacy of the Africanist presence created by these white women authors. It depends on the nature and their use of Africanism, that their works will imply cultural theft, appropriation, or simply a source of inspiration.

For this reason, and because my textual sample is more representative than exhaustive, my aim in this thesis is to produce not so much a final evaluation of a finished project, but a report on a literature that is still in evolution, and in need to progress being researched. Hence, this critical investigation will illustrate that the Africanist presence is –and has always been– central part of the production of the national North American

literature, and so Africanism is inextricable from the creation of a national American identity.

After highlighting through a brief introduction, the main aims of this dissertation, the second chapter offers a review of the theoretical framework relevant to understand the current state of this research. Section 2.1, Toni Morrison: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, summarizes the research questions encouraged by Morrison that this thesis address. The first area for research deals with the “Africanist character as surrogate enabler” of whiteness’ self-reflexive properties (*Playing* 51). That is, the ways in which the imaginative encounter with Africanism enables white writers to meditate about themselves. The second issue in need of investigation that Morrison proposes is related to the Africanist idiom, and the language practices that are used to reinforce otherness, as well as to assert privilege and power (*Playing* 52). The third aspect of analysis consists on “the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters” (*Playing* 53). Finally, the last topic examines the manipulation of Africanist narrative “as a means of meditation –both safe and risky- on one’s own humanity” (*Playing* 53).

After this presentation of the research parameters, section 2.2 comprises a panoramic view of the Africanist presence in the traditional canon of North American literature. This part summarizes the study carried by Morrison, reviewing Africanisms in the works by canonical North American writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Mark Twain, and Willa Cather. Morrison provides an alternative reading in view of the ways the Africanist presence has shaped “the choices, the language, the structure –the meaning” of the literature produced by white writers

(Morrison, “Unspeakable” 377). As a result, Morrison’s examination corroborates her claim that Africanism is an essential constituent of the American national identity, not only in literature, but also on the personal level of these authors. Moreover, Morrison requests a similar examination of the Africanist presence in the contemporary or non-canonical literature, which is the main purpose of this thesis.

Taking Morrison’s research approach as the model for my investigation, section 2.3 displays other valuable theories to be applied in the textual analysis carried out on the third chapter of this thesis. Along this research, the concept of race is understood as a social, historical, and ideological construct, following Mohanty’s Realist Theory. Thus, racial categories are formed, transformed, and destroyed (Omi and Winant, 61), creating “a hierarchy that grants the privilege and power to specific groups of people while simultaneously oppressing and excluding others” (Keating 916). That is why this thesis analyzes whiteness in the context of blackness (Keating 905). Since this project is taken from a feminist perspective, this section also illustrates the inextricable link between racism and other types of women’s oppression, related to gender and class. In fact, all the theories presented in this chapter break down essentialist notions of difference, in order to create multiple discourses to recognize the multiple intersectionalities of an identity (C. Marshall 24).

Based on the topics in need for research encouraged by Toni Morrison, together with the theories previously mentioned in section 2.3, chapter 3 deals with the analysis of two of the most important novels in contemporary North American literature that reveal the nature of whiteness, due to the Africanist presence created from the imagination of white women authors. In section 3.1, the examination is made upon the work of Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*. In her work, Kidd includes a fabricated Africanist presence to enrich the sense of Americanness of her white female protagonist, and narrator, Lily Owens. Through “a complex process that involves both emotional and cognitive effort” (Mohanty 68), Lily raises her racial consciousness about the invisible, omnipresent white

norm that ruled in the South during the Civil Right Movement, and shapes her own moral standards, due to the cross-racial interchange that she experiences within the African American community of the Boatwright sisters. In addition, from an antiracist feminist approach, Kidd repositions the role of African American women into the centre of her fictional work. Hence, the analysis on *The Secret Life of Bees* will explore the main functions of Kidd's African American women, as "surrogate and enabler" to construct the self-reflexives properties of whiteness.

Section 3.1 explores Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* in view of "the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters," which is another topic for research encouraged by Toni Morrison (*Playing* 53). Set in Jackson, Mississippi, *The Help* explores the complicated relationships between white women and their black maids in the early 1960s. Stockett creates the Africanist characters as the instruments to reveal the nature of whiteness, since depending on the white ladies' responses and agency –in favor or against the white dominance over the African Americans– define themselves, and by extension, whiteness. Moreover, the author, Stockett, and her protagonist, Skeeter, achieve their dream of becoming writers thanks to their book regarding how female domestics felt while working for the white families. It is thanks to the Africanist presence, that both Stockett and Skeeter discover their own identity as white Southerners, unveiling the unspoken and transcending the racial boundaries enforced by segregation laws.

Drawing from these insights, chapter 4 summarizes the conclusions reached in each individual section of this thesis, comparing the results after analyzing the two novels of chapter 3 and setting the differences between their similarities. Finally, the last chapter concludes with a list of the works cited in this Master thesis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Toni Morrison: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination

Toni Morrison is one of the pioneers in analyzing the ways in which an Africanist presence –real or imagined- has inspired and shaped the North American literary production. In her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison displays an eloquent and provocative challenge to the privileged, naturalized ‘whiteness’ of American literature, redefining the American cultural identity. Morrison blurs the artificial boundaries between blackness and whiteness, exploring what the white authors’ representations of blackness –or use of Africanism– tell us about American literary whiteness (*Playing* 6). It is thanks to the literary Africanist presence, that whiteness was constructed; since whiteness by itself, “alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable” (*Playing* 59). Morrison aims to encourage literary scholars about American literature to break the silence related to the privilege and the dominance of whiteness’s invisibility; to speak the unspoken. In *Playing in the Dark*, she proposes some topics in need of further critical investigations, which are still relevant nowadays in the academic world. Offering a model for research, Morrison applies her proposed areas of study to the American canon of literature. As a result, she corroborates her claim that Africanism is an essential constituent of the American national identity.

Morrison defines the term “Africanism” as “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreading that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (*Playing* 6). She focuses on the original and literary uses of an Africanist presence by white authors, what she calls “American Africanism” (*Playing* 6). However, Morrison remarks that her purpose is not to “alter one hierarchy in order to institute another” (*Playing* 8). In simpler terms, scholars should not be Eurocentric, nor Afrocentric, in their approach to American Africanism. Instead, critics should care to discover “what

makes intellectual domination possible,” “what ignites and informs the literary imagination,” and how to establish “the parameters of criticism” (*Playing* 8). Morrison’s early assumption as a reader was that “black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of the white American writers” (*Playing* 15); their role was simply decorative. Then, she began to re-read this literature as a writer, realizing that the “Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom moved and enriched the text in self-conscious ways” (*Playing* 15-16). Thus, her vision of the use of American Africanism, to establish hierarchal difference, was transformed into its surrogate properties as self-reflexive meditations of the white authors, in the rhetoric of dread and desire (*Playing* 63). White American authors reflect their own identity –and search for agency– upon their imaginative Africanist constructions, since “the subject of the dream is the dreamer” (*Playing* 17). According to Morrison, Africanisms enable white Americans to stress their freedom “to move, to earn, to learn, to be allied with a powerful center, to narrate the world” in the framework of the stereotyped “bound and unfree, the economically oppressed, the marginalized, the silenced” (*Playing* 64).

This ideological dependence of white Americans on racialism offers them “a safe route into meditations on morality and ethics; a way of examining the mind-body dichotomy; a way of thinking about justice; a way of contemplating the modern world” (*Playing* 64). Consequently, Morrison meditates about the moral nature, the inadequacy, and the force of the imaginative act while creating Africanisms. First, the fact that a white author achieves agency from the Africanist others “to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless” (*Playing* 7), opens critical debate about whether this use of Africanism implies cultural theft, appropriation, or it simply acts as a source of inspiration. Second, depending on the author’s representations of Africanisms, they could be discussed to be more or less accurate; that is, the work of literature can be considered “racist or nonracist, based on the author’s attitudes” (*Playing* 25). However, Morrison does not call scholars for this

Francisco Artiles Luque

type of conventional research about race and racism. She aims a third level of research, demanding to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from serving to the served” (*Playing* 90) which means an investigation about whiteness by contemplating blackness.

Morrison criticizes the fact that in a racialized society, the “habit of ignoring race is understood to be grateful, even generous, liberal gesture” (*Playing* 9). This color-blind ideology is responsible for enforcing whiteness’s invisibility, privilege and power, through silence and evasion, which have traditionally ruled in the dominant literary discourse. Hence, she intends to analyze the patterns to maintain this invisibility and silence, in order to discover the strategies to break them (*Playing* 51). Morrison proclaims that those who consider literature not only “universal” but “race free” diminish “both the art and the artist” (*Playing* 12), as every piece of literature is influenced by the writer’s “genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world” (*Playing* 4). Consequently, Morrison’s goal is to encourage scholars to examine the hidden racial discourse – “the hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony and dismissive ‘othering’” – evoked by the language in the literature of the United States (*Playing*, 9). From her perspective, studies in American Africanism “should be investigations of the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanist presence and personae have been constructed –invented– in the United States, and of the literary uses this fabricated presence has served” (*Playing* 90).

Within this research line, Morrison proposes some topics that, according to her, need for critical investigation since they have not been usually included in the critical analysis of what is considered to be the national literature canon. In fact, Morrison’s proposal is addressed in the research questions of this thesis. The first topic for research is the “Africanist character as surrogate and enabler” (*Playing* 51). This refers to the ways in which white characters, and writers, reflect on themselves, thanks to their encounter with Africanisms. This concept is specifically analyzed in this thesis within Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees*, in which August –as a surrogate mother- enables Lily to achieve the necessary agency and wholeness to construct her self-identity. The second

issue in need of attention is the Africanist idiom. That is, “how Africanist language practices are employed to evoke the tension between speech and speechlessness; how it is used to establish a cognitive world split between speech and text, to reinforce class distinctions and otherness as well as to assert privilege and power” (*Playing* 52). The evidences to explore these issues are taken from Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*. Written from different perspectives of narration, the contrast between the language of the narration –the text– and the dialogues –the speeches– helps to characterize the African American identities of the characters. The third issue of study aims at the analysis of “the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters” (*Playing* 53). In the case of Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*, Skeeter gets to know more about her own-self thanks to Aibileen, the black maid who becomes her true friend. That is why this novel will be also useful to exemplify and examine how the lives of these women changed because of their interracial relationships. Finally, this thesis “analyze[s] the manipulation of Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation –both safe and risky– on one’s own humanity” (*Playing* 53). Consequently, the sources of inspiration for these white women writers –Sue Monk Kidd and Kathryn Stockett–, in their creation of the Africanist presence, will be explored.

As it has been previously stated, the greatest works of the American canon of literature written by Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Mark Twain, Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway are examined and reinterpreted by Morrison. Thus, *Playing in the Dark* spotlights the “unspeakable things unspoken” about the ways in which the Africanist presence “shaped the choices, the language, the structure [and] the meaning” in the tradition of American literature (“Unspeakable” 377). Within section 2.2, Tradition: The African American Presence in the Canon of North American Literature is explored and a brief summary of Morrison’s analysis is offered. To shed some light on Morrison’s request of examining the presence of Africanism in the “contemporary and/or

noncanonical literature” (“Unspeakable” 377), the two previously mentioned novels are analyzed.

With her essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” followed by her book *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison succeeded in creating a new trend in American literary studies: the ways in which an Africanist presence and personae is created from the white literary imagination, and its uses to reflect whiteness, in American literature. Morrison confirms that a “contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of [the American] national literature” (*Playing* 5), because Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness (*Playing* 6). Numerous scholars have recently approached Morrison’s questions about how literary whiteness and blackness are constructed, their consequences in the building of an American national identity, the implications of both constructions, and in which cases a racial unconsciousness or awareness about racial assumptions enriches or impoverishes the language of a work (*Playing*, 12). However, due to the relative newness of this field of research, which has been left apart from the scholars’ gaze, literary critics are still aiming to find answers. For this reason, this thesis attempts to contribute to the development of Morrison’s research into the nature of both whiteness and blackness, and its reflection in North American literature.

## **2.2. Tradition: The African American Presence in the Canon of North American Literature**

Critics have avoided analyzing “the racist inflection” of the Africanist presence in the canon of North American literature, due to the polemical nature of this field (Morrison, *Playing* 11). In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Morrison proposes an agenda for research, encouraging scholars to examine and reinterpret the ways in which the Africanist presence has shaped “the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning” of the canon written by white authors (377). Consequently, in her book, *Playing in the Dark*, she reviews the “implicit” or “explicit” Africanist presence. A good number of

North American white writers among which I would like to mention Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Mark Twain, and Willa Cather portray African American characters. She argues that Africanism “is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and an invisible meditating force... even, and specially, when American texts are not ‘about’ Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom” (*Playing* 46). Some literary scholars agree with Morrison that the canon of American literature has been created from the “white male” point of view, not taking into consideration the “presence of black people in the United States” (*Playing* 5). However, since literature is formed and shaped by the history of the nation, the American canonical literature reflects “the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans, and then African Americans” (Morrison, *Playing* 5). As a result, Morrison provides an alternative reading that alters the conventional assumptions buried under the white male gaze of the American literature.

Morrison considers Poe to be one of the earliest significant writers to elaborate on the concept of American Africanism (*Playing* 32). Poe inscribes his romance fascination about race in his tales, such as “Ligeia,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Black Cat.” In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Poe’s powerful and consistent uses of images of “impenetrable whiteness” are contextualized as opposites to the representations of blackness or Africanist (Morrison, *Playing* 32-33). Morrison points out that beyond Poe’s habit of “othering” black characters through stereotypes and estranging dialect (Whalen, preface xv), the haunting of Africanism serves him to meditate about whiteness, reflecting the situation in which “American writers found themselves during the formative years of the nation’s literature” (Morrison, *Playing* 33). Poe’s representation of blackness enables him to explore American space as both, a place charged with the fear of trespass, but also a desirable limitless site (Morrison, *Playing* 51). Poe’s meditation can be due to the “palpable social and ideological tension” between the North and South at his time, the half free and half slave nation (Whalen, preface 14).

Therefore, Poe can be considered as “an active promoter of racist ideology,” or as “a product of his time, repeating generally shared views,” due to the ambiguities of his position (Whalen, preface xviii). However, Morrison does not judge Poe as racist or non-racist by his depiction of blackness, since for her, it is more interesting to investigate the Africanist influence on whiteness. I consider, as Whalen states, that in order to publish according to the politics of the industry that were established in the South of the 1830s, Poe might be “seeking a form of racism acceptable to white readers,” which includes Africanisms (Whalen 4).

Morrison observes that like Poe, Melville also uses the Africanist presence in *Moby Dick* as “surrogate selves for meditations on problems of human freedom” (*Playing* 37). Cope asserts that although *Moby Dick* is not focused on race or slavery, their presence allows Melville to explore human relations and racial difference from the unethical ideology of whiteness. In agreement with this, Rampersad considers Melville as “one of the principal interpreters of the American obsession with race and commitment to racism, an artist to whose work we should turn for a fair measure of illumination and guidance” (172). Morrison claims that “there is no romance free of what Melville called ‘the power of blackness’” (*Playing* 31); especially “not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated” (Cope 2011 n.p.).

Morrison notes that criticism towards Faulkner “treats [his] later works –whose focus is on race and class– as minor, superficial, marked by decline” (*Playing* 14), or in Towner’s terms, “just plain bad” (4). In contrast, Towner argues that his last works feature experiments in form and narration that mirror Faulkner’s exploration of racial identity. She claims “Faulkner’s work might not be ‘about’ race, but it is nearly always about ‘race’” (11). In the same way Morrison does not evaluate Faulkner’s racial views, Towner avoids essentializing Faulkner as a Southern, patriarchal, and racist white author, aiming

to understand how complex –although conflictive and contradictory- Faulkner’s racial perspectives were. Even Faulkner, in a 1955 interview, negates his position as a racist Southerner writing about this setting:

I think that the setting of a novel is just incidental, that the novelist is writing about truth; I mean by truth, the things that are true to all people, which are love, friendship, courage, fear, greed; that he writes in the tongue which he knows, which happens to be the tongue of his own native land. I doubt if environment or country can be enough inspiration to write a book about, that the writer is simply using the tool which he knows. I write about American Mississippi simply because that is what I know best. (Meriwether 202)

Morrison recognizes a certain level of criticism in Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* towards class and race in antebellum America, “disguised on enhanced by humor and naiveté,” through the gaze of Huck –already ‘othered’ by society (*Playing* 54). In addition, Fishkin (2002) remarks that Twain’s vernacular humor, as well as his varieties of Southern dialects, is inspired by African American sources (*Was Huck Black?* 126). Twain uses the Africanist persona, Jim, to empower Huck’s agency, and enables Huck “to mature into a moral human being,” in the confines of “America” (Morrison, *Playing* 56; author’s emphasis). Furthermore, Huck’s notions of independence and freedom rely on the presence of the unfree Jim, who makes the white standard of normality to be seen as a privilege (Keating 906). Twain’s representation of Jim as the most moral character in the novel, is remarkable, at a time when only few – almost none- white fiction writers emphasize their respect towards black people (Fishkin, “Desegregating” 122). By empowering the African American persona, Twain is able to deconstruct whiteness, as the dominant force in Southern society, remarking its hidden privilege and power.

In Willa Cather’s *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the Africanist presence is reduced to the use of emphasizing “the power and license of a white slave mistress over her female

slaves” (*Playing* 18). For this reason her work has been usually left apart from critical consensus regarding her abuse of Africanist figures. Cather appropriates the Africanist personae to reflect upon them the self-properties of a white individual, Saphira, that were regarded as inappropriate by the white standards of her society. Thus, “the surrogate black bodies become her hands and feet, her fantasies of sexual ravish and intimacy with her husband, and, not inconsiderably, her sole source of love” (*Playing* 26).

This overview of the uses of Africanisms by white writers, in what is considered to be the canon of North American literature, evidences the difficulties that the writers were undergoing in their representations of African Americans, because of the racist conventions, as well as their own racial assumptions, set by their time. The fabrication of Africanisms by contemporary North American writers has been also shaped by the previously mentioned literary tradition. In order to achieve a more complex analysis of the fabrication of Africanist personae by contemporary white women writers, taking into consideration not only race matters but gender, the next section offers a summary of background theories, related to whiteness, feminism, and the construction of identities, that facilitates this research.

### **2.3. Exploring Whiteness: Other Theories**

At the time Morrison remapped the study of American literature, publishing *Playing in the Dark* in 1992, American ideas of “whiteness” became interrogated, as ideas about “blackness” were complicated (Fishkin, “Interrogating” 429). As a result, there was a growing interest in the study of the “imaginative construction of whiteness,” and how it “had shaped American literature and American history” (Fishkin, “Interrogating” 430). The rapid proliferation of this genre can be observed by the numerous publications containing the word “whiteness” in their titles by American historians and scholars from sociology, cultural studies, education and literature during the past decades (Kolchin 154). Whiteness studies “represents a new way of addressing old questions” about “the

changing ways of making race” (Kolchin 172). In other words, how Americans conceptualized and redefined race, under the historical conditions of the context. Hence, whiteness studies try to confront racism; challenging the invisible, privileged whiteness of American literature, and by extension, the American cultural identity.

Ten years after Morrison challenged the scholarship to review the representation of blackness and the Africanist presence in the canon of American literature as an examination of whiteness, Peter Kolchin has predicted the nature of whiteness studies. According to Kolchin, critics:

would include greater attention to historical and geographical context, more precision in delineating the multiple meanings of ‘whiteness,’ continued effort to move beyond a strictly binary approach to race even while emphasizing the distinctive ways African Americans experienced race and racism, continued exploration of the complex relationship between race and nation, closer consideration of the South’s role in shaping American notions of race, more sustained treatment of actual lived relations, and more inclusive examination of the way nonwhites and whites-in-the-making have perceived whiteness (and nonwhiteness). (172)

Considering race a social construct shaped by the socio-historical context, scholars of this field have examined “what’s going on with whiteness” (hooks, *Yearning* 54). However, no one up until now really knows exactly what whiteness is by itself (Keating 904; Kolchin 160; Mercer 205). The common knowledge shared by contemporary scholars is that whiteness functions as a “pseudo-universal category” (Keating 904) that hides inequalities in our contemporary culture (Clark 73; Holmes 303; I. Marshall 241; Morrison, *Playing*, preface 11), “by seeming not to be anything in particular” (Dyer 44); by its “violent denial of difference” (Mercer 206). Whiteness’s performance in a hierarchical social system evokes a parallelism with Baudelaire’s contemplation: “the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist” (qtd. in

Keating 904). Giroux asserts that the dominant culture's inability or reluctance to see whiteness as a historical and social construction "under the guise of a nonracialized, supposedly colorless 'human nature'" (qtd. in Keating 904), is the source of its hidden authority, "that secures its power by refusing to identify" itself (15). Therefore, whiteness operates as "an unmarked marker of others' differentness" (Frankenberg 198). For this reason, it is easier to analyze whiteness "in the context of 'blackness' or other non-'white' racialized categories," since it is nearly impossible "to analyze 'whiteness' as 'whiteness'" (Keating 905).

However, scholars have gone a step further by acknowledging whiteness as visible for the first time (Mercer 205). This rising consciousness in the United States about race matters is supported by the incorporation of this issue in the contemporary film industry. Recent films, such as *Django Unchained* (2013), *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and *The Butler* (2013) depict the story of a male African American –situated as the center of the plot in a white Southern racist context, with the background of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. The two novels analyzed in this thesis have been also adapted into films, *The Secret Life of Bees* (2006) and *The Help* (2011). Furthermore, both films –just like the novels– are gender oriented. The study of race and gender issues has become such a trend, that even a videogame, *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* (2012), has been set in Louisiana at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), with an African-French woman as the first female protagonist of the series. Continuing the development of this agenda, I will analyze two contemporary novels written by white American women, which have black female characters at their core, following Morrison's model of her reexamination of the American canonical literature, while also considering Kolchin's proposal, among other theories related to race and gender.

Understanding race as a social, historical and ideological construct (Mohanty 55), Edgar T. Thompson asserts that "races are made in culture, not found in nature" (325). This theory implies the essentialist notion that race "is 'made' by humans" (Kolchin 158).

Hence, it is in the framework of a human creation, where the interrogation of whiteness has to be analyzed. Moreover, race –as a socio-historical concept- is constantly changing and reinvented, shaped by the influence of “political, economic, and historical factors” (Keating 917). As Michael Omi and Howard Winant demonstrate, “the meaning of race is defined and contested throughout society, in both collective action and personal practice. In the process, racial categories themselves are formed, transformed, destroyed, and re-formed” (61). Therefore, in order to analyze what whiteness embodies, we need to focus on our contemporary socio-historical context.

Because racial categories “were developed to create a hierarchy that grants privilege and power to specific groups of people while simultaneously oppressing and excluding others” (Keating 916), racial differences do not need to be inherent (Kolchin 162). As Marilyn Frye suggests, “the connection between whiteness and light-colored skin is a contingent connection: this character could be manifested by persons who are *not* white; it can be absent in persons who are” (151-52; author’s emphasis). That is, someone born with “white” skin color does not necessarily imply that this person “will think, act, and write” in the “white” ways dictated by society; and so it happens with “non-white” skin people (Keating 907). Keating exemplifies this contingent nature of skin color with Leslie Marmon Silko’s Native characters that “think and act in ‘white’ ways,” associated with evilness (Keating 907). Also *The Help* serves evidences that enhance this argument.

In Silko’s and Stockett’s literary works, whiteness seems to reproduce the common belief in African American communities, where “blackfolks associated whiteness with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing” (hooks, *Black Looks* 170). Similarly, Keating describes this belief of evil and morally bankrupt whiteness as “an oppressive, mythical norm that negates peoples (whatever their skin color) who do not conform to its standard” (916). These negative qualities of literary representations of whiteness and white people are generally extended to the “real-life human being classified as ‘white’” (Keating 909).

For this reason, Keating suggests that white people who have self-identified with this racial category have separated themselves intellectually from the so-called “white race” (908), after they assume personal responsibility for the racism of the historical past, reacting with “guilt,” “anger,” “withdrawal” and “despair” (915). Similarly, there are also examples of the opposite literary assumption, which devalues the black race as a negative signifier, regarding then whiteness positively, as a synonym of freedom and honor. That is the case of Harriet Wilson’s positive usage of whiteness in *Our Nig*, where a black character defends his honor by declaring “I’s black outside, I know, but I’s got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in a white skin, or a white heart in a black one?” (qtd. in Mullen 85). Also, in Langston Hughes’s “Passing,” the narrator imagines his life much easier if he passes for a white man:

I’ve made up my mind to live in the white world, and have found my place in it (a good place), why think about race any more? I’m glad I don’t have to, I know that much. I’m going to marry white and live white, and if any of my kids are born dark I’ll swear they aren’t mine. I won’t get caught in the mire of color again. Not me. I’m free, Ma, free! (qtd. in Mullen 79)

According to Morrison, these negative assumptions conventionally accepted about whiteness –and about blackness– result from an alteration of one hierarchy in order to institute another (*Playing* 8). In simpler terms, as Morrison remarks, when “the dominant Eurocentric scholarship is *replaced* by dominant Afro-centric scholarship” the effect is simply an exchange of oppressors and oppressed, but equally based on stereotypes that shape the literary imagination and its products (*Playing* 8). Consequently, in order to research Morrison’s suggestion about what does really make these intellectual dominations possible, and what “ignites and informs the literary imagination” (*Playing* 8), it is necessary to explore whiteness “as a racial identity without recentering whiteness” (Edelstein 15). In agreement with this, Henry Louis Gates ponders about the conflictive nature of this issue, explaining that “race is a text (an array of discursive practices), not

an essence,” and so “it must be *read* with painstaking care and suspicion, not imbibed” (qtd. in Keating 901; author’s emphasis).

Whiteness is considered the “unacknowledged standard or norm against which all so-called ‘minorities’ are measured” (Keating 905). Historically, the Puritans created the term ‘white’ to establish their own racial category and by extension, their Americanness, in opposition to the ‘black race’ (Keating 912; Kolchin 154). Thus, the white race was not created until the black race was visualized. This origin emphasizes the whiteness’s dependence on blackness in order to achieve meaning, to be analyzed and to be defined; resembling the reverse pattern by which blackness was originally defined according to its differentness with the standard of whiteness. Accordingly, Dyer notices that “it is the way that black people are marked as black (are not just ‘people’) in representation that has made it relatively easy to analyze their representation, whereas white people –not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact– are difficult, if not impossible, to analyze *qua* white” (143).

For this reason, Morrison maintains that blackness, or “Africanisms is central to discover the nature –even the cause– of literary whiteness” (*Playing* 9); because, paradoxically, whiteness has been created in the American literature through the blackness’s presence (Grobman 10). Likewise Morrison, Philips concludes that “our understanding of white American society is incomplete without an understanding of the black, and African, impact on white America” (230). Since racism is deeply embedded in American society, race still matters in the twentieth-century U.S. culture (Keating 915). Fair predicted that “the problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of color blindness –the refusal of legislators, jurists, and most of American society to acknowledge the causes and current effects of racial caste” (qtd. in Lewis 624). Gilyard states that the issue of the relations between whites and blacks, is not a matter of race, but racism (qtd. in I. Marshall 240). By extension, Ian Marshall claims that an “interrogation of whiteness is an interrogation of racism” (240). An examination of racism has to break with the

silence “that elide[s] questions of racism with rhetorics of standards and amelioration” (I. Marshall 240) that “reify[ies] the position of majority culture, while further marginalizing women and people of color” (Holmes 302).

...only a persistent, rigorous, and informed critique of whiteness could really determine what forces of denial, fear and competition are responsible for creating fundamental gaps between professed political commitment to eradicating racism and the participation in the construction of a discourse on race that perpetuates racial domination. (hooks, *Yearning* 54)

Because the racist and the sexist oppression are inextricably linked in history, theories about race are intimately related to those dealing with identity and gender (Edelstein 24; Holmes 293; Keating 909). These theories break down essentialist notions of difference, in order to create “multiple discourses from voices that are frequently left out of the academy” (C. Marshall 24). These “multiple discourses” are linked to the multiple nature of an identity. As African Americans, the characters of the novels analyzed in this thesis embrace the sense of W.E. B. Du Bois’ *double-consciousness*: “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 torn asunder” (3).

Moreover, because the African American protagonists of the novels studied in this thesis are women, gender must be included into this double-consciousness construct, aiming towards the most advanced multiple consciousness concept. Frances Beale considered black women to be the subject of “abject oppression,” because they were treated as “the slave of a slave” (92). On Mae G. Henderson’s words, the black woman is not only the ‘other’ of the same, that is, the white woman, but also the ‘other’ of the others, relating to men (60). Du Bois and Ruiz comment on race, gender and class as interlocking roots of inequality, which cannot be really understood without considering the intersection between them, due to the interrelated processes of women’s oppressions

(preface xiii). This idea connects with the feminist perspectives that “increasingly incorporate the recognition of multiple intersectionalities of identity” (Marshall 23).

Following Satya Mohanty’s Realist Theory, identities are defined as “theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways” (43). According to Mohanty, “whether we inherit an identity –masculinity, being black– or we actively choose one on the basis of our political predilections –radical lesbianism, black nationalism, socialism– our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences” (43). Therefore, while analyzing Kidd’s and Stockett’s works, I will also focus on the authors’ experiences –or sources of inspiration– that lead them to construct an African American personae, working as self-reflections about their own whiteness (Morrison, *Playing* 63). However, I do not aim to evaluate these experiences, but to analyze the variety of ways in which these two white women authors process the information, based on social mystification that leads practices of oppression to be invisible or freely chosen (Mohanty 32).

### **3. Textual Analysis**

#### **3.1. *The Secret Life of Bees* (2001)**

Sue Monk Kidd’s novel *The Secret Life of Bees* deals with one of the topics in need for critical investigation proposed by Toni Morrison: the Africanist presence as the “surrogate and enabler” (*Playing* 51). As a white author, Kidd’s “imaginative encounter with Africanism enable[s]” her to think about herself (Morrison, *Playing* 51). In her novel, Kidd confronts the white privilege and racism (Kolchin 154), making “whiteness” visible “as a culturally constructed ethnic identity historically contingent upon the disavowal and violent denial of difference” (Mercer 206) in the context of and through- “blackness” (Keating 905; Grobman 10). Moreover, these Africanisms serve Kidd’s white American protagonist and narrator, Lily Owens, as the vehicle by which she gets to know herself as “not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident

of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (Morrison, *Playing* 52). In addition, from an antiracist feminist approach, Kidd repositions the role of African American women, who were living as a “double minority” within the racist and patriarchal social system (Pinderhughes, preface xi). *The Secret Life of Bees* provides a piece of contemporary North American literature in which the process of building an identity, as well as the construction of “whiteness,” are based on the foundations of the Africanist presence created from Kidd’s imagination and narrated from Lily’s perspective.

Similar to Mark Twain’s bildungsroman *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, set in South Carolina in 1964, addresses “racial discrimination in a racially-charged Southern landscape, allowing the world to be seen” through the eyes of a motherless fourteen-year-old Lily (Hebert 33). Lily is a white girl who embarks a journey to Tiburon, in order to escape from her abusive father, T. Ray, and to search for answers about her mother’s past, Deborah. In the company of her black maid, Rosaleen Daise, a runaway who is willing to escape the racist justice system, Lily experiences her “coming of age” in a new world for her, living in an intimate community of black women, with the beekeeping Boatwright sisters: August, June and May. Within this matriarchal community, Lily, who copes with the loss of her mother at an early age, finds a safe environment to examine and develop her own identity influenced by the wisdom and nurturing of August (Feldman, qtd. in Hebert 14). Lily “learns about racism, whiteness, forgiveness, maternal love, spirituality, and creativity” and she “becomes more aware of the complexities and possibilities of herself and her world” (Grobman 10). Thus, Kidd seems to recognize “the importance of race as a historically specific, structural, and relational category that is co-constitutive with gender” (Clark 89).

In Kidd’s work, as in Twain’s, the “social indictments” about racial discrimination of the American South in the 1960s are challenged by the power of Lily - the narrator- to transform her “preconceived notions about race” and build her own identity in a multi-racial American society (Hebert 34). The South was –and remains- the “part of the country where race has most pervasively shaped social relations” (Kolchin 161). Kidd

constructs a realistic Southern environment during the Civil Right Movement, in which real historical events are presented through the media. Walter Cronkite appears on television informing about the violent deeds rooted in this movement, and governors come on the screen asking for “calm and reason” (Kidd, *Secret* 90). Also, the radio provides an authentic background of 1964, such as the launch of *Ranger 7* and the Vietnam War (Kidd, *Secret* 172). Not only is the racial violence of this period portrayed in the surrounding of the novel, but it also affects the lives of the African American characters, which allows Lily to be “self-conscious and ashamed” when she identifies herself on the white side (Kidd, *Secret* 91).

Kidd highlights the Southern racial discrimination towards African Americans through “the physical and emotional pain” damaging the lives of Rosaleen, April, Mary, and Zach Taylor (Hebert 2). When Rosaleen heads to register to vote,<sup>1</sup> she gets arrested by police, on the claim of “assault, theft, and disturbing the peace” (Kidd, *Secret* 34). So in order to gain her freedom back, Rosaleen is pushed to escape from police custody with Lily’s aid, becoming a runaway. Later on in the novel, Zach is also unjustly arrested (Kidd, *Secret* 186). According to Lily’s moral standards, she is a “criminal” for having helped a runaway (Kidd, *Secret* 188). Kidd suggests that at times, what it is truly moral goes against the rules dictated by Southern society; denouncing the racial bias within the justice system, in which white people are privileged over colored people. In fact, hooks states that to be feminist implies that we can “choose to be disloyal to the dominator culture,” in order to heal from all the wounds caused by racial assault, as well as sexist and classist oppression (*Writing* 57). Lily “realizes that black people must deal with social barriers she will never face” (Hebert 59). This echoes Huckleberry Finn’s dilemma whether he should or should not feel guilty about helping Jim, a runaway slave. Furthermore, Kidd uses Rosaleen’s and Zach’s detention to stress Lily’s freedom; and so

---

<sup>1</sup> The Black Codes: ex-slaves were meant to return to their former condition. Being restricted their movement, forcing them to enter into year-long labor contracts, preventing them from rights in courts, and so on.  
Francisco Artiles Luque

Lily recognizes and values her freedom in contrast with their imprisonment (Morrison, *Playing* 52; Grobman 14).

As a consequence of Zach's arrest, May commits suicide, just like her sister April did, in a desperate escape route away from racial discrimination. May suffered from a mental flaw that made her undergo a profound emotional pain towards the injustices of a white dominant society. May's decision of taking her life teaches Lily a lesson. Her inability to handle "loss and dissension" drives Lily to confront her overwhelming situation due to her mother's loss. After May's suicide, the police authority manifests Lily that her situation –as a white girl living in a house with black women– is not natural (Hebert 39). All these events illustrate that violence and racial prejudices are standards of conduct in the South, encouraged by the privilege and dominant position of whites in power.

Although Lily places herself on the African American victim's place in these examples of racial injustice, she is subconsciously influenced by the Southern white dominance. Kidd acknowledges readers the moments in which Lily becomes aware of her race and "her own racial intolerance" through Lily's first person narration (Hebert 50). First, despite "Lily facilitates Rosaleen's escape from police custody" (Grobman 14), Rosaleen accuses Lily of acting like her keeper, as if she were "some dumb nigger [she] gonna save" (Kidd, *Secret* 55). By protecting Rosaleen, Lily achieves a sense of confidence on herself, which Rosaleen regards as the common white superiority and arrogance. At this point, the audience is informed through Lily's pray that she "*didn't mean to treat her like a pet dog. [She] was trying to save her. That's all*" (Kidd, *Secret* 55; author's emphasis). This symbolizes Lily's truly good intentions of protecting Rosaleen, although she also accomplishes self-esteem through that deed (Hebert 16).

Then, once at the pink house, when Lily overhears June's opposition to housing her, she is shocked to realize that "June may not want her there" (Hebert 50) because "she's *white*" (Kidd, *Secret* 89; author's emphasis). For Lily, this was "a great revelation;" she specifies "not that [she] was white but that it seemed like June might not want [her

there] because of [her] skin color. [She] didn't know this was possible –to reject people for being *white*” (89; author's emphasis). This manifestation evidences Kidd's witty and subtle strategy of making whiteness visible in the context of blackness, highlighting its consistent invisibility (Keating 905). For Lily being white implies “an unmarked marker of others' differentness” (Frankenberg, qtd. in Kolchin 160), “seeming not to be anything in particular” (Dyer 44). That is, Lily's assumptions of her color-blind culture lack the notion of white as a marked ethnicity, as a race. For her, whiteness functions as a “pseudo-universal category” under the guise of “a nonracialized, supposedly colorless ‘human nature’” (Keating 904). In addition, what constitutes a revelation on Lily's preconceived notion of Southern racism is her *white* skin color perceived as trace of a minority, as “the other.” Lily's conception –or misconception– imitates the only possible pattern of racism in the South at that time: racism towards blacks. Hence, it is remarkable how Kidd intentionally interchanges the roles between the oppressor and the oppressed in this African-American-centric community. In this context, Lily has to confront the “invisible, omnipresent, naturalized ‘white’ norm” (Keating 905) and re-form her meaning of race (Omi, qtd. in Keating 910), in order to build her own identity. Through this conflict, after June's acceptance of Lily, June “teaches [Lily] two important lessons: people can change, and she is loveable” (Hebert 18).

Also Zach comments that August did not mention “about [Lily] being... white” (Kidd, *Secret* 119). In contrast to June, Zach does not diminish Lily because of her whiteness; he is only surprised about the fact that Lily –being white- would collaborate with them in the beekeeping business. Then, Kidd also discloses the Southern racist assumptions on Lily's black counterpart. Zach assumed that August's helper would be colored, since no white would be willing to participate in any business owned by African Americans. Due to this, Lily feels hurt by being pointed out as different, and pays Zach back with more prejudiced ideas shaped by her own racist intolerance. Lily declares that if Zach was shocked by her color of skin, she was shocked by the beauty of Zach's black

features (Kidd, *Secret* 119). In the past, when Lily was at school, she used to laugh at colored people's physical appearance as a way to "fit" within the white mainstream ideology, hoping not to become an outsider to that rooted racist society (Kidd, *Secret* 119). But now that she has experienced in her own flesh how it feels to be pointed as "the other," and later to be accepted in an African American community, she raises her racial consciousness (Hebert 30). To be in love with Zach causes Lily "emotional turmoil" (Hebert 2), since according to the southern retentions dictated by racist laws of the past – Jim Crow laws<sup>2</sup>– it was "unlawful for a white person to marry anyone except a white person" (Herbert 19). In relation to this, Zach, being an activist, influences Lily to realize that she should not think of changing her skin to be a couple, but to "change the world – that's how [they] gotta think" (Kidd, *Secret* 224). This claim supports the notion that races are socially constructed, and so humans have the agency to make, transform, or even destroy race (Kolchin 170). Through this interracial friendship, Kidd creates a place for cross-racial exchange, benefiting both, Zach and Lily. Zach empowers Lily to become a writer, likewise Lily supports Zach to become a Negro lawyer, after Zach defeats her racist stereotyped belief that he would have rather liked to be a football player, as sports was "the only thing white people see [blacks] being successful at" (Kidd, *Secret* 123-24).

Kidd elucidates Lily's raising consciousness in the pink house, when Lily acknowledges that "[she] *could* have been in the Congo for how unfamiliar it felt. Staying in a colored house with colored women, eating off their dishes, lying on their sheets –it was not something [she] was against, but [she] was brand-new to it, and [her] skin has never felt so white to [her]" (Kidd, *Secret* 80; author's emphasis). This passage reminds that of Thompson's "The Kongo Atlantic Tradition," in which he affirms that "to be white in America is to be very black. If you don't know how black you are, you don't know how American you are," especially in the South (qtd. in Fishkin, "Interrogating" 429). For Lily, this Africanist atmosphere was so unfamiliar and remote, that she refuses to recognize the

---

<sup>2</sup> They were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. They were meant to marginalize African Americans by denying them any rights whatsoever.

American side of that African American household. According to Thompson, if you are American you should be aware that Africanisms are also part of your national identity, no matter what your race –or ethnicity– is. That is why, Kidd, as Morrison asserts, includes a “fabricated Africanist presence” to enrich Lily’s “sense of Americanness” (*Playing* 6), through “a complex and ongoing process that involves both emotional and cognitive effort” (Mohanty 68). Controversially, Grobman argues that Kidd’s use of Africanist characters and traditions implies a cultural theft (10). According to her, it should be the “owners” of these Africanisms the ones responsible to elect to share their cultural traditions (Grobman 22). Yet, I value Kidd’s imaginative encounter with Africanism as an attempt to explore the writer’s inner self, reflecting about her own humanity. As Kidd confesses, what motivates her to write is a creative urge to give expression to the life of her soul (“Steep Your Soul”). In fact, Kidd does not even appropriate the voice of the Africanist personae in the narration. Instead, she exposes the narrative from Lily’s white perception. For this reason, I support Kidd’s right to include Africanisms in her work, as a source of inspiration and motivation for both, the narrator and the writer, in the cognitive elaboration of an American identity.

Readers witness the psychological process Lily goes through by constructing her identity based on her connection with this Africanist presence, thanks to her first person narration. Kidd creates a reliable narrator by describing Lily’s racial assumptions, weaknesses and insecurities during her coming of age (Hebert 49). For Lily, to tell the whole truth means to tell the worst parts, including her realizations about her prejudices buried inside her (Kidd, *Secret* 81). Thus, Lily’s narration provides the story believability, if not a sense of realism (Hebert 10). However, Grobman accuses Kidd of “whiten[ing] her black characters” through the language and creating “incredible situations” (13). According to her, Kidd “reinforce[s] the unequal white-black power dynamic” (13) by avoiding almost every trace of the African American vernacular English (AAVE). Nevertheless, Morrison requests critics not to condemn language racially, but to

understand the process of how white writers “have searched for and mined a shareable language” in a racialized society (*Playing* xiii). August and June are college-educated, so their use of Standard American English (SAE) works as a marker of their status; whereas Rosaleen interchanges SAE with AAVE in her comments. My interpretation is that Lily is so familiarized with Rosaleen’s dialect that she is capable of transcribing it, writing in AAVE. Simultaneously, I believe that Lily prefers to translate the Boatwright sisters’ voices of wisdom, in order to portray them as equally powerful and inspiring, as only a white could be in that racist southern society. That is, Lily seems to adjust her message to the racist standards of her world. In addition, the Boatwright sisters’ use of SAE is an indicator of these ladies’ education, which states the fact that not all African Americans were poorly educated or ignorant.

In addition, Hebert justifies Kidd’s intentional usage of SAE to “emphasize the possibility of cross-racial communication” (3). From my perspective, Hebert’s argument implies a double interpretation of cross-racial communication. One refers to the way in which Lily translates what she hears into her own usage of language, feeling more comfortable in her process of writing (Hebert 3). Another reading can be Kidd’s intention of making this novel more accessible to a wider contemporary readership, which is generally unfamiliar with the AAVE. For instance, Twain’s mastery use of different Southern dialects in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* makes his novel succeed in terms of realism, at the same time that it makes his work less accessible. Apart from the AAVE, Shaffer pleads the “colloquial sound of Kidd’s prose” (49), which implies Kidd’s use of different dialects –on a small scale- since colloquialisms are part of a regional dialect (qtd. in Hebert 13). In addition, Hebert praises other stylistic strategies used by Kidd, such as her dominance of descriptions, conversations, and story-telling (55).

According to Hebert, Kidd’s description and interactions between Lily and both Rosaleen and the Boatwright sisters provides an authentic rendering of black women during the 1960s (56). In contrast, I consider that Kidd offers an uncommon depiction of the lives of black southern women at that time. None of the Boatwright sisters are married;

yet, they succeed in producing economic income by running their own beekeeping business, becoming then self-sufficient economically, and even owning a property. Then, the Boatwright sisters' unconventional lifestyle does not seem to be affected by the confines of the southern racist and patriarchal social system. However, I believe that Kidd intends this account of the Boatwright sisters' life conditions, as a strategy -from a nonracist and feminist approach- to redefine African American women's position into the center of her fictional work.

Grobman accuses Kidd of "[reinforcing] stereotypes of black women and [desexualizing] them" by portraying both Rosaleen and August as the "archetypal Mammy" (11). Nonetheless, I agree with Hebert that neither Rosaleen nor August are mammies (5). Grobman defines a Mammy as the "faithful, devoted family servant who is asexual because she is a surrogate mother to the white family's children" (12). Physically, Harris describes a Mammy as a large, dark-skinned woman, who usually wears an oversized dress that accentuates her size and her large breasts, to emphasize her maternal qualities and desexualize her (23). Following her description, Rosaleen fits physically as a Mammy. Rosaleen has a "big round face and a body that sloped out from her neck like a pup tent, and she was so black that night seemed to seep from her skin" (Kidd, *Secret* 2), and her bosoms are as "big and soft as couch pillows" (Kidd, *Secret* 10). Nevertheless, Rosaleen does not resemble the psychological standards of a Mammy; although she was hired and paid to "cook, clean, and be [Lily's] stand-in mother" (Kidd, *Secret* 2), which are typical domestic tasks carried by the Mammy figure. First, she was married with the desire of building a family of her own, "something mammies rarely did" (Hebert 5). Then, Rosaleen's independent spirit leads her to kick her husband out, in order to avoid suffering his womanizing attitude, which evidences that her independent personality does not fit in the role of a Mammy. Moreover, her own agenda of freeing herself also takes her to apply for her voter registration card (Hebert 5). In contrast to Grobman's claim that as far as readers know, "Rosaleen has no sexual intimacy in her

life” (13), I believe that since we only get to know what Lily expresses, readers cannot be certain about Rosaleen’s sexual life, which does not imply that Kidd desexualized her.

Similarly to Rosaleen, August also worked as a housekeeper, taking care of Deborah, Lily’s mother. But that was only because the racism of the southern society at the time “prevented her from getting a teaching job,” even when she had a teaching degree (Grobman 12). August’s nurturing care during Deborah’s life mirrors the Mammy stereotype (Hebert 6). However, August’s emotional support and guidance during Deborah’s adulthood can be regarded as a sign of friendship or acting as a surrogate mother, since August was no longer paid to devote herself to Deborah. Thus, again, this is not enough to assert that August fulfills the entire role of a Mammy for several reasons. August is an economically independent educated woman, who runs her own honey-gathering business, going against the principles of the traditional stereotype (Hebert 6). She also has a leader’s personality within the women-centered community: she is the matriarch in the pink house, and she heads the Daughters of Mary community. Controversially, as Grobman declares, August seems to lack any interest in sexual related issues, which can evoke Kidd’s pitfall of the characterization of an independent feminist woman (13). But indeed it is August’s choice not to marry, in order to keep her feminine freedom, which is not compatible with the way in which marriage is “set up” in her oppressing patriarchal society (Kidd, *Secret* 150). She values her freedom over marriage, although the price of freedom is loneliness. This loneliness is overcome with the company of her sisters and the Daughters of Mary; the same as she performs the role of a surrogate mother by taking care of Deborah and Lily, without the need of having biological children.

Although August does not fit in the characterization of the Mammy, she performs the role of the Magical Negro, a supporting character who aids others. August reunites the main three parameters, noted by Entman and Rojecki, to recognize a Magical Negro. Firstly, August assists Lily with love and nurturance, leading her to achieve the agency to develop her own identity. Secondly, August helps Lily to discover and utilize the

spirituality of this African American community, by introducing her to the Black Madonna. And finally, August offers Lily some “folk wisdom” to resolve her dilemma about her mother’s fate, revealing the truth that allows Lily to release her guiltiness (Glenn 138). Consequently, August’s role as a Magical Negro clearly evidences the use of an Africanist persona as the “surrogate and enabler” of the white character (Morrison, *Playing* 51).

Breaking the Mammy stereotype, Rosaleen and August act as Lily’s surrogate mothers by their own choice. This non-biological motherhood is frequent in African American culture, where “non-blood relations who have close affectional ties with family members may be treated and experienced as family” (Greene 13). In the black tradition of “othermothers,” the “kin unit tends to be woman-centered” and the community is seen as “responsible for mothering” (Collins 182). Kidd uses the strength of “these powerful, talented, nurturing, protective, intelligent, entertaining” (Hebert 47) African American women “to combat the negative forces of racism and abuse with nurturing and love” (Hebb 186). In the matriarchal African American community of the pink house reflected also in the beehive, Lily confronts her mother’s true past to “achieve self-hood” (Hebert 1) and agency to construct her identity conscious of the racial and gender related problems at the time. As the novel concludes, Lily overcomes her suffering of having been abandoned by her mother –who was “fleeing the confines of marriage and motherhood” (Grobman 18). Lily forgives Deborah and is relieved from her guilt, knowing that she killed her mother only by accident. In an epiphany, Lily recognizes that her longing for a mother has been satisfied by the Africanist presence, “all these women, all this love, waiting” (Harken 25; Kidd, *Secret* 310).

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the world of bees parallels the matriarchal structure of the world of humans (Hebert 42; Hebb 179). While Lily is living with T. Ray, she collects bees in a jar, which symbolizes her need of escaping that patriarchal world in search for the freedom that she finally finds in August’s world. August teaches Lily the career of

beekeeping, focusing on the fact that “women made the best beekeepers, ‘cause they have a special ability built into them to love creatures” (Kidd, *Secret* 147). In both the pink house and the beehive, male roles are peripheral (Hebert 43). Through the process of becoming a skilled beekeeper, thanks to August, Lily does not feel “helpless, but licensed” (Morrison, *Playing* 52), as if honey offered Lily an “elixir of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing” (Hebb 180). At the same time, Lily also learns about maternal love (Grobman 18). In the beehive, every bee is dependent on the queen to keep it going, as “she’s the mother of thousands” (Kidd, *Secret* 154). This metaphor reinforces the role of the African American women in a family unit, comparing their significance as surrogate mothers to that of a queen bee in a colony.

Levy stresses that “a heritage of female creativity passing from mother to daughter” is crucial in a women-centered household (7). Accordingly, August shares with Lily her “black historical and creative legacy” through storytelling, offering Lily the link “with both her white mother and with generations of black women” (Grobman 21). As August’s art of beekeeping is passed to Lily, Lily also finds her own way of creative expression in writing, which will be also passed through generation as a cross-racial material, “connecting black and white stories” (Grobman 21). Metaphorically, Lily’s room in the pink house represents the fictional place where she will compose, “deeply embedded in a black community of women” (Grobman 22). This will help Lily “to cope with negative experiences,” as May had taught her (Hebert 19). Thus, Kidd creates a cross-racial maternal heritage through the Africanist presence.

Similar to the queen bee, black Mary also emphasizes the matriarchal structure of this African American community. Kidd explains the role of black Mary as “a divine feminine presence” through which Lily encounters a source of strength that she “needs in order to understand her possibilities for self within the context of a racist, patriarchal society and religion” (“Black Madonna”). This major African retention passed through generations until it ended up in the possession of the Boatwright sisters. “Our Lady of

Chains” as called by the Daughters of Mary, stands as a “psychological archetype of an indomitable spirit,” after she was not defeated by slavery, nor by Lily’s white patriarchal and racist society that oppressed women and African Americans (Emmanuel 118). Black Mary intervenes in the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption; a ritual to thank for the honey crop, and to “celebrate Mary’s ability to liberate people from not only physical bondage but also spiritual, social, and emotional bondage” during the Civil Rights Movement in the South (Harken 9). Grobman interprets Lily’s participation in the ritual as a mixture between the African and the Christian cultural traditions, as if Kidd aimed to suggest that Lily’s and Our Lady’s cultures can be linked through syncretism (17). Although this black Madonna “serves the needs of everyone as a mother to all” (Hebert 42), August explains Lily that black Mary “is not some magical being out there”, but she is “something *inside* of you” (Kidd, *Secret* 288; author’s emphasis). Through Kidd inclusion of the Africanist Black Mary, Lily does not feel “damned, but innocent” (Morrison, *Playing* 52).

As a result, thanks to the Africanisms included in *The Secret Life of Bees* Lily achieves her own identity at the end of the novel, by finally confronting her father, releasing her guilt, and gaining her right to choose where and with whom to live. In the matriarchal world of the Boatwright sisters –as well as in the beekeeping business– Lily accomplishes self-esteem, which allows her to be aware of her own agency in the construction of her identity in a multi-racial American society. Thus, Lily raises her racial consciousness about the invisible, omnipresent white norm and shapes her own standards through the cross-racial interchange that she experiences in this African American community. Hence, Lily grows emotionally, with the love and nurturance of August, Rosaleen and Zach; as well as spiritually, guided by Africanist Black Mary, who liberates Lily from guilt and aids her to cope with the loss of her mother. Therefore, the whole narration reflects Lily’s growth, as she finds in writing her way of being creative and expressing herself. Consequently, by extension, not only Lily’s sense of Americanness is

enriched by the Africanist presence, but so is Kidd's American novel (Morrison, *Playing* 6).

### **3.2. *The Help* (2009)**

*The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett, illustrates "the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters," which is a topic for research encouraged by Toni Morrison (*Playing* 53). Set in Jackson, Mississippi, *The Help* explores the complicated relationships between white women and their black maids in the early 1960s (Claxton 22). Skeeter Phelan, the white protagonist, fulfills her dream of becoming a writer thanks to the collaboration of Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, together with other ten black maids, in her book regarding how these female domestics felt while working for the white families. Due to her encounter with the Africanist presence, Skeeter becomes aware of the racial injustices these women were facing, discovering her own identity as a white Southerner, unveiling the unspoken and transcending the racial boundaries enforced by the segregation laws. Moreover, the process of writing the book, within Stockett's novel, parallels the author's search to meditate about herself, and to obtain her longing to be forgiven by Demetrie, who was her maid. As Morrison states, "the manipulation of Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation –both safe and risky- on one's own humanity" helps Stockett "to ease and to order [her] external and internal chaos" (*Playing* 53).

By constructing the Africanist presence in *The Help*, Stockett gives significance to whiteness (Morrison, *Playing* 6). Stockett creates the Africanist characters as the instruments to reveal the identity of the white women, whose responses and agency –in favor or against the white dominance over the African Americans in that racist Southern society of the 1960s– define themselves, and by extension, whiteness. In *The Help*, whiteness is recognizable in its diversity due to the different interracial female relationships portrayed: the interactions between white women and their maids, the

African American women's nurturance to the white children they raise, and the friendship that develops between Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny. Because the novel focuses on the lives of women, Stockett centers the attention of race matters within the domestic sphere—which is where women had power within this patriarchal society.

Hilly Holbrook, the president of The Jackson Junior League, embodies Stockett's literary characterization of the morally bankrupt, evil side of whiteness, which negates people who do not conform to its standard (Keating 916). Hilly participates in the segregation system within the domestic sphere. She designs the Home Help Sanitation Initiative, "a bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for the colored help" (*Help* 9). Her initiative supports the policy "separate but equal", which is defended by the Governor Ross Barnett, and so no one "can't argue with the *government*" (*Help* 185; author's emphasis). Not only Hilly's disease-preventive measure is legal, but ironically she also claims that it would benefit the domestic help, since "some germs carried by whites can also be harmful" to them. Under the slogan "Protect yourself. Protect your children. Protect your help" (*Help* 158), the initiative illustrates the double-moral standard of those whites who while being racist, were concerned about the wellbeing of black people. Regarding this double standard, Stockett criticizes Hilly's hypocrisy using the Christian religion as a justification to be doing the right thing when Yule May, her black maid, asks Hilly for a "loan" in order to send her twins to college. "Miss Hilly say no. That a true Christian don't give charity to those who is well and able. [She] say it's kinder to let them learn to work things out theyselves" (*Help* 251). As a consequence, Yule May steals a ring that Hilly intentionally misplaced, in order to send her to prison, setting the fear among other maids and strengthening her white dominance over them. Another fallacy occurs at the Junior League Benefit, when Hilly calls for the applause to appreciate the work of the help, claiming that "in their own way, they are helping the League reach its goal to feed the Poor Starving Children of Africa," a cause, she is sure, "dear to their own hearts as well" (*Help* 325). This statement reminds the

black female domestics of their Africanist roots; a way to enforce the racial difference of blacks, who are regarded by Hilly as merely Africans, since she is unable to recognize their American identity. Thus, Hilly's conception of whiteness operates as an unmarked marker of others' differentness, which recalls the Puritans establishment of Americanness, in opposition to the black race (Keating 912; Kolchin 154). Ironically, the Junior League aims to help financially the children of Africa, while the institution confines the future of the African American children of Jackson.

Hilly's follower, Elizabeth Leefolt, works desperately to conform to standards. Elisabeth reveals the consciousness of middle-class women, who "follow a set of prescribed rules in order to participate in society" and not being rejected in their community (Claxton 154). Acquiescing Hilly's project, Elizabeth expects her maid Aibileen to be thankful for being able to use her own bathroom (*Help* 158). This evidences the false attempts of this racist society to encompass African Americans. Thus, it is through the preventive measure that Stockett highlights the white women's "ultimate irony" of entrusting the upbringing of their babies to the black maids, who also cook and clean in their white homes, "but simultaneously presuming" their black bodies to be infected (Foster 102).

In contrast to Hilly and Elizabeth, Celia Foote confronts the racist conventions "by virtue of her lower-class status," which is confirmed when she is refused to be part of the snobby Junior League (Foster 103). Ironically, Celia "as white trash outsider is the one white woman [...] who refuses to embrace the white supremacist dictates that there should be no intimacy between black and white" (hooks, *Writing* 65). In the basis of the intersectionality between class, gender and race, Celia and Minny develop a friendship that improves both lives (Claxton 157). At first, Minny is puzzled by the positive treatment that she receives from Celia: she is paid double, gets the weekends off, leaves early in the day, Celia smiles and hugs her, and they share the "same table" to lunch (*Help* 215; author's emphasis). This new condition makes Minny uncomfortable since, unlike Aibileen, she accepts the separation between white and black people (*Help* 215). Minny

remembers the “rules for working in a White Lady’s house” that her mother told her when she was a girl, which comprises “one thing: white people are not [her] friends” (*Help* 38). As Herbert states, “blacks were indoctrinated from birth that they were inferior to white people” (22). That is why Minny cannot make sense of Celia’s ignorance about the racial boundaries:

So I think if God intended for white people and colored people to be this close together for so much of the day, he would’ve made us color-blind. And while Miss Celia’s grinning and “good morning” and “glad to see”-ing me, I’m wondering, how did she get this far in life without knowing where the lines are drawn? (*Help* 215)

However, Minny and Celia earn each other’s trust. On the one hand, Celia shows Minny her sisterhood when she dares to “physically fight white male patriarchy in order to protect Minny,” (hooks, *Writing* 65) defending her from a white naked man who breaks in the garden (*Help* 308). Also, Celia and Johnny offer Minny a lifetime job at home (*Help* 405), which encourages Minny to leave Leroy, her abusive violent husband (Herbert 31). On the other hand, Minny returns the favor by saving Celia both “physically and psychologically” after her last miscarriage and after her humiliation at the League’s Benefit (Herbert 31). By telling Celia about the Terrible Awful Thing (*Help* 339), Minny gives her the “gift of knowledge” that empowers Celia to face Hilly, and to achieve the self-esteem she needed to save her marriage.

Although Celia is presented as a positive white character, Stockett has been criticized for connecting Celia’s lower status with “signs of pathological blackness” (Foster 103). Celia’s speech—later discussed—and her body suggest that she fails to “pass” for a proper Southern lady (Foster 104). Foster considers that Celia is aligned with the way blackness is drawn in the novel. Minny notices “she’s got a lot more bossom to her, too. In fact, she’s almost as big as me except she’s skinny in all those places I ain’t” (31). However, beneath her ‘non-white’ appearance, Celia reflects her natural, biological side

of white race, as she has fertility problems in contrast to Minny's hyperfertility. To my view, Stockett tries to demonstrate that whether humans inherit or actively choose a racial identity, this racial consciousness is based upon theoretical constructions that make sense of our experiences, and so they can be transformed, depending on our understanding and responses towards our social framework. This agency towards the formation of an identity is also revealed in the case of Mae Mobley, Elisabeth's daughter.

As a child, Mobley receives from Aibileen the "tender maternal affection denied to her by her own mother," nurturing her as a surrogate mother (Foster 104). In fact, Mobley considers "Aibee" to be her "real mamma" (*Help* 248). Because Mobley is fat and not "cute" (*Help* 283), she, like Celia, "is defined outside of acceptable white womanhood" (Foster 104). While Elizabeth neglects her daughter, abusing her physically and verbally, Aibileen constantly reaffirms Mobley her mantra "*You kind, you smart, you important*" (*Help* 199). Thus, Aibileen teaches her 'Baby Girl' to love herself and to appreciate her personal values. Moreover, Aibileen goes further by educating Mobley about racial equality and the Civil Rights. She tells her "secret stories," which include the one of two girls who become friends after realizing about their similarities despite their "different color" (*Help* 200); the story of Aibee's favorite Martian, called Martin Luther King, who was treated unkind by certain people on Earth "cause he was green" (*Help* 296); and the bus incident with Rosa Parks (*Help* 431). Aibileen's extreme influence on Mobley's identity is manifested when at school, the girl "colored herself black" (*Help* 409), as a way to bridge the physical gap that exists between her and Aibileen according to their racist southern society (Foster 104). In contrast to Aibileen's moral lessons about "how to love all people, not judge by color" (*Help* 409), Miss Taylor, Mobley's white teacher, enforces the racist prejudices that grant the white privilege and power (Keating 916). Hence, Stockett points out Aibileen's strategy of instructing –first Mobley and then Skeeter– about racial equality to break the pattern that maintains racist ideas, since these are not born, but taught and learned (Morrison, *Playing* 51).

Similar to Mobley, Skeeter does not fit the mold –physically nor personally– of

the ideal white woman either (Herbert 7). Eugenia is given her nickname, Skeeter, as she is tall and thin resembling a mosquito (*Help* 57). Like Aibileen comforts Mobley, Skeeter's "efforts to self-actualize are motivated by her nostalgic relationship with the caring black domestic Constantine" (hooks, *Writing* 64). Constantine also teaches Skeeter that beauty depends on her inner personal values, not on her appearance (*Help* 62). In contrast to her beloved Constantine, Skeeter's mother, Charlotte, "diminishes her daughter's self-esteem" for not behaving as a proper southern lady (hooks, *Writing* 64). According to Charlotte, the value of a white lady is reduced to find a man at an early age, in order to get married and have offspring, which is basically what her friends, Hilly and Elizabeth, achieved. Nevertheless, Skeeter refuses to follow standards; she has a college degree and she is determined to make her career as a writer. Her unconventional life style makes Charlotte to wonder if Skeeter could be lesbian, and tries to give her a sexual-correction tea, that "cures" those who "gets unbalanced" and "unnatural thoughts" (*Help* 75). Thus, Stockett uses Charlotte's pressure on Skeeter to reveal women's oppression, not only in the sense of gender and race, but also in terms of sexuality. Wittily, Skeeter replies to Charlotte that she is attracted to women as much as Charlotte is to black people (*Help* 75), emphasizing thus the connection between her homophobic and racist ideologies as simultaneous forms of discrimination.

By portraying the negative mother-daughter relationships between Elizabeth and Mobley, as well as Charlotte and Skeeter, Stockett creates "a damning portrait of white womanhood" (hooks, *Writing* 64). This "sadoomasochistic bond between white women and their children" (hooks, *Writing* 64) is highlighted in opposition to black women's ability to love, to educate and to nurture not only their own biological children, but also the white babies of the families they work for. Thus, Stockett uses the Africanist characters as "surrogate enabler[s]" of white people to construct and enhance the qualities of their identities, as well as to achieve their goals (Morrison, *Playing* 51). Not only does Skeeter achieves self-esteem thanks to Constantine (Foster 105), but she also fulfills her

dream of becoming a writer thanks to the publication of her book, *The Help*, in collaboration with Aibileen and Minny, among other black domestics who agree to share their story.

As a woman, although she is white and educated, Skeeter's options are limited in a racist society ruled by the white male (Claxton 154). Her first journalistic job is to write weekly cleaning advices on the Jackson Journal. However, as she knows little about housekeeping, she turns to Aibileen for answers. Their relationship develops when Skeeter, reads a book about the Jim Crow Laws, immersed in the project of writing a book about how black domestics feel while working for a white family (*Help* 102).

Although at first they reject to collaborate in the book, Aibileen, Minny and other maids enroll in this project, in order to outspoke the white ladies' mistreatments towards them, with the idea of "changing things" (*Help* 10). Telling "the truth a what they really like" (*Help* 188) "is a dangerous undertaking" in Jackson (Herbert 8). For this reason, they "work in secret to protect their project, their jobs, and even their lives" (Herbert 8). However, although the book is published under pseudonyms, white women of Jackson could recognize themselves in the book's characters. As Foster affirms, although the "social system is controlled by white men," in the novel Stockett replaces white women in the genesis of the fear about the "retribution against people of color" (99). Aibileen recognizes in contrast to men, who would take violent actions, that "white women like to keep they hands clean" (*Help* 188). However, white ladies can be a maid's nightmare, since their revenge would not stop until she has "no jobs, no money, no house," because "the white lady don't *ever* forget" (*Help* 188). In addition, Aibileen notices that "sides stealing, worse thing you'n do for your career as a maid is have a smart mouth" (*Help* 17). Once again, Stockett suggests that revealing the taboo topics about racial inequality becomes a strategy to break the white privilege and dominance. Because for African Americans communal benefits are above the individual interests, Minny decides to include the Terrible Awful Thing in their book, which "serves as the[ir] ultimate protection," preventing Hilly "from outing them as the authors of the book" (Foster 102).

It is Hilly's shame, to have eaten Minny's fecal matter in a pie, what makes her to keep the secret and deny that the book is about Jackson. According to Foster, "by consuming the chocolate pie, Hilly effectively eats Minny's blackness," confirming "the ways in which human beings can be *made* black, not only born black" (102; author's emphasis). This interpretation supports Mohanty's epistemic status of cultural identity, which claims that "identities are constructed and are thus contingent and changeable" according to our theoretical understanding of experiences (71).

Although these women take the risk of reprisal by publishing the book, thanks to it they improve their lives, achieve their goals, and establish a friendship. By virtue of the black maids' contributions in the book, Skeeter is offered her yearning job as a writer at *Harper's Magazine* in New York (*Help* 424). Thus, the African Americans of *The Help* empower Skeeter not only to become a writer, but to be self-aware of the racial injustices in her society, caused by the white supremacy, and about her "duty" as a white to cross "*the line*" of segregation and help them (*Help* 255; author's emphasis). By being "disloyal to dominator culture," Skeeter creates "bonds of solidarity that help [her] heal" (hooks, *Writing* 57) from her sense of guilt and shame of belonging to the white racial category (Keating 9). After she discovers Constantine's fate, she gains the agency to meditate about herself. Thus, Skeeter raises her consciousness about her own racial assumptions and prejudices as a white southerner, while she engages actively on the legal and social forces that allow racial –as well as sexist and classist– hierarchy, exclusion and vulnerability to persist. Through this awakening, Skeeter develops moral and ethical principles that enrich her identity as an American (Morrison, *Playing* 64).

Consequently, the differences between Skeeter and Aibileen gradually diminish as they work together to defeat the system that sets them apart. Aibileen does not longer see the "lines" that separate people by their race, class, or gender; because, as she rationalizes, these limitations only exist in the minds of the people oppressed by the ones who made them believed that these lines are real (*Help* 312). Moreover, Aibileen's

encouragement makes the other maids who contributed in the book to “leave the bonds and boundaries of segregation behind” too (Herbert 27). Aibileen is given Skeeter’s job to write Miss Myrna column, and she hopes to start a better life. While Aibileen’s voice stands for a peaceful pronouncement in the book, readers “feel the defiant spirit” of a black maid through Minny’s eyes (Herbert 9). Yet, even if she has a strong and sassy personality, she suffers racial and sexist abuse by Hilly and Leroy. After the book, Minny fulfills her dream of being able to emancipate her children away from her violent husband, while she works as Celia’s domestic help under equal conditions.

In spite of the fact that Skeeter considers that she is ‘helping’ the black maids to improve their conditions, by entitling their voice in her book, critics, as well as the proper maids of the novel (*Help* 253), interpret this fact in the reverse way; regarding Skeeter as the one being helped, instead of the helper. According to Harris, Skeeter is “not a true white civil rights activist;” she publishes the book following her editor’s advice to write something original in order to get herself a better job. Also, hooks remarks that “Skeeter is all theory and no practice,” since with the book, “she sacrifices the well-being of black female domestics for her fame and glory” (*Writing* 65). In my opinion, Skeeter’s intentions to write the book are as controversial as the ones by Stockett in writing the novel.

Stockett’s process of writing and representation of the African American characters in *The Help*, parallels Skeeter’s process of writing the book (Claxton 162). This parallelism has awaken controversy among readers, as *The Help* blurs the borders between reality and fiction. Being a white Southerner raised by a black maid, Demetrie, Stockett recognizes in the novel’s epilogue that what urged her to write the story was the fact that she “spent years imagining” how Demetrie had felt being “black in Mississippi working for [her] white family,” which never occurred to Stockett to ask her since “it was the normal” of everyday practices (451). In fact, Stockett affirms that she started to write this story in the voice of Demetrie “to comfort [her]self” (Calkin); as a way to find Demetrie’s forgiveness (*Help* 445). On this foundation, I suppose that in the novel, Skeeter

publishes her book with a similar purpose; that is, to thank Constantine for her devotion, to discover her fate and to overcome her lost.

Despite Stockett claims that “*The Help* is fiction, by far and wide,” the connection between Demetrie and the African American characters in the novel is evident. Stockett mentions Demetrie’s past, “picking cotton in Mississippi in the dead of summer” (*Help* 447), as Aibileen worked at Skeeter’s plantation (*Help* 12). Like Demetrie, Aibileen and Minny became maids at an early age too. In a similar way that Demetrie used to tell Stockett all kinds of stories from her black perspective (*Help* 447), Aibileen shares her “secret stories” with Mobley. However, both Stockett and Mobley are too young to realize about the magnitude of these women’s storytelling in their real lives. But as Stockett matures, she becomes aware of the horrifying situations that Demetrie went through; exactly the same as Skeeter values the testimonies of the black maids who contribute to her book. As Stockett explains that Demetrie used to say that she had three children, even when she had no offspring (*Help* 448), when Mobley asks Aibileen how many babies she has, Aibileen answers seventeen, counting the white babies she raised instead of her real deceased son, Treelore (*Help* 284). Furthermore, like Stockett considers herself to be the closest one to Demetrie, Mobley declares that she is Aibileen’s “real baby,” while the other ones “are pretend” (*Help* 285). Moreover, Aibileen comforts Mobley echoing somehow what Demetrie used to tell Stockett: “you are beautiful. You a beautiful girl” (*Help* 448). Both in Stockett’s real life and in the novel, the kitchen stands as the common ground where the interracial relationships, between the black maids and the white babies and women, develop. While Minny teaches Celia to cook, their friendship grows in the kitchen. Minny, who is “the best cook in Hinds County” (*Help* 7), reminds readers of Demetrie, whose “cooking was outstanding” (*Help* 448). Thus, in *The Help*, cooking becomes a symbol of Africanism, since it is an almost exclusive activity of the black maids, who can basically express their creativity through their cooking. Stockett’s memory of her grandmother telling her not to sit “at the table while a colored person was

eating” is echoed on Minny’s rules as a maid (*Help* 448). Finally, Minny is married to a “mean, abusive drinker” (*Help* 448), the same as Demetrie was.

Considering these parallelisms, I assume that Stockett constructs the identities of the African American women included in her book, and their relationships with the white ones, based on her knowledge and memories about her black maid, Demetrie. So, instead of incorporating authentic black women’s voices in *The Help* revealing the unspoken about the lives of black domestics in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement, Stockett offers her own version of the story (Claxton 162), constructing Africanisms from her contemporary white imagination. Paradoxically, Stockett’s attempt to create a realistic interpretation has been criticized for her lack of credibility in terms of the language used, the representation of the novel’s setting, and the characterization of African American women.

Stockett offers the narration of *The Help* reader through various lenses in, in order to create a faithful and global view of how racism affected the lives and the interactions of these female characters from both perspectives: the oppressor and the oppressed. The narrative is written from the first person perspective of the three main characters: Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny. Alternatively, each of them “brings her own background, fears, and hopes” into the interwoven story (Herbert 9). In addition to these three narrators, chapter XXV, “The Benefit,” is told by an omniscient narrator; since it is the most objective narration to reveal readers the viewpoints of all the characters interacting in this social event. Stockett’s risky employment of the narrative supports Morrison’s claim that in “a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language,” and it is complicated, interesting and definitive “the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language” (*Playing* 12).

Foster examines how language becomes an indication of racial difference in *The Help*. Despite the novel is set in the South in 1962, only African American characters use black Southern vernacular speech, while white characters do not present any linguistic marker (Foster 97). That is why some scholars –as Herbert, Calkin, and hooks- condemn

Stockett's lack of documentation in her employment of the Southern dialect, which not only is missing in most of the white characters, but its linguistic patterns are inappropriate and outdated (Foster 97). In fact, Celia is the only white character who uses a non-standard dialect, in order to be aligned with the black characters due to her lower-class status (Foster 97). This evidences Morrison's claim that language "powerfully evoke[s] and enforce[s] hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people" (*Playing*, preface x). Thus, as Dyer notices, it is "the way that black people are marked as black," using Stockett's inaccurate Africanist idiom, what makes easy to recognize and define her literary whiteness, since "white people -not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact—" becomes "difficult, almost impossible, to analyze *qua* white" (143, author's emphasis).

Even Stockett recognizes that "Skeeter was the hardest to write because she was constantly stepping across that line [Stockett] was taught not to cross" (*The Official Web site of Kathryn Stockett*). Because "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (Morrison, *Playing* 9), Stockett acknowledges in her afterwork her fear for having "told too much" regarding the lines between black and white women, at the same time that she was afraid of having "told too little" about the life in Mississippi and the love between white families and black domestics (*Help* 451). Indeed, as Claxton states, "silence, hearing, and speaking" become important narrative strategies within the novel itself (162). Furthermore, Stockett's predilection to write from the African Americans' voice reaffirms Morrison's theory; the fabrication of the Africanist presence enables the white author to explore and meditate about the self freely, revealing the narration "of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity" of her white consciousness (*Playing* 17).

Regarding the historical context and setting of *The Help*, hooks criticizes the novel because it "tell[s] audiences very little about race and racism in the deep south" (*Writing* 58). However, Stockett does portray how the Southern racism affects the lives of both,

white women and black maids, ruling their interactions. The novel is set in 1962, but all the characters maintain historical precedents that remind readers that “Jackson is still tied to its antebellum past” (Claxton 151). Skeeter lives on a cotton plantation, where Aibileen worked, knowing that she would become a maid, like her mother and her grandmother. Minny comments on Celia’s silver pistol from the past: “I bet Great-granddaddy Foote scared some slaves with that thing” (*Help* 32). Similarly, Skeeter describes Hilly’s “antebellum-style parlor” (*Help* 146). Hence, Stockett uses the houses of white women to represent a “certain kind of past” (Claxton 150), still present in their identities as white Southerners.

*The Help* “attempt[s] to evoke nostalgia for the old south, when white supremacy and class hierarchy ruled social mores, while at the same time occasionally attempting to call attention to flaws in that system” (hooks, *Writing* 59). Hence, Stockett strategically uses some icons of the Civil Rights Movement—Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and President J. F. Kennedy—in order to expose how race matters affect the lives of white and black characters in a completely different way. African Americans seem to be the only ones who suffer the tension, violence, and fear driven by racism in the South. Whereas white women characters are not concerned about political issues, since they accept the racist ideology dictated by the Jim Crow Laws as natural. Stockett exemplifies this contrast when Aibileen hears “the word *Kennedy*” at Elisabeth’s, and she knows the white ladies are not discussing about politics, but about what Miss Jackie wears (*Help* 6; author’s emphasis).

Moreover, black characters are presented as victims of violent acts carried out by the whites. That is the case of Medgar Evers, the NAACP Field Secretary, shot by the Ku Klux Klan (*Help* 195). While his assassination—covered up by the police—makes the African American community to tense up with fear, white characters appear inalterable by the political injustices, unable to feel empathy towards the victims due to their lack of that Africanist sense of community, which is replaced by their notion of individual benefit. Treelore, Aibileen’s son, embodies on the one hand, the lack of opportunities that

an intelligent young man faced in Mississippi, having had only access to the most physically demanding, dangerous and lower-paid jobs, which were rejected by whites. On the other hand, his preventable death in an accident, while working at the Scanlon-Taylor mill, illustrates how black bodies were regarded almost as mere objects by their white bosses, echoing the value of a slave only in terms of a property, and not appreciated as a human being. As a result, Minny stands for the voice of African Americans who believe that “[they] living in hell, [they] *trapped*. [Their] *kids* is trapped” (*Help* 196; author’s emphasis); whereas the mayor appears in the radio, addressing white, claiming that “Jackson, Mississippi, is the closest place to heaven there is. And it’s going to be like this for the rest of [their] lives” (*Help* 197).

Hooks accuses Stockett of ignoring “historical accuracy and offer a version of civil rights struggle that is entirely taking place between vicious unenlightened white women and exploited black female domestics” (*Writing* 59). Nevertheless, I consider that since *The Help* focuses on how the dynamics of Southern racism affected the interracial relationships between these women, Stockett intends to reduce her attention from society into the private sphere; since the priority for colored women “focused on improving their working conditions and opportunities,” as their positions were at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy (Holvino 5). Accordingly, Minny declares that she does not care about that the right to vote and being able to eat with white people, but about her daughters being forced to work as maids, and still badly treated by white ladies (*Help* 218). In this way, the lack of opportunities for all the African American symbolizes, by extension, the privilege of white people, who still control the “economic power structure” (Claxton 150), “keeping blacks in menial positions” and “politically subservient” (Herbert 22). As Foster states, “in the social, economic, and political order of the Jim Crow South” an invisible hand –that was white and male– ruled the lives of all the colored people (99).

Nonetheless, Stockett’s manipulation of the Africanist narrative leads her to fail in the true portrayal of the African American characters. While whiteness is addressed

and defined in the novel in its diversity –physically and personally– thanks to the Africanist presence, the Association of Black Women Historians agrees that Stockett “distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers,” turning black women’s fears and struggles into moments of comic relief (qtd. in Foster 96). In *The Help*, African American women do not have any identity away from their service to the white families. Even Stockett recognizes that she was impressed when she went to Demetrie’s house and noticed, for the first time, that “she was a person with an identity outside the Stockett family” (Calkin). Thus, Stockett constructs “a history and a context for whites by positing history-lessness and context-lessness for blacks” (Morrison, *Playing* 53).

As said by Foster, also black bodies are “marginalized, even pathologized” (96), in order to highlight the “the primacy, normalcy, and beauty of white ones” (105). Stockett repeatedly emphasizes, bordering on offensive, physical blackness as a mark of othering. Aibileen’s blackness “makes her body nearly inhuman” (101) when she compares herself with a cockroach (*Help* 189). Minny is “described in terms of excess” (Foster 101); she is overweight, strong and tall, “her skin is blacker than Aibileen’s by ten shades, and shiny and taut, like a pair of new patent shoes” (*Help* 164), she sweats excessively, and she is frequently pregnant. In addition, Constantine’s big size is pointed out by Skeeter, as well as her black skin is “dark ebony” (*Help* 65). Consequently, it is these women’s blackness what “negates their individual humanity” (Foster 101).

In my opinion, Stockett’s misrepresentation of Africanisms is due to her appropriation of the African American voices that she intended to give to black domestics through the book inside novel. In other words, Stockett fails on what Skeeter successes, that is, the accounts of real southern black maids, telling readers about how they felt working for the white families during the Civil Right Movements (*Help* 102). Skeeter overcomes her racist assumptions and prejudices against Aibileen’s writings, since she first thinks they would not be good enough to be published without her editing, and after reading them, she agrees to share the authorship of their book, giving readers thus

different perspectives about racism (*Help* 149). Contradictory, Stockett writes the novel maintaining to be giving voice to the African American women's silence; the chance to be heard, when in fact, she is appropriating them, substituting "her imagination for understanding" (Harris). Stockett, aware of her own limitations, admits that she does not "presume to think that [she] know[s] what it really felt like to be a black woman in Mississippi, especially the 1960s," but she believes that "trying to understand is *vital* to our humanity" (*Help* 451; author's emphasis). As a result, the novel and the book within it are "[f]or women to realize, *We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought*" (*Help* 451; author's emphasis). For this reason, *The Help* is considered to be written only from the white perspective, and for white readers. Hence, this explains the success of the novel in the mainstream marketplace that, still nowadays, is "dominated and controlled" by the white-male supremacy (hooks, *Writing* 54).

Despite the success of *The Help*, scholars have argued over the merits and failings of the novel. Hooks stands on the African American perspective, condemning the book to be "mediocre sentimental fiction," a backlash against both, "the movement to end racism and the feminist movement" (*Writing* 59). Oppositely, Claxton encourages white readers to regard Stockett's novel as an access to other stories from more authentic voices and better documented (163). Hence, the Africanist presence works as a surrogate enabler to white readers, who would be forced to examine their own racist assumptions and to expand their national consciousness. As Allison commented, "the deepest way to change people is to get them to inhabit the soul of another human being who is different from them. And that happens in story. That happens in literature" (qtd. in Claxton 163).

The storm of controversies set around *The Help* also includes a trial. Ablene Cooper, who worked for Stockett's brother Robert and his wife Carroll, has filed a lawsuit against Stockett, accusing the author of having appropriated Cooper's identity. Despite Stockett claims that "*The Help* is fiction, by far and wide" (450) Cooper argues that the characterization of Aibileen Clark is an unpermitted appropriation of her name and her

likeness (Robertson). Cooper, as Aibileen, has worked in Jackson as a maid and baby sitter (Miller); Cooper's son died of cancer, while Aibileen's son died in an accident at work; and both, Aibileen and Ablene are deeply religious women (Churcher n.p.). Moreover, Cooper accuses Stockett of causing her to "experience severe emotional distress, embarrassment, humiliation and outrage," by "holding her to the public eye in a false light" (Miller n.p.). Churcher agrees that certainly Aibileen's name is pronounced in the same way as Cooper's, Ablene. In fact, both women are given the same nickname, "Aibee", by the children they raise. In an interview, Stockett admits that she "didn't get real creative with names," she "just used people [she] knew" (qtd. in Churcher). Nevertheless, the lawsuit contends that Stockett "was asked" not to use Ablene's name in *The Help*, before the book was published. The dilemma occurs when the person who asked Stockett to do so is not specified. Since Cooper affirms that Stockett had never talked to her about the book (Robertson n.p.), it is presumed that Cooper's employers – Stockett's family– are involved in the suit. Accordingly, Cooper recognizes that it was Carroll, Stockett's sister-in-law, who first told Cooper about the book in tears (Churcher), supporting her legal quest. Henneberger meditates that Stockett seems to be really "sued for embarrassing her family," which is indeed a southern tradition (7). The proper Stockett revealed that some "close family members" stopped speaking to her, because they were upset about her novel (Miller). That is the reason why some reviewers, like Miller and Churcher, have thought about a possible identification of Stockett's sister-in-law, Carroll, with Aibileen's employer, Elizabeth. If this supposition were true, Carroll would not be willing to reveal her secret, somehow like Hilly does not want *The Terrible Awful Thing* to be known. Consequently, I believe that the reason of Cooper's lawsuit might hide the Stocketts' effort to detach themselves from being identified with Stockett's depiction of whiteness –as a dominant, privileged force of oppression, rather than to denounce the characterization of the African American maid.

## 4. Conclusion

In this Master thesis, I have explored the presence of Africanisms and the representation of blackness in contemporary North American Literature written by white women. Following the pattern of research encouraged by Morrison, this thesis analyzes the novels *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. Through a textual analysis, both works illustrate “the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanist presence and personae have been constructed –invented– in the United States, and the literary uses this fabricated presence has served” to define whiteness (Morrison, *Playing* 90). In both novels, the research questions –encouraged by Morrison in section 2.1– overlap. However, Kidd and Stockett address to whiteness in the context of blackness in a different way, if not with a same purpose.

The first area analyzed in the novels deals with the “Africanist character as surrogate enabler” of whiteness’ self-reflexive properties (Morrison, *Playing* 51). In the case of *The Secret Life of Bees*, the Boatwright sisters enable Lily to achieve her own identity in their African American community, where she feels “not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (Morrison, *Playing* 52). Rosaleen and August become Lily’s surrogate mothers by their own choice, providing the love and nurturance she needs in order to grow emotionally. It is thanks to August, who shares with Lily her creative legacy through storytelling, that Lily also develops her creative expression writing, “connecting black and white stories” (Grobman 21). Similarly, in *The Help*, Skeeter fulfills her dream of becoming a writer thanks to the collaboration of Aibileen and Minny in her book, together with other maids. Nevertheless, at first, Skeeter is the only one thought to be helping the black domestics by breaking the silence of the racial injustices and the oppression these women were suffering. Thus, both, Skeeter and the black maids get benefits from their interracial exchange. Whereas in Kidd’s work, the matriarchal

community of the Boatwright sisters does not get any benefit from Lily. This is why August plays the role of the Magical Negro, who leads Lily to achieve the agency to develop her own identity. In Stockett's novel, Aibileen's love replaces the care Mobley does not receive from her real mother, Elizabeth; the same as Skeeter, who was empowered by her maid Constantine. Although these African American women had offspring, they still devote themselves to teach white babies self-love, as well as important values about racial equality and the Civil Rights. Oppositely, neither of the Boatwright sister has children, but each of them still teach a lesson to Lily that completes her personality. Therefore, although the racial exchange occurs in different contexts, in both novels the white characters, Lily and Skeeter, are empowered by the Africanist presence to develop their identities.

Secondly, the Africanist idiom, and the language practices that are used in the novels to reinforce otherness, as well as to assert privilege and power were also covered in the analysis (*Playing* 52). *The Secret Life of Bees* is told from Lily's first person perspective, allowing readers to regard Lily's proper racial assumptions and prejudices from her white perspective. Because the Boatwright sisters are educated women, they, as Lily, speak Standard American English. Therefore, the fact that only Rosaleen uses African American Vernacular English in her speech, aligns her with a lower education. In *The Help*, Stockett offers the narration through the first person perspective of the main three characters: Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny. Thus, Stockett's Africanist idiom becomes an indication of racial difference; although Stockett's lack of documentation in her employment of Souther dialect has been criticized. In addition, Celia is the only white lady that uses a non-standard English, reflecting thus her lower status.

The third aspect of analysis consisted on "the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" (Morrison, *Playing* 53). In *The Help*, Stockett uses the Africanist characters as the instruments to reveal the identities of the white women, whose responses and agency –in favor or against the white

dominance over the African Americans in that racist Southern society of the 1960s—define themselves, and by extension, whiteness. Hence, whiteness is recognizable in its diversity due to the different interracial female relationships portrayed: the interactions between white women and their maids, the African American women's nurturance to the white children they raise, and the friendship that develops between Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny. Hilly represents the evil side of whiteness that negates people who do not conform to racist standards. Elizabeth embodies the consciousness of the middle-class women who follow the prescribed rules of racism in order to participate in their society. Whereas Celia, depicted as white trash, confronts racist conventions by virtue of her lower-class status. Also Skeeter decides to be disloyal to the dominator culture in order to end with racial injustices. Like her, Lily in *The Secret Life of Bees*, deliberates to be against the rules dictated by the Southern society, since these are biased racially against black people. Lily is self-conscious and ashamed when she identifies herself on the white side of racism. In contrast to Stockett that presents whiteness in its diversity, Kidd only offers Lily as the reference of whiteness. However, Kidd manipulates the only possible pattern of racism in the South during the 1960s in order to interchange the roles between the oppressor and the oppressed in her African-American-centric community. Hence, Lily becomes aware of her preconceived notion as a white, overcoming her racial assumptions, once she is marked as 'the other.' Consequently, the definition of whiteness in both novels depends on the way white characters react in favor or against the Jim Crow Laws, inside their own communities.

Finally, the manipulation of Africanist narrative "as a means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own humanity" has been also explored in both novels (Morrison, *Playing* 53). This topic refers to the ways in which the imaginative encounter with Africanism enables white writers to meditate about themselves. Kidd confesses that what motivated her to write her book was a creative urge to give expression to the life of her soul ("Steep Your Soul"). In fact, Kidd does not even appropriate the voice of the

Africanist personae in the narration. Instead, she exposes the narrative from Lily's white perception. So, Kidd's Africanist presence becomes a source of inspiration and motivation for both, the narrator and the writer, in the cognitive elaboration of an American identity. In the case of *The Help*, the novel and the book within have awakened controversy among the scholars. On the one hand, Stockett writes the novel to comfort herself, as a way to find her maid's, Demetrie's, forgiveness. In a similar way, her protagonist Skeeter publishes her book to thank Constantine for her love and to overcome her loss. Although Stockett claims *The Help* to be fiction, the author has been denounced of theft by Ablene Cooper, who claims Stockett to have appropriated her identity. Even if the trial has not been over yet, some reviewers consider Stockett's sister-in-law to be the real one identified with Elizabeth or Hilly, since she stopped the relationship with Stockett. On the other hand, scholars have criticized Stockett's appropriation of the African American voices that appear in her novel, since she is translating her imagination into understanding. Ironically, Stockett fails on what Skeeter succeeds, that is, the accounts of real southern black maids, telling readers about how they felt working for the white families during the Civil Rights Movements.

As a result, both Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, and Stockett's *The Help*, support Morrison's claim that it is thanks to and through the Africanist presence created from the imagination of these women writers, that whiteness is constructed and defined in their novels. Because of the limited extension of this paper, these two novels addressed in this thesis cannot be considered representative of the non-canonical or contemporary North American literature. However, this critical investigation offers an example of possible future research, in which more novels, that include Africanism created by white women, could be analyzed and so their results could be more representative than mine. Nevertheless, this thesis illustrates that the Africanist presence is –and has always been– central part of the production of the national North American literature, and so Africanism is inextricable from the creation of a national American identity.

## 5. Works Cited

- 12 Years a Slave*. Dir. Steve McQueen. Summit Entertainment, 2013. DVD.
- Assassin's Creed III: Liberation*. Ubisoft. 2012. Video game.
- Beale, Frances. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1970. 109-22.
- Calkin, Jessamy. "The maid's tale: Kathryn Stockett examines slavery and racism in America's Deep South." *The Telegraph*, 16 Jul. 2009. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.
- Carther, Willa. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.
- Churcher, Sharon. "Her family hired me as a maid for 12 years but then she stole my life and made it a Disney movie." *Mail Online*. 4 Sept. 2011. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.
- Clark, Rebecca L. "Transmuting Grammars of Whiteness in Third-Wave Feminism: Interrogating Postrace Histories, Postmodern Abstraction, and the Proliferation of Difference in Third-Wave." *Signs* 38.1 (2012): 71-98. JSTOR. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Claxton, Mae M. "Writing The Help: The Oblique and Not-So-Oblique Narratives of Eudora Welty, Ellen Douglas, Norma Watkins, and Kathryn Stockett." *Eudora Welty Review* 5 (2013): 145-65. *Literature Online*. Web. 4 Jan. 2014.
- Collins, Patricia H. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 1990. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Cope, David. "Whiteness, Blackness, and Sermons to Sharks: Race in Melville's Moby Dick." *Museum of American Poetics*. Web. 20 Mar. 2011.
- Django Unchained*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Columbia Pictures, 2013. DVD.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1994. Print.
- DuBois, E.C. and Ruiz, V.L *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Edelstein, Marilyn. "Multiculturalisms Past, Present, and Future." *College English* 68.1 (2005): 14-41. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.



- Emmanuel, Catherine B. "The Archetypal Mother: The Black Madonna in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*." *Philological Papers* (2005): 115-22. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Entman, Robert M. and Rojecki, Andrew. *The Black Image in the White Mind*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000.
- Fishkin, Shelley F. "Desegregating American Literary Studies." *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*. Ed. Elliott Emory, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 121-34. Print.
- . "Interrogating 'Whiteness', Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture." *American Quarterly* 47.3 (1995): 428-66. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.
- . *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices*. New York: New York UP, 1993. Print.
- Foster-Singletary, Tikenya. "Dirty South: The Help and the Problem of Black Bodies." *Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South* 49.4(2012): 95-108. *Literature Online*. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Frye, Marilyn. *Willful Virgin: essays in feminism*. California: The Crossing Press, 1992. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- Glenn, Cerise L., and Landra J. Cunningham. "The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film." *Journal of Black Studies* 40.2 (2009): 135-52. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Greene, Lorenzo J., Gary R. Kremer, and Antonio F. Holland. "From Sunup to Sundown: The Life of the Slave." *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Complete Text with*

- Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*. Ed. Susan K. Harris and Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 19-29. Print.
- Grobman, Laurie. "Teaching Cross-Racial Texts: Cultural Theft in *The Secret Life of Bees*." *College English* 71.1 (2008): 9-26. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Harken, Amy L. *Unveiling The Secret Life of Bees*. Massachusetts: Chalice Press, 2005. Print.
- Harris, Trudier. *From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982. Print.
- Hebb, Judith. "Conflict and Closure: Bees and Honey as Metaphors for Healing in *The Secret Life of Bees*." *Conflict in Southern Writing*. Ed. Ben P. Robertson. Alabama: Association for Textual Study and Production, 2006. 179-87. Print.
- Hebert, Joy A. *A Critical Study of Sue Monk Kidd's The Secret Life of Bees*. MA Thesis. Georgia State University, 2011. Print.
- Henderson, Mae G. "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics and Dialectics and The Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition." *Changing Our Own Words*. Ed. Cheryl Wall. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1989. 59-75. Print.
- Herbert, Marilyn and Rosa Arato. *Bookclub-In-a-Box Discusses The Help, by Kathryn Stockett*. Google Book. Web. 24 May 2014.
- Holmes, David G. "Cross-Racial Voicing: Carl Van Vechten's Imagination and the Search for an African American Ethos." *College English* 68 (2006): 291-307. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Holvino, Evangelina. "Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies." *Gender, Work and Organization* 17.3 (2010): 248-77. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2010.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End, 1992. Print.
- . *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.

---. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End, 1990. Print.

Keating Ann L. "Interrogating 'Whiteness', (De) Constructing 'Race'." *College English*

57.8 (1995): 901-91. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.

Kidd, Sue M. Interview with Oprah Winfrey. Super Soul Sundays. Oprah Winfrey Network.  
OPW, Chicago. 13 Apr. 2014. Television.

---. *The Secret Life of Bees*. New York: Penguin, 2002. Print.

Kolchin, Peter. "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America." *The Journal of*

*American History* 89:1 (2002): 154-73. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.

Levy, Helen F. *Fiction of the Home Place: Jewett, Gather, Glasgow, Porter, Welty, and Naylor*.

Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992. Print.

Marshall, Catherine. *Feminist critical policy analysis: A perspective from primary and  
secondary schooling*. London: Falmer, 1997. Print.

Marshall, Ian, and Wendy Ryden. "Interrogating the Monologue: Making Whiteness Visible."

*College Composition and Communication* 52. 2 (2000): 240-59. Print.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. New York: Norton,  
1967. Print.

Mercer, Kobena. "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary." *How*

*Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*. Ed. Bad Object-Choices. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991. 169-  
210. Print.

Meriwether, James B. and Michael Millgate, eds. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William  
Faulkner, 1926-1962*. New York: Random House, 1968. Print.

Miller, Laura. "The Dirty Secrets of 'The Help'." *Salon*. n.p., 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 9 Oct 2013.

<[http://www.salon.com/2011/02/22/the\\_help\\_lawsuit/](http://www.salon.com/2011/02/22/the_help_lawsuit/)>

Mohanty, Satya P. "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial  
Condition." *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993): 41-80. Print.

- Mohanty, Satya P. *Literary theory and the claims of history: Postmodernism, objectivity, multicultural politics*. Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Morrison, Toni. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken". *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. New York: Duke UP, 1994. 369-98. Print.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992. Print.
- Mullen, Harryette. "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness." *Diacritics* 24.2 (1994): 71-89. JSTOR. Web. 4 May 2014.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Pinderhughes, Elaine. "Foreword." *Women of Color*. Lillian Comas-Diaz and Beverly Greene, ed. New York: Guilford P, 1994. xi-xiii. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Complete Stories And Poems Of Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Doubleday Books, 1984. Print.
- Rampersad, Arnold. "Melville and Race." *Herman Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Myra Jehlen. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1994. 160-73. Print.
- Robertson, Campbell. "A Maid Sees Herself in a Novel, and Objects." *New York Times*. 17 Feb. 2011. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/books/18help.html? r=0>
- Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help*. London: Penguin, 2009. Print.
- The Butler*. Dir. Lee Daniels. The Weinstein Company, 2013. DVD.
- Thompson, Edgar T. *Plantation Societies, Race Relations, and the South: The Regimentation of Populations*. Durham: Duke UP, 1975. Print.
- Towner, Theresa M. *Faulkner on the Color Line: the Later Novels*. Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 2000. Print.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Whalen, Terence. "Average Racism: Poe Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism." *In Romanincing the Shadow: Poe and Race*. Ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 3-40. Print.