

# EXPANDING CONSCIOUSNESS, INTEGRAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION IN PAULE MARSHALL'S FICTION

## LA EXPANSIÓN DE LA CONSCIENCIA, CONSCIENCIA INTEGRAL Y EVOLUCIÓN CONSCIENTE EN LA FICCIÓN DE PAULE MARSHALL

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### **Abstract**

Paule Marshall's literary concerns cover key issues of the Black Diaspora such as Black consciousness and the search for wholeness. These two issues connect with the research about the different manifestations of consciousness carried out by scientists such as physicist Peter Russell, nurse Margaret Newman, philosopher Ken Wilber and psychologist Paloma Cabadas. In this essay, I contend that Marshall's characters experience different aspects of consciousness that take them into a process known as the search for wholeness. Paule Marshall's writings are also part of the Black Consciousness Movement, inquiring into epistemologies that have their roots in "the workable past", creating emancipatory knowledge for afro-descendants. The methodology employed to read Marshall's novels follows the conscious evolution paradigm put forward by psychologist Paloma Cabadas, and the integral consciousness model proposed by Ken Wilber. Both models offer valid routes for analyzing Marshall's characters in the light of Newman's concept of expanding consciousness.

**Keywords:** expanding consciousness, integral consciousness, conscious evolution, black consciousness, wholeness.

## Resumen

Las preocupaciones literarias de la escritora afro-americana Paule Marshall ponen de relieve dos aspectos importantes de la diáspora africana como son la consciencia de los afro-descendientes y la búsqueda de la integridad por el ser humano. Esta temática enlaza con diversas investigaciones sobre la consciencia humana llevadas a cabo por científicos como el físico Peter Russell, el filósofo Ken Wilber y la psicóloga Paloma Cabadas. Este ensayo defiende que los personajes creados por Marshall experimentan un necesario salto de consciencia en su búsqueda por la integridad y la lucidez. La ficción creada por Marshall forma parte del movimiento por la consciencia afro-descendiente ya que contribuye al desarrollo de epistemologías que entroncan con el pasado, creando conocimiento emancipador para los afro-descendientes. La metodología empleada para analizar la literatura de Marshall se basa en el paradigma de evolución consciente desarrollado por Paloma Cabadas y el modelo de consciencia integral elaborado por Ken Wilber. Ambas teorías ofrecen rutas válidas para explorar los personajes de ficción de Marshall a la luz del concepto de la expansión de la consciencia propuesto por Margaret Newman.

**Palabras clave:** expansión de la consciencia, consciencia integral, evolución consciente, consciencia negra, unidad.

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## 1. Introduction: The Black Diaspora in Paule Marshall's Fiction

The Black Diaspora has been an inspirational lifetime project for Marshall in all her works of fiction. Her first novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) concerned Barbadian immigrants in Brooklyn, New York during the Great Depression and WW2. Short stories such as “Reena” (1970) or the novella “Merle” (1983) sustained a spiritual return to Africa as the land of origins and possibilities. Novels like *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), *Daughters* (1991) and *The Fisher King* (2000) showed the importance of the theme of the dispersal of black people around the globe. The memoir *Triangular Road* (2009) featured the motif of the journey in stories that stretched across continents: Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and the United States. This involvement with the journey takes a deeper meaning in each character's center, for it reveals an introspective journey back to their true selves. Their inner journey becomes empowering when it focuses on centering, rooting, and finding what Merle Hodge calls “one's true-true name” (Marshall 1999: 31). The empowered self involves personal power, connecting with the larger self of the community. As Marshall points out: “The personal is inseparable

from the political. One's responsibility also is to work to empower the larger world that is part of your definition of self" (31).

Paule Marshall's literature calls for social change within the scope of reconstructing black diasporic identity by focusing on the past. Her writings enlighten Black epistemologies, since blacks' knowledge of their surrounding reality comes mainly through European conceptions. Marshall's literary voice brings to the fore "a strong interpersonal relationship with others, as well as harmony, peace with nature, and spirituality" (in Bakari 1997). In her literary world, Marshall generates both emancipatory and practical knowledge. In order to achieve this, she explores the effect of social forces "on the life chances of people of African descent" by creating characters that participate in action, thus improving their life chances as African-descended people" (Kershaw in Nabudere 2011: 39). Thus, her characters' need to cope with fragmentation issues within themselves is overtly exposed.

According to some critics such as Pettis (1995) and Okolo (1991), Marshall's literature has another major objective: to "reconstruct and appropriate meaning within the parameters of lived inheritances and traditions that have become increasingly estranged and alienated by the implications of the modern scientific outlook" (Okolo in Nabudere 2011: 161). Marshall's literature blends various fully functional black diasporic realities through characters who struggle for self-identity and self-representation. Thus, this literature acknowledges and partakes in the process of repaying a collective debt to "those whose sacrifice and hard struggle actualized [their] freedom" in what Nabudere calls "post-traditionalism" (2011: 160).

My article will explore the manifestations of consciousness in Paule Marshall's literary cosmos. It will approach a selection of Marshall's novels such as *Brown Girl*, *Brownstones* and *Praisesong for the Widow*, and short fiction such as the novella *Merle*, following influential theories about the nature of consciousness and human evolution such as Ken Wilber's spectrum of consciousness (1975), Margaret Newman's expanding consciousness (1994), and Paloma Cabadas' conscious evolution program (2015). This study will show Marshall's approaches to "conscientization", a term originally coined by Paulo Freire, who defined it as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (1985: 19).

## 2. Expanding Consciousness in *Brown Girl*, *Brownstones*

Black consciousness and the search for wholeness are intrinsic aspects of Paule Marshall's understanding of the Black diaspora. These two preoccupations connect with the pioneer work on human consciousness developed by scientists such as

physicist Peter Russell (2021), philosopher Ken Wilber (1975), nurse Margaret Newman (1994) or psychologist Paloma Cabadas (2015) from an interdisciplinary perspective. In this essay, I contend that Marshall's characters undergo a leap of consciousness that becomes a first step in their necessary search for wholeness. Gaining consciousness implies change, and accessing liberatory moments from past suffering. Consciousness connects with the energy of true feeling and free thinking: "Free thinking is the capacity to think with clarity, and a sort of vaccine against sociocultural brainwash" (Cabadas, 2018: 193, my translation).<sup>1</sup> Marshall's heroines learn to listen to their own thoughts driven by a sense of ethics focused on free will. This provokes an integral transformation through different stages of waking up, growing up, and developing their consciousness.

Consciousness, as Peter Russell contends, is "the quality of being conscious, the knowing of experience" (Russell 2021). Consciousness is the capacity that every human being has to perceive reality and to recognize himself/herself in that reality. Wilber, in his cartography of consciousness known as the integral model, establishes a four quadrant model that accounts for four "dimensions" of consciousness being these "intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social" (Wilber 1997: 71). The four quadrants combine with a dozen major levels or stages. Besides this, Wilber's integral model establishes six structures of consciousness discovered by western psychology through scientific research methods. These structures are called archaic, magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic and integral (in Esbjorn-Hargens 2009: 8). Therefore, Wilber's integral model of consciousness proposes that there are at least two types of conditions of consciousness that are transformed into growth and development. In her research on the nature of consciousness Paloma Cabadas states that

Consciousness is a singularity composed of thoughts and feelings that flow through energetic fields that do not need space or time. Consciousness is not matter, nor is it associated to the functioning of the brain, but, on the contrary, brain functioning is the result of the existence of consciousness. (Cabadas 2018: 259, my translation).<sup>2</sup>

The theory of expanding consciousness is an intrinsic part of the studies on consciousness. Nurse Margaret Newman contends that expanding consciousness is an "evolving process" in which "we can embrace aging and death [...] We are free from all the things we have feared —loss, death, dependency". It concerns "the meaning of life and of health" (Newman 1994: xxiv). In this regard, McIntosh claims that "consciousness can be understood as the inside of human experience, what it is like to be and know ourselves; and this sentient personality, this original identity, is also the unique subjective presence through which others know us" (2022). Through her characters, Marshall aptly explores the dynamic structure of being since she focuses on the *I Am*, the first —person experience of

being, the “true-true self” she commands her characters to find. Marshall urges her characters to look into their memories, collected through introspection in their consciousness.

The search for a true self and remembering may bring up possibilities for self-consciousness in a world that looks at blacks “in contempt and pity” and despises the “soul beauty” of the black race (Washington 1981: 319). Is there the possibility, Marshall questions with her work, for the true black self to emerge guided by agency and lucidity, thus transcending the limitations proposed by double consciousness? A conflicting understanding of memory is revealed in Marshall’s work. Selina, the protagonist of her first novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, and characters such as Merle Kinbona in the novella *Merle* or Avey Johnson in the novel *Praisesong for the Widow*, confront unresolved issues of slavery and racism in African diasporic communities. Marshall points out the advantages of making the past usable. However, the conscious exercise of remembering may reveal vulnerabilities concerning identity issues. In this context, forgetting may become a useful strategy when the character has not grasped a solid relationship with agency and lucidity.

Selina, the protagonist of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, is a marginal character, summoned by Marshall to “jump at the sun” (1942: 13).<sup>3</sup> She is a young woman with a conscious, rich interior life. Her visibility emerges without any hue of victimhood, only preceded in African American literature by Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha*. In fact, Selina’s characterization follows what Judylyn Ryan calls a “paradigm of growth”<sup>4</sup> with *Brown Girl*<sup>5</sup> as an optimistic text in this respect, because Selina “makes the conscious political choice” (Washington 1981: 322) of returning to Barbados, embracing a unique journey towards answers and looking for personal wholeness. The heritage of newer generations of African Americans is, as Washington points out, that of conflict and confusion (1981: 318). Gavin, for instance, interprets Selina’s quest for wholeness as “incomplete” (1998: 597).

Selina Boyce is the daughter of Barbadian immigrants living in Brooklyn, New York. The novel narrates Selina’s stormy coming-of-age because the Barbadian or Bajan community and the African Americans in New York clearly converge in her experience, composing a dual diasporic identity that is not free from tensions. Selina Boyce gives “voice” to both communities in *Brown Girl*. At the time of the publication of the novel, in 1959, it was important for Marshall to represent Selina’s sexuality, because sexuality within young women in the immigrant West Indian community was highly repressed. However, Selina decides to take charge of her life, standing up to her mother, taking a lover at the age of seventeen. She represents all that the repressed West Indian American little girls of her generation could not express (Graulich and Sisco 295).

For instance, Selina becomes conscious of her need to express herself when she becomes part of the dance group of the Barbadian Association in Brooklyn. Selina's consciousness recalls ancestry through memory when she realizes that she can be a successful dancer: "the huge eyes in her dark face absorbed, yet passionate, old as they had been old even when she was a child, suggesting always that she had lived before and had retained, deep within her, the memory and scar of that other life" (Marshall 1981: 281). However, this agentive path suffers a severe test when Selina "truly saw the full meaning of her black skin" (289) reflected in the eyes of the mother of her dancing mate, who was white, feeling that the true self recently gained is stolen by her own hate of that part of herself that was "strong enough to sweep the world" (289). This hate had been in the way of her being proud of her successes and was "the part of her which had long hated her for her blackness and thus begrudged her each small success like the one tonight ..." (289). After Selina performs the dance called "the birth-to-death cycle" (275), Selina's "own dark depth", her blackness, (291) feels like death. Her self-hate hurts because it limits her life's options and takes her on a spinning wheel of guilt since whiteness "sought to rob her of her substance and herself" (289).

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After escaping the beast, Selina is ready to see her true self, coming into conscious realization that her options are available only if she is strong enough to reach for them. Selina rejects the scholarship that the Barbadian Association gives her, embracing instead, "the loneliness [coiling] fast around her freedom" (Marshall 1981: 303). Challenging the Bajan community, she is also confronting her mother, who, much to Selina's surprise, recognizes herself in Selina: "G'long! You was always too much a woman for me anyway, soul" (307). After she sees herself

mirrored in her own daughter, Silla admits her daughter's own right to look for her own place in the world, and remembers her own arrival in Brooklyn some thirty years ago: "she somehow glimpsed in Selina the girl she had once been [...] she became the girl who had stood, alone and innocent, at the ship's rail, watching the city rise glittering with promise from the sea" (307).

Selina decides to abandon Fulton Street and its brownstone houses and heads for the Caribbean. She decides to explore those values rooted in the place where her family comes from, that carry dreams that have become twisted and almost destroyed by the American dream of capitalism and racism. The last scene of the novel depicts Selina as "a survivor amid the wreckage" (Marshall 1981: 310). She takes a walk alone, through a wasted area of Brooklyn, where brownstone houses have been torn down. Selina remembers and imagines the people who had lived in them and that she knew well—especially those, like her father, whose bodies had been broken, and whose voices had been shuttered by "material values, identity blurring, displacement, alienation and the obscuring or loss of self in the effort to survive" (Pettis 14). In a sublime act of generosity and appreciation for their sacrifice, strength, and endurance, Selina decides to leave them a testimonial gift: she gets rid of one of her silver bangles, hurling it "high over her shoulder" (Marshall 1981: 310). This is the very bangle that had tied her to the Bajan community: she takes it off her wrist in a symbolic final act of personal liberation. In this way, Selina frees herself from their influence. However, she retains the other bangle on her wrist because she wants to take with her the very strength of the Bajan people, since she will need it on her journey towards wholeness. The Caribbean is deeply rooted in Selina, who at the end of the novel chooses to travel there, working as a dancer on a cruise. Selina's double consciousness as an African American and as a Barbadian progresses into a triple consciousness that integrates an acute gender consciousness led by womanism,<sup>8</sup> since black and female stand not as contradictory opposites, but as complementary wholes in the novel.

### 3. Integrating the Opposites in *Merle*

Paule Marshall seems to understand the world that both the writer and her characters inhabit as one of duality. As she asserts in her essay entitled "From the Poets in the Kitchen" (1983), this dual nature feeds from an emerging world view that expects synthesis as well as generative contradictions. These ideas reach back to the principle of polarity, featured in *The Kybalion*. The fourth hermetic principle states that opposites are not perceived as conflictive but, on the contrary, they make up the whole in life. According to the principle of polarity, "all manifested things have two sides, two aspects, two poles or a pair of opposites with manifold

degrees between the two extremes” (2004), arguing that opposites are only opposite to a degree. In this view, the tensions between opposites appear as generative. Carl Gustav Jung refers to the principle of polarity as *coniunctio oppositorum* or the concept of opposites, referring to the idea that “opposites attract and combine to make up wholes greater than the sum of in the opposing parts [...] any given entity contains, within itself its own opposite” (Garry 482). Thus, the conjunction of the opposites transcends duality on its way towards wholeness, going beyond that permanent tension that provokes lots of unnecessary suffering in human beings.

The idea that opposites, or contradictions, make up the whole is reflected in Paule Marshall’s work and life. For instance, her mother and a group of West Indian women who Marshall claims were her mentors and teachers, and that she called “the Poets in the Kitchen”, addressed each other as “soully-gal —soul referring to the spirit; gal, to the body, the flesh, the visible self” (Marshall 1983: 28). Those women at the kitchen table did not conceive there was any split between the body and the mind (the soul). Marshall understood this unity of the spirit and the body through a process that takes on dimensions of reconciling the past and the present, the mythic and the real, the spiritual and the physical. This ability to bring into relation opposites rather than writing characters fragmented in opposite directions is illustrated by the fact that Marshall’s most powerful characters are always reconcilers. Although they seem imperfect, misfits, exiles, women with large flaws going through rough times, they contend with injustice, and when they become paralyzed with grief or guilt, they take sides with those who have even less: *The Wretched of the Earth* —recalling Frantz Fanon’s famous ideas, revealed in his seminal book of the same title.

Marshall addresses the complexities of womanhood in her second novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), and in the novella *Merle*, published in 1983. Merle, the main protagonist in both texts, is “a whole research project in herself” (Marshall 1983: 139), “a perfect cultural broker” (138) and “a good obeah woman” (163) who is “trying to come to terms with her life and history as a black woman, still seeking to reconcile all the conflicting elements to form a viable self” (109). Merle’s parameters of perception of reality are polarized aspects of experience, thus Marshall builds this character on patterns of doubleness. For instance, Merle exhibits a severe imbalance between silence and talk. She falls into long periods of silence and paralysis, when her mind cannot reconcile her fragmented self. As she confesses: “I am like someone bewitched, turned foolish. It’s like my very will’s gone. And nothing short of a miracle will bring it back” (159). In Merle’s tension between speech and silence, there is an implicit polarity between public and private speech. She uses her strong public



voice when she has to denounce the inequalities and oppression that people in Bournehills suffer. In this way, Merle's individual consciousness projects itself towards the collective. In fact, Marshall describes Merle's face as mirroring "not only the faces of the children but the men and the women [...] She appeared to contain them all [...] She was "some larger figure in whose person was summed up both Bournehills and its people" (160). Her public voice is loud and clear. However, with regard to private matters, she always remains silent. Merle only breaks this inner silence when she allows herself some intimacy with Saul Amron who, besides her friend and lover, becomes her confidant. As a Jew and as a widower, Saul is familiar with personal and collective suffering. This intimate, revelatory talk indicates Merle's tendency to identify with her own suffering, "to accept the meaning of the emptiness [...] the paralysis, grief and collapse that had left her [...] like someone dead" (171). Merle continuously recalls that moment when time stopped eight years ago, when her husband left her, taking their daughter with him to Uganda, his birthplace. She was "still standing in the middle of that two room flat in Leeds waiting for them to come back ...." (170). Marshall uses time in a rather peculiar way, describing the past as being a continuous present that traps Merle in an uncertain future, just as uncertain as the future of the Bournehills people in that part of the island where she lives, and which continues

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To exist intact beneath the present reality [...] its shabby woebegone hills and spent land might have been selected as the repository of the history that included the hemisphere [...] rooted in that other time [...] as a reminder [...] that it was not yet over, only the forms had changed, and the real work was still to be done. (Marshall 1983: 191-92)

Bournehills remains rooted in the wounding past, waiting for "an act of the most sweeping proportions" (Marshall 1983: 192) to redeem the place and its people from the injury inflicted by slavery whose effects remain visible throughout the island. Saul clearly perceives this "in another, deeper way" (192). In Merle's bedroom he enters into a deeper reality, endowed with a double vision that allows him to see both the old and the timeless. In a similar manner, Merle also needs redemption, accepting her own responsibility for her past actions: her relationship of dependence on a white British woman, and the abandonment of her husband and subsequent loss of her daughter. Merle realizes that she needs to stop "feeling sorry for [her]self and blaming everyone and everything for the botch [she has] made of things. And talking. Oh, God, going on like some mad woman all the time but doing nothing. Finish with that!" (203) This expanding of consciousness allows her to integrate those experiences and to see, beyond the opposites, the possibilities of life as parameters of wholeness.

Symbolically, just like Selina in *Brown Girl*, Merle will begin her redemptive journey by discarding the jewelry —earrings and heavy bracelets— which trap her in a mentality that limits her human potential. Without them, she looked “younger, less scarred,” feeling “unburdened, restored to herself” (Marshall 1983: 202). Freeing herself is the first step before travelling to Africa to look for her daughter. Reaching an understanding of her own personal history and inserting it in the collective history of the island will give her the courage to pursue her own future: “sometimes a person has to go back, really back —to have a sense, an understanding of all that’s gone into making them— before they can go forward” (206). She will travel to Uganda, to meet her daughter, to reach some kind of understanding with her former husband, to gain, she hopes, a whole life. However, she will not travel there on the usual route, “North to London and then down”, but for her return to be fully meaningful, she will travel south and then east:

She was going south to Trinidad, then on to Recife in Brazil. And from Recife, where the great arm of the hemisphere reaches out toward the massive shoulder of Africa as though yearning to be joined to it again, as it had been in the beginning, she would fly to Dakar and, from there across the continent to Kampala. (Marshall 1983: 210)

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The change of route triggers diaspora consciousness, since Merle identifies with a cultural and historical past that needs to be reaffirmed, and connected to the homeland, Africa, through a reenactment of the Middle Passage.

The trip to Uganda is Merle’s first step towards her active search for wholeness. She is ready to reconcile the opposites, moving out of guilt and shame towards her future. This quest will reconcile her fragmented cultural past(s) into one whole present that will launch her towards a meaningful future that recognizes her full identity, regardless of how hybrid it might be.

#### **4. Conscious Evolution in *Praisesong for the Widow***

Marshall’s significant contribution to the concept of diaspora relates to her understanding of a psychological and spiritual return to Africa in what she has called the “Triangular Road,” which interestingly is the name given to her *Memoir*, published in 2008. The triangular road refers to the Middle Passage, the transatlantic voyage that Africans undertook on board slave ships, stopping over in Europe and having the Caribbean as its destination. In the Caribbean islands the slaves were inspected, seasoned and directed towards the slave markets of the South of the United States. The idea of return implicit in Marshall’s work calls for

reenacting the Middle Passage but in reverse. The journey starts in the South of the US, and it goes through the Caribbean, where the themes of return and historical and spiritual continuity are inscribed in the collective memories of the people. This reconnection takes Marshall's characters back to the motherland: Africa, as we have seen with Merle. The idea of spiritual return to a historical self is an important trope in *Praisesong for the Widow*, because the inner fragmentation and cultural disconnection of characters such as Avey Johnson are transformed by the diasporic process: "she had made up her mind to fix [the house her great-aunt had left her] up" and "sell the house in North White Plains as Marion had been urging her to do for years" (Marshall 1983: 256).

Diaspora literacy enters Avey's consciousness as she recognizes and reads the cultural signs left scattered along the road of progress. While at the Beg Pardon dance, she hears the note of the drum as "a lamentation that could hardly have come from the rum keg of a drum. Its source had to be the heart, the bruised still-bleeding innermost chamber of the collective heart" (Marshall 1983: 245). The achievement of material acquisition along with cultural dispossession is a strong metaphor for the history of the African in America. The decline of the spirit of Avey's marriage followed the abandonment of "the little private rituals and pleasures, the playfulness and the wit of those early years, the host of feelings and passions that had defined them in a special way" (136). However, the powerful message implicit in Marshall's fiction is that material acquisition should not exclude cultural dispossession. As Paule Marshall points out in an interview with Maryse Condé: "A spiritual return to Africa is absolutely necessary for the reintegration of that which was lost in our collective historical past and the many national pasts which comprise it" (1986: 52-3). She emphasizes the role that Africa plays in determining African American historical identity, an aspect of their personality that she feels has been "systematically de-emphasized" (Williams 53). Therefore Marshall states that as African Americans, as people of African descent, they can "reinvent" their own image.

In this respect, Marshall's concept of return imbricates with Toni Morrison's concept of re-memory, since both writers engage in the necessity to build patterns of collective historical and spiritual memory within their writing. They both contribute by informing about the need to implant a new paradigm of lucid living on planet earth. This paradigm has consciousness at its heart, driving towards the conscious evolution of humanity. Concerned with personal liberation and reaching out to all human capacities, this evolving actualization implies good doses of agency and proactivity. As Cabadas contends, conscious evolution aims at "erradicar las memorias de miedo y sufrimiento del pasado para poder estar en el presente, en lo mejor que cada uno ha sido y en la expresión de la propia grandeza" (2018: 16).<sup>9</sup> In *Praisesong for the Widow*, Avey undergoes a personal odyssey remembering her

past life, recounting what has been lost throughout time, and recovering and reconnecting with her cultural roots, beginning with her childhood in Tatem (South Carolina).

Conscious evolution is core to understanding that lucid living is a process, not an end in itself. Lucid living implies the awakening of consciousness that in the literary work of Paule Marshall is linked to the search for a true self, away from external influences. Marshall's novel *Praisesong for the Widow* is a representative text of the value of the dissociative states of consciousness in reconstructing a lost sense of identity. Marshall, through Avey's experience, reminds us of the necessity to evolve as human beings on this planet earth. Through Avey we learn that we, as humans, are at risk of forgetting who we are. Thus, Avey appears with a slanted identity, someone who cannot remember anything from her past: "there was a hole the size of a crater where her life of the past three decades had been" (Marshall 1983: 196). The novel undertakes the task of reconstructing Avey's identity, so that she recovers enough lucidity to recognize her true self.

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Researchers such as Paloma Cabadas have realized that one of the sources that allow the study of human consciousness is that of the dissociative states. They show the transcendent aspect of consciousness and its manifestations beyond matter, time, and space. Dissociate states open up a creative and rich research field that provides evidence about the nature of consciousness. During a dissociate state of consciousness, the person enters a state beyond habitual perception within a mental and sensorial human context. The accessing and processing of information widens, going beyond the physical senses and normal brain capacities. This state is also known as altered, modified, or opened to sensitive and immaterial realities (Cabadas 2018: 40). Among the most common dissociations are: dreams, clairvoyance, progression, regression, premonition, déjà vu, telepathy, intuition, synchronicity, expanding consciousness and near death experiences.

Dissociative states are interesting because they show that consciousness exists separately from the body, and that it might not be in contact with the human brain because it survives the physical body. Consciousness uses the brain through layers of energy. This specificity and its relationship with the human brain has been widely studied by scientists such as Raymond Moody, Peter Russell, Sam Parnia, Pim Van Lommel, and Peter Fenwick. The evidence that consciousness might be independent from the physical brain has also been studied by Dr. Kübler Ross. She affirms dying people can see others that have passed away, usually family members, and she shows evidence of near death experiences in her research (1999: 83-4). Dr. Michael Newton has studied contacts with close family members already dead through dreams, in near sleep states or in deep trance states (2010: xviii-xix). Also, both spontaneous and hypnotic regressions to both childhood and past lifetimes are effective methods of healing mind, body and soul, according to Dr. Brian Weiss (1993: 29, 38).

The repetitive cycle of amnesia that traps Avey thwarts her realization about the true meaning of her existence. When she is still on board the luxurious cruise, she experiences a progression<sup>10</sup> towards the near future, when “her mind had left to go and stand down at the embarkation door near the waterline five decks below [...] her mind had leaped ahead of time, later that morning, when the ship would have arrived at the next port of call” (Marshall 1983: 10). Avey undergoes several spontaneous regressions to both her childhood and her past life as a slave on a slave boat across the Atlantic Ocean. Remembering will bring Avey the lucidity required to understand her present. The exploration of Avey’s interior life through consciousness allows the recovery of her identity as a black diasporic woman.

Marshall begins her novel with Avey going through the dissociative state produced by a dream. The protagonist of the dream, Avey, literally sees her great-aunt Cuney in a dream that she perceives as vivid as reality. Aunt Cuney, who had died decades ago, wants Avey to return to Ibo Landing, the place they visited every summer in Tatem Island. However, at present, Avey has forgotten her old aunt’s stories, and many years ago she had rid herself of the notion of what they had meant: that Avey might have had a mission in life.

The day after the dream, Avey enters into an altered state of consciousness. She fails to recognize the surrounding reality that she perceives through her senses. For instance, she experiences an overpowering feeling of estrangement whenever she is reflected in a mirror or a window glass. While dining on the cruise with her two friends and watching her reflection in a distant mirror, she recalls: “for a long confused moment Avey Johnson could not place the woman in beige crepe de Chine and pearls seated with them” (Marshall 1983: 48). This was not the first time “it had happened” (48), such as when she was at her favorite department store or travelling by train. When Avey is awake she enters a dissociative state of consciousness that, according to scientists and psychologists, is a natural state in which perception modifies the reality that the subject perceives through her senses. Thus, her energetic field is amplified, and this enhances Avey’s vision. Avey’s consciousness goes beyond her physical plane of reality while her body remains in the physical realm. Her immediate world, that of the boat she is travelling on and everything that happens on it, is altered, giving her glimpses of a hidden reality that looks dangerous because she does not understand it. For instance, each round table assembled in the Versailles room seemed “an island separated from the others on the sea of Persian carpeting that covered the room” (47) echoing the dividing up of “India, the West Indies, the World” that her daughter Marion had mentioned when she heard the name of the room. Then, she became aware of her invisibility with respect to those people seated at nearby tables: “their eyes which seemed to pass clearly through them whenever they glanced across, and even, ironically, with the quick strained smiles some of them occasionally flashed their way” (47).

Avey's awareness of herself then shifts towards her surroundings outside the boat. On the sports deck, she sees "padded Neanderthal men clubbing each other with the murderous sticks" (Marshall 1983: 56). She associates long forgotten memories with the vision: an act of police brutality on a black man right outside her apartment on Halsey Street. She vividly hears the "thud and crack of the billy and the man's screams [...] Her ears, her memory seemed to be playing the same frightening tricks as her eyes" (57).

After this an old lady aims at her with a shotgun. Later, in the swimming pool area, an old man speaking to her turns into a "skeleton in a pair of skimpy red-and white striped trunks and a blue visored cap" (59). Once she arrives at the safe emptiness of the deserted library, she feels that she is under "something that had dramatically expanded her vision, offering her a glimpse of things that were beyond her comprehension, and therefore, frightening" (Marshall 1983: 59). That "something" is none other than a dissociate state of consciousness that enhances her vision, taking her mind to a deeper level of understanding that she fears because she cannot offer a valid interpretation for her visions of death and violence on the boat. This dissociation exposes Avey to the polarity between *The Bianca Pride's* deck, and the boat dock in Grenada, where her perceptions will be of "familiarity, almost an intimacy, to their gestures of greeting and the unintelligible words they called out" (69).

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When aunt Cuney contacts Avey in her dream, she makes her remember what "had taken her years to rid herself of" (42), the "far-fetched story of people walking on water which she in her childish faith had believed till the age of ten" (42). What Marshall is indicating is that, through remembering, Avey's consciousness can reach the roots of self and identify the trauma that needs healing, the trauma of forgetting. This hidden trauma fits within the scope of the evolution of consciousness and corresponds to the nuclear trauma (Cabadas 2015: 13). This type of trauma condenses the unsolved suffering of humans that calls for resolution. The trauma for Avey is that she has forgotten, or rather, has made herself forget the history of the Africans that arrived in the western hemisphere as slaves. For Marshall this is the drama of contemporary African Americans and black diasporic people, and the re-creation of Avey's experience in fiction "constitutes an artful, original and sustained presentation of the causes and effects of a fractured psyche" (Pettis 1995: 11). Moreover, Marshall's "fiction demonstrates how self-healing may be generated within the black cultural matrix" (Pettis 1995: 11).

Great aunt Cuney's project is that Avey must remember the Ibos, her ancestors, and must re-enter black consciousness in a process of healing consciousness. In order to do this, Avey undergoes a spontaneous regression while she is resting inside the deckhouse of the *Emanuel C*, when

She became dimly conscious [...] she had the impression as her mind flickered on briefly of other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head. Their suffering—the depth of it, the weight of it in the cramped space—made hers of no consequence. (Marshall 1983: 209)

As a result of this regression, Avey is brought to a better understanding of the special talents of her consciousness that rely on centeredness, peace and calm. Remembering brings sincerity and healing to her consciousness which takes a leap towards evolution. After her trip to Carriacou island, Avey opens up to feeling, to listening to herself, to meaningfully connecting with her ancestry, trusting herself through hearing the voice of her now healed consciousness.

### ***5. Conclusion: The True-True Self is Consciousness in Evolution***

The methodology employed to examine Marshall's novels has followed current research into the nature of consciousness. Marshall considers all sides of her main characters' lives, including those covered with fear and insecurity, to procure a conscious vision of reality and life. Conscious living means trusting with strength and confidence those good values the characters carry inside themselves to integrate their polarities, the light and the shadow. Characters such as Selina, Merle or Avey are able to extract learning from both sides to learn, evolve, and blend in knowledge generated by thought, following ethical parameters of goodness. The sense of wholeness they achieve is neither static nor strictly individual, but it is for everyone. It does not generate harm, since everyone can learn from it and grow according to their own level of consciousness. Knowledge about themselves takes these characters to a deeper level of lucidity about their surrounding reality and to understanding that what they know is what they have inherited from their ancestors. Lucid living implies that they have reached consciousness not only of themselves and their difficulties, but also of their gifts. This can help them fuse both sides of themselves, opening the door towards transcendence. They can discard their fears, above all the fear of not knowing their true identity. Conscious evolution brings lucidity about the true-true self, as the characters continue with their work of healing, discarding the sickness provoked by the assimilation of values imposed on them by white society.

## Notes

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1. "El pensamiento libre es la capacidad de pensar con claridad y la vacuna contra el lavado de cerebro sociocultural" (Cabadas 2018: 193).

2. "La conciencia es una singularidad constituida por pensamientos y sentimientos que transmite a través de campos energéticos que no necesitan del espacio-tiempo. No es materia, ni está asociada al funcionamiento cerebral, sino que, al contrario, el cerebro es el resultado de la existencia de la conciencia" (Cabadas 2018: 259).

3. This is what Zora Neale Hurston's mother said to her so that she might gather the courage to step out in the world, facing all its contradictions and appreciating the beauty of life (1991: 13).

4. Judylyn S. Ryan inserts black women's writings in "a paradigm of growth" that views black women as "powerful, independent subjects" and that is proactive, reacting in this way against the "paradigm of resistance" used in most theoretical approaches to African diaspora cultural studies (2005: 17).

5. For the purposes of this paper, the novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* will be referred to as *Brown Girl*.

6. The "shadow" is a concept first coined by Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Dr. Carl Jung. It refers to those dark aspects of our personality that humans carry inside the brain. The act of realizing this moral problem becomes a necessary condition for self-knowledge. As Jung points out, becoming conscious of the shadow involves a considerable moral effort (2014: 14).

7. Reference to the title of the novella written in 1899 by Joseph Conrad depicting the horrors of western colonialism.

8. As Paule Marshall states in an interview with Daryl Cumber, her work has a womanist perspective "from very early on" (1992: 31).

9. Both progression and regression can be spontaneous states or induced through therapy. In the case of Avey they are spontaneous. According to Dr. Weiss "not everyone needs to remember prior lifetimes through regression under hypnosis. Not every individual bears the weight of past life traumas or scars that are significant in the current lifetime. Often, what a patient needs is to concentrate on the present, not the past. However, I teach most of my patients self-hypnotic and meditative techniques, since these skills are enormously valuable in day-to-day life" (1993: 38).

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