

Paule Marshall's "Brooklyn" and the Quest for Wholeness

Smaranda Ștefanovici

Abstract

The article questions cultural identities as fixed 'locations of culture'. It discusses the liminal and hybrid approaches Paule Marshall uses to explore the fluid and unstable notion of hybrid identity in her short story 'Brooklyn'. The complex of dislocation and identity construction in dual location that often accompanies migratory experiences is felt by the characters in the story. Their 'Americanization' produces uniquely hybridized immigrant identities. A story of transcendence and continuity, 'Brooklyn' probes the liminal, intercultural aspects of human experience as lived by the author herself.

Keywords: dislocation, relocation, fragmentation, (post)colonialism, liminality, imperialism, hybridity, wholeness, catalyst, ambivalence

Motto: "An oppressed people cannot overcome their oppressors and take control of their lives until they have a clear and truthful picture of all that has gone before, until they begin to use their history creatively. This knowledge of one's culture, one's history, serves as an ideological underpinning for the political, social, and economic battles they must wage. It is the base upon which they must build." (Marshall: "Shaping the World of my Art" 107)

Paule Marshall and Caribbean Culture

Paule Marshall was born in 1929, in Brooklyn, New York, from West Indies immigrant parents, shortly after WWI. Raised in a transplanted Caribbean community, Marshall experienced West Indian culture through the subsequent travels to Barbados, which connected her to its worldview and oral traditions.

After publishing her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), telling of a young woman's struggle for identity in the West Indian subculture, Paule Marshall's next book, *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*, appeared in 1960. It is a collection of four long stories about African descendants in the USA, the Caribbean, and South America, and their relations with other immigrant groups. Marshall here contrasts traditional African spiritual values with the commercialism and materialism of the New World. Some of the stories included in this volume, such as "Brooklyn", were also included in his later volume of tales entitled *Reena and Other Stories* (1983).

The critic Edward Braithwaite highlights the unique literary approach of West Indian novelists. They "have, so far, on the whole, attempted to see their society neither in the larger context of Third World underdevelopment, nor, with the exception of Vic Reid, in relation to communal history [...]. West Indian novels [he claims] have been so richly home centered, that they have provided their own universe, with its own universal application" (225). Accordingly, West Indian novelists faced the task of describing their own society in their own terms. Undoubtedly, to do that, they had to take pride in their native land and place, which was a difficult task to do, considering the fact that the exploration of their societies was limited by distance, separation and different background. The critic rightly asserts that, on the other hand, we should not see the contemporary West Indies as simply ex-colonial territories, which "... are underdeveloped islands moving into the orbit of North American cultural and material

imperialism, retaining stubborn vestiges of their Euro-colonial past (mainly among the elite) ... and active memories of Africa and slavery (mainly among the folk)...” (119).

Indeed, Paule Marshall was brought up in a West Indian/Afro-American environment in New York, and visited the West Indies, and especially her ancestral Barbados. All this points to her encompassing triple consciousness, i.e. that of an Afro-American of West Indian parentage raised in New York. Having the quality of being triply invisible as well (black, female, foreigner), she deserves consideration for the original solution she gives to the dilemma of how to cope with these cultures. She sees them as separate, yet interconnected cultures: “I am Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American,” she says in an interview (1988), “I am embracing both these cultures and I hope that my work reflects what I see as a common bond” (qtd. in Pettis 32). Thus, as seen in her story ‘Brooklyn’, she places herself in a transitional space, a liminal place where her inter-cultural and hybrid approach allows her to explore the notion of hybrid identity, which is fluid, unstable, incessantly in search of and transforming itself.

Joyce Pettis raises an interesting issue which the critic thinks differentiates Paule Marshall from other black women writers. While other such female writers deal with the schism between the two cultures, Paule Marshall, even while rejecting Western values such as the American Dream and the lack of Afro-centric values in a materialistic culture, asks herself “...how African Americans can remain **culturally moored** and **psychologically whole**, while participating in economic enterprises that almost guarantee **fragmentation**” (115, emphasis added). The present article will comment and speculate on the solution to the problem posed by Paule Marshall in her writing.

Paule Marshall and Post-Colonial Ethics

Since the 1980s we have been witnessing a growth of ethical criticism which has claimed to cultivate an ethics more respectful of alterity, of the right to difference – understood quite concretely as cultural or sexual difference. As a result, new gender roles, and new relations between self and other, have to be invented. Such narrative fiction will be analyzed as representations of female oppression as the Other.

From a post-colonial angle, the critic Homi Bhabha develops the concepts of hybridity and “liminal” space of the colonized Third World to describe the conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity. He argues that cultural identities cannot be pre-given. Nor can “colonizer” and “colonized” be viewed as separate entities. We need to understand cultural differences as the production of minority identities. Instead, Bhabha suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual exchange of cultural performances that in turn produces a mutual representation of cultural difference:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (2)

In other words, he questions cultural identities as fixed “locations of culture”. Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory centralizes the discourse of marginality, at the same time pointing out the ambivalence of colonial discourse. As a post-colonial critic, he provides a theory of cultural hybridity in which he uses concepts such as hybridity and liminality to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. Negotiation, according to Benjamin Graves, takes thus place in a “liminal space” which is a “hybrid” site where cultural differences articulate. Characters can be hence analyzed in terms of hybridity; it is an encounter of otherness within the self in an attempt to evade the dichotomy of alterity and identity.

The Trauma of the Middle Passage

Angelina Reyes, another literary critic, approaches the “paradoxical metaphor of the Middle Passage in American writing of African descent”. The Middle Passage, geographically, represents the part of the Atlantic Ocean between the west coast of Africa and the West Indies. Historically, it represents the longest part of the journey formerly made by slave ships. Metaphorically, with its “complex aftermath of American racism, prejudice, and exploitation of people of color” (179), it symbolizes progress and displacement in American literature. Specifically, Miss Williams has to suffer a symbolic death in order to experience re-birth to the present world. The journey motif fuses past and present events. The black character, as is the case of Miss Williams in “Brooklyn”, experiences a “crossing over... and must be led to the Threshold, [historic and mythic] in order to be cleansed and re-birthed” (125- 126).

The Threshold is a concept used in postcolonial theory. This Threshold or liminal stage is a transitional period or phase of a rite of passage (called the Middle Passage) during which the participants lack social status or rank, lose sense of cultural identity, and face disorientation and confusion. Liminality refers to characters’ condition of being on this cultural and psychological threshold, when ‘crossing over’ from one stage of life to another. This liminal space is meant to mediate rather than separate mutual exchanges. In anthropological theories, new perspectives thus arise when characters experience this ‘crossing over’ the threshold and a new social structure based on common humanity and equality, irrespective of social class, forms.

People of mixed ethnicity, oppressed, colonized, or immigrants in their position of participants in the act of culture as well as observers of it, are usually in this liminal or transitional stage. A major transformation occurs in characters’ lives when they are in a liminal space, a place where we are ‘out of place’, where boundaries dissolve, where all transformation happens. Being in a liminal space provides the opportunity to recreate oneself. Characters can become that which they have never yet been. Due to the unsteady character of liminality, understanding of both sides can be facilitated.

The two immigrant characters in Paule Marshall’s short-story “Brooklyn” are Miss Williams (Black student) and Max Berman (Jewish teacher). They belong to different social classes, yet they use liminality as a threshold for sharing different cultural experiences.

The liminal or transitional space where they can reclaim their lost sense of identity is provided by a journey to Max Berman’s country cottage where he invites Miss Williams to spend a day to speak about a possible continuation of her paper on Gide’s *The Immoralist* into a master’s dissertation.

Physical and Mental Colonization

Sabine Bröck speaks about black women's obsession with not having a place in white society. Therefore, they become obsessed with open and untouched spaces (nature, countryside, water, etc.). From closed rooms, where black characters feel imprisoned and suffer disillusionment, they try desperately to find a place untrodden by the white race, a liminal space where they experience freedom and lack of restraints.

The city and closed spaces, such as the classroom, stand, in Marshall's view, for cultural breakdown, materialism, and lack of Afrocentric values. Those belonging to the white race, the oppressors, implicitly cannot stand for cultural regeneration.

As a Black student in the enclosed space of the classroom, Miss Williams "sat very still and apart from the others, ... her face turned toward the night sky as if to a friend" (32). Her hands "stiffly arranged in her lap ... betrayed a vein of tension" (33). Her posture expressed fear, submissiveness, lack of courage and friends. The enclosed space made her refute all her inner urges as if she would endanger the self so closely guarded within. Her uneasiness and air of submissiveness please Professor Max Berman, they give him "a feeling of certainty and command" (34), making him, paradoxically, one of the oppressors. It is the relationship between a teacher (subject) and his student (object), between two people of different social status and rank and with different cultural experiences. At the professor's sexual harassment, "her eyes remained dry and dull with disbelief. Only her shoulders trembled as though she was silently weeping inside. It was as though she had never learned the forms and expressions of anger. The outrage of a lifetime, of her history, was trapped inside her" (38). He watched the astonished and grateful smile like a child's turn into the disappointment: "She did not move, yet she seemed to start; she made no sound, yet he thought he heard a bewildered cry. Trust, dying – her eyes, her hands faltering up...." (37).

The literal journey takes Miss Williams and Max Berman into the western countryside, a suitable liminal setting for unleashing their abused and fragmented selves as minority people and for calling out their refuted feelings. The literal journey initiates the psychological and metaphorical journey, back into their consciousness and past memories, which in turn forces them to confront certain past experiences and beliefs that others and society have impressed upon them. Aside from being a physical place, Berman's country cottage is a metaphorical place from where they can retrace their past from a renewed perspective. This is the liminal space, the transitional space that allows for exploring alternative, yet interconnected possibilities.

The historical colonial context is similar for both. However, their cultural colonial experiences are different. Miss Williams has been colonized by men in the patriarchal society where she grew up, by Americans and their cultural imperialism, and she is now facing the new colonization.

The story focuses on the mental colonization that still exists (domination of the white man in imperialist America) long after physical decolonization has occurred. Feminist postcolonial theory focuses on the "double colonization" that women colonized by both race and gender have suffered. This mental colonization has left Miss Williams with feelings of dislocation and disconnectedness from her language, history and culture, which in turn has led to a fractured sense of self and a desperate need to regain and reclaim her identity. This form of colonization, worse than physical colonization, has its negative effects on Max Berman as well.

Post-colonialism and Identity Formation

Feminism and post-colonialism consider language fundamental to identity formation and also a psychological weapon to undermine patriarchal and colonial powers.

In the introductory essay to *Reena and Other Stories* entitled "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen", Paule Marshall confesses that, contrary to people's expectations, she does not mention the usual literary giants; she acknowledges the influence of white and black writers she read in her formative years as well as "the group of women around the table long ago" (12); to honor these women she even writes an essay entitled "The Poets in the Kitchen" which is also included at the beginning of the volume *Reena and Other Stories*. They taught "[me...the] first lessons in the narrative art. They trained my ear. They set a standard of excellence. This is why the best of my work must be attributed to them; it stands as testimony to the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed on to me in the wordshop of the kitchen" (12).

Language is used as a most powerful psychological instrument by oppressed women in particular. It is a linguistic tool, but also a means of putting women in control, at least verbally. In this sense, Paule Marshall uses metaphors that, based on condensation, define similarities out of contraries. She can thus capture both the contradictory relationships generated by capitalism and the Afro-Americans' belief in the fundamental dualism of life, i.e. the whole as made up of contradictions and opposites.

Like all African Americans, Paule Marshall and her characters participate in two separate but related worlds, with something that W.E. Du Bois refers to as double-consciousness. It is out of this sense of doubleness that black novelists write. The American land promises, on the one hand, freedom, dignity and identity to a once oppressed people. The complex bicultural identity that is the heritage of African-American writers forces Paule Marshall, on the other hand, to examine the pitfalls associated with the black pursuit of the American Dream, such as the loss primarily of history, culture and identity. Hence, the influence of history, personal and collective, on individual action is a major theme in this autobiographical fiction. Miss Williams represents the contemporary African American woman who has sacrificed her self in attempting to embrace middle-class values. It is the price she has to pay for trying to be accepted among white people through education.

Paule Marshall's fiction embodies Afro-Americans' belief in the fundamental dualism of life. The idiom of a people, she claims in "The Poets from the Kitchen", reflects their fundamental views about themselves and their conception of reality. For illustration, she gives the pair of words "beautiful-ugly" used by her mother and her friends "to describe nearly everything, [for] expressing this dualism: the idea that a thing is at the same time its opposite, and that these opposites, these contradictions make up the whole" (9).

Reena and Other Stories deals with the conflicting attitudes of black women, presumably because of the resurgence of Black Nationalism, as a political and aesthetic ideology of the time. "Black is beautiful" (35) was the popular slogan, says Dorothy L. Denniston and, for this reason, "all elements of black folk heritage began to be interpreted with new insight and pride" (40). Paule Marshall's attention, however, was drawn, the critic continues, more sharply to the familiar black immigrant experience and to issues related to African cultural survival in contemporary black American society. Embracing African ancestry through extended family ties (along several generations) her characters develop the strength to "combat all that the white world refuses her" (41).

Besides language, history and past must also be reclaimed. People seldom exist independent of their culture or of their history. What feminist and post-colonialist theorists have recognized is

that history has been written by oppressors. It is generally accepted that there is more than one way to look at history, a necessary process that can be slow and painful, but a process that will inevitably lead to a clearer understanding of self and of our world.

History and a deep sense of the past are thus especially important to oppressed people such as Blacks, and once familiar with it, they can use it creatively, to their advantage, to build the future. Those who do not know their history because of oppression are condemned to repeat it endlessly, unless they first become familiar with it, and then acknowledge it, both being used as survival techniques nowadays. It is a historical and cultural continuum we cannot deny. Such characters, according to Winifred Stoelting, are victims of memory who speak and listen, trying to find a reconciliation between the oppressed past and the needs of the present.

In like manner, Paule Marshall tells the tales in her own search for “viable links between the traditions of the past and the needs of the present” (Stoelting 61). Her technique of bonding the public history of the setting with the private history of the characters illustrates this interdependency. In this sense, Marshall voices opinions about the distinctly black vernacular and oral tradition: “If you say what’s on your mind in the language that comes to you from your parents and your street and friends, you’ll probably say something beautiful” (“From The Poets in the Kitchen” 4).

The exploration of African ancestry is possible by looking at the cyclical nature of time as perceived by traditional African societies in direct contrast to the linear progression of time as perceived by Western societies. This original concept of “organic unity”, i.e. the continuous cycle of life and death, and the duality of life and loss, refers, in Marshall’s fiction, to the use of the past as a key to the future, and the present as the culmination of the past: “a person has to go back ... before they can go forward” (*Reena* 179), says a character in Marshall’s short story “Brazil”. There, within the African community, Marshall’s characters regain their selves by relocating with their African ancestry. In other words, the characters recover their fragmented psyches within a “recoverable, changeable and renewable” history as well. As such, history is no longer seen by Marshall as static but as living history. Healing takes place at the level of the individual as well as of the community. History does justice and recovers both of them. Marshall’s position as a writer and as an immigrant urges in her the desire for totality. There once existed a whole – the traditional Caribbean black community – but immigration and the pressures of life under capitalism have divided the whole. Her project as a writer is, then, to recreate the whole, but from different cultural ingredients – which also include the American white community as well as the Caribbean black community.

Acceptance of one’s past is indispensable in the process of regeneration. To do this, Miss Williams and Max Berman mingle child and adult memories in a dual confrontation and reconciliation. The past and the present meet, interdependent, yet separate, to mold the future. Max Berman remembers his childhood, his father calling him a bad Jew, his desire to become a doctor, his wives whom he married out of trivial interests, his inquisitors, etc. Miss Williams listens, polite but neutral, while he becomes aware of his existence, for the first time in his life. Similarly, Miss Williams recalls her childhood, her parents’ warnings against speaking or dating strangers with skin color darker or whiter than hers, the man she loved and did not marry because she knew her parents would disapprove, her graduation when she returned home and started teaching, being as confused, frightened and ashamed as before. She experiences the same epiphany while sharing her thoughts aloud or silently with the professor. That spiritual flash awakens her back to life, changes the way she viewed herself and, hence, becomes aware of what she has to do from that moment on. She has finally found her place in the white society.

The search for her lost identity and for wholeness in a society in which she has been defined according to race values is done by means of the motif of the journey back into her cultural roots, which she must undertake for psychic reintegration in a patriarchal, postcolonial, capitalist, and white supremacist world order. The self (individual) is used as an instrument in this need for reclaiming her cultural heritage and, accordingly, an instrument for the continuation of that community. To that end, i.e. to recover the rituals of her family and the other people of the African diaspora, as Carol Kort argues, black women writers become “representative of the larger black struggle for individual autonomy and communal wholeness” (88).

Liminality: Breakdown and Contact

The critic Rhonda Cobman paradoxically notes the fact that in Caribbean fiction “the moment of **breakdown** is not a moment of isolation but a moment of **contact**: with the ancestral past, with the community, and with the self” (58, emphasis added). Miss Williams, indeed, relives the trauma of the Middle Passage in the “company” of the professor and her parents who help her “recover” her past and herself. The excursion to the professor’s country cottage is the symbolic enactment of the Middle Crossing (the liminal state) in which she is assisted by the Jewish teacher, by historic bearers and by the readers.

An essential role is played by elderly people (parents, etc.), the primary interpreters of culture and spirituality in African communities who usually facilitate access to the past. Mostly her mother, a representative of the female ancestor, becomes a factor of cultural continuity, a mentor who teaches how to live in the present world; her cultural role also includes the passing on of stories, legends, and cultural traditions. Miss Williams is helped by her parents to take this spiritual “middle passage back” to rediscover and, at the same time, to pass on the histories and stories of her people. They are the “bridge” between the past and the present. They help her to have that moment of revelation and insight, to comprehend and perceive reality as it is, and, implicitly, to regain her self-confidence and to recompose her fragmented psyche.

Abena P.A. Busia’s idea of the role of readers as fellow travelers with the female characters who take this psychological journey into their ancestral heritage is attention-grabbing. Although she refers to Marshall’s novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), I think it is also valid in the case of the short-story “Brooklyn” discussed here. As readers, the critic states, we are able to see again “the fragments that make up the whole, not as isolated individuals and even redundant fragments, but as part of a creative and sustaining whole” (127). It is the journey, she continues, “of relocating with all the dispossessed and scattered African peoples from their past and their original homeland and, in the present, from their communities and from each other” (127). That is to say, we identify as readers with the characters’ life experiences, each of us in our own way, depending on the cultural environment we belong to and/or the degree of contact with oppression.

In the act of “purification” of her self by means of the swimming ritual (which results in rebirth by water “baptism”), Miss Williams is assisted by the professor and her African community. He feared to touch her lest “his touch would unleash the threatening thing he sensed behind her even smile” (42). She came and stood beside him and then walked slowly into the water. And, as she walked, she held out her arms “in what seemed a gesture of invocation” (43) which recalled his childhood memories when “he invoked their God each Sabbath with the same gesture” (43). It is the moment of breakdown and contact: “He understood suddenly the profound cleavage between them and the absurdity of his hope. The water between them became the years which separated them. Her white cap was the sign of her purity [rebirth], while the silt darkening the lake was the flotsam of his failures. Above all, their color-her arms a pale, flashing gold in

the sunlit water and his bleached white and flaccid with the veins like angry blue penciling-marked the final barrier” (42- 43).

Catalysts and Enablers. The Whole: Contradictions and Oppositions

Susan Fromberg Schaeffer (27), referring to Marshall’s novel *Daughters* (1991), raises an interesting idea about women’s role in becoming men’s conscience. Undoubtedly this is the case of Miss Williams in “Brooklyn”. She acts as a catalyst, in Pettis’s outlook, i.e. she is the prime agent of Max Berman’s change. She is “the bridge”, in Berman’s words, that can reconnect him back to life.

We might even say that they are both catalysts for each other along the physical and spiritual journey across the liminal threshold.

One of Marshall’s main goals is to prove that the whole is made of contradictions and opposites. The beginning of the story presents Max Berman as an imperialist, neocolonialist, white oppressor, while Miss Williams belongs to the oppressed, colonized group. Max Berman appears to be strong, uncaring about human feelings, despite being one of the oppressed himself, since he was dismissed from all schools after he was found to be a Communist Party member. He looks down on his black young female student, treating her as a sexual object. Nevertheless, he is aware of the feeling of loneliness they both share. As a feminist writer, Marshall uses aging men as symbols of cultural decay; old men who, like Western countries, bathe in past glories. Max is “enabled” by Miss Williams (“What did matter?”, she asks him) to recollect his painful past and to realize that nothing has really mattered since boyhood: he has been indifferent to love, job, family, community, faith, and himself. He is, in fact, an “unabler”, incapable of acknowledging his Jewish cultural roots until he meets Miss Williams. The more aware he becomes of his cultural roots, the weaker he gets, only to become one of the oppressed in the end. Her questions have dealt the severing blow. He is an outcast, aware for the first time in his life of his existence. Eventually, he accepts “his responsibility [...] for all those at last whom he had wronged through his indifference: his father lying in the room of shrouded mirrors, the wives he had never loved, his work which he had never believed in enough and lastly (even though he knew it was too late and he would not be spared), himself” (48).

Unlike him, Miss Williams, although she seems inferior and frail in the beginning as one of the oppressed, eventually proves to be the strong one. She looks at herself through others. She realizes how white people see her, and the racial limitations offered by her parents’ education. The more she thinks about how wrong her parents have been, and what a terrible thing they have done to her, the more she listens to Berman’s life story, the less confused and more self-enabled a woman she becomes. The past offers her the key to a successful future. “I will do something. I don’t know what yet, but something” (45) ... In a way you did me a favor. You let me know how you and most of the people like you – see me,” she says (47). The past and the liminal space help them to reconcile rather than disconnect their mutual cultural exchange. They finally become aware of their selves through questioning the Principle of Alternative Possibilities that asserts that “a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise” (Frankfurt 829).

The end of the story reverses roles. Miss Williams is in full command now when she tells him, serenely and fully enraged, at his country cottage (the liminal space): “Look how I came all the way up here to tell you this to your face. Because how could you harm me? You’re so old, you’re like a cup I could break in my hand” (47). From a woman who has been repeatedly cautioned to be afraid of and not to talk to strangers, either white or darker than the color of her

skin, she realizes now that she is no “more confused, frightened and ashamed...” (47). Her ancestral anger spurs her back to life. Her head lifted no more towards a dark sky, but “as though she carried life” (48). Her head lifted, tremulous with her assurance. “I can do something now! I can begin,” (47) she said with her head poised and self regained. From autumn it turned to summer, the lake, from “so dark and serious-looking” (43), became almost as nice as hers from home. An ironic and pitiless smile was on her face. For the first time in her life, as she confesses, she feels almost brave. He envies her rage, deeper than his, her smile like a knife, her new bravery, “the disgust which he read in her eyes” (46), “the strength which had borne her swiftly through the water earlier” (46).

Both characters experience breakdown and contact at the same time in order to recompose the fragmented whole from oppositions. However, the effect on the two characters is different: Miss Williams ends in rebirth while Max Berman ends in failure. Max Berman, 63, a Jewish teacher, and Miss Williams, a fair-skinned middle-class Southern Black student, are both marginals, i.e. they belong to the group of oppressed people. However, they relocate to a different community (Jewish and Black) and have different cultural experiences (quasi-colonial and double colonial). Listening to each other’s historical colonial past builds arcs of communication between two different, yet similar through oppression, immigrant races – Jewish and Black.

“Bridging” Arcs of Recovery and Reconciliation

Acceptance of the past is indispensable in the process of regeneration. Both of the characters acknowledge and make peace with their past. However only Miss Williams can surface to life again as she affirms, “Maybe in order for a person to live someone else must die” (47), and, thus, only one becomes a positive agent of community through psychic transformation and spiritual reintegration. She is the only one who reaches the desired destination because she first rejects all that seeks to colonize her. She refuses to accept neo-colonialism with its white male dominance. She then subverts the forces neo-colonialism uses (language, history and culture) to reject her identity as a victim.

The end of the story, however, is optimistic. Both characters will gradually move closer to the destination that will dissolve irrelevant cultural differences because it will affirm acceptance of the spiritual origin of the African and/or Jewish diaspora.

The liminal, neutral space or “threshold” that marks the transition from one stage of life to another is visible in the title of the short story as well. “Brooklyn” is the crossroads of many cultures, the “bridge” where cultures meet and people make arcs of reconciliation in an attempt to build “wholeness” out of culturally different fragments. It is the place where Max Berman spent his childhood and also the place where he thinks of returning after meeting Miss Williams. Miss Williams is also born in Brooklyn. They both build these “arcs of recovery” through “bridging”, i.e. connecting through their common cultural experiences. From sharing this colonial cultural experience they connect with their cultural roots and assist regenerative action in each other. Bridging cultures (African, Caribbean, and American), reconciling past and present, oppressors and oppressed, “enablers” and “unablers”, child and adult memories, private and public, personal and communal stories and relationships, through language, as an “arc” of communication, Paule Marshall’s immigrant remakes a cultural whole in which he/she regains spiritual wholeness through identification with original cultural roots. Accordingly, Paule Marshall’s black female characters remake their “psychological wholeness” through identification with African roots whereby they can gain force for the political, social, and economic battles with the white Western civilization.

Bibliography

- Bhaba, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Braithwaite, Edward. "West Indian History and Society in the Art of Paule Marshall's Novel", *Journal of Black Studies* 1.2 (December 1970): 225-238 .
- Bröck, Sabine. "Transcending the 'Loophole of Retreat': Paule Marshall's Placing of Female Generations." *Callaloo* 10.1 (Winter 1987): 79-90.
- Busia, Abena P. A. "What is Your Nation?: Reconnecting Africa and Her Diaspora through Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow". *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989: 196-211.
- Cobham, Rhonda. "Revisioning Our Kumbias: Transforming Feminist and Nationalist Agendas in Three Caribbean Women's Texts." *Callaloo* 16.1 (Winter 1993): 44-64.
- Denniston, Dorothy L. "Early Short Fiction by Paule Marshall". *Callaloo* 6.2 (Spring/Summer 1983): 31-45.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A.C.Mcclurg & Co., 1903.
- Frankfurt, Harry. "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility". *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 829-839.
- Graves, Benjamin. "Homi K. Bhabha: the Liminal Negotiation of Cultural Difference". *Political Discourse - Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism*, 1998.
<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/bhabha/bhabha2.html>
- Kort, Carol. *A to Z of American Women Writers. Facts on File Library of American History*. New York: Facts on File, 2000.
- Marshall, Paule. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. New York: New York Avon, 1959.
- . *Daughters*. New York: Atheneum, 1991.
- . "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen". In *Reena and Other Stories*. Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1983: 3-12.
- . "Merle" in *Reena and Other Short Stories*. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1983: 107-120.
- . *Praisesong for the Widow*. New York: Plume, 1983.
- . *Reena and Other Short Stories*. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1983.
- . "Shaping the World of My Art", *New Letters* 40:1 (October 1973): 97-112.
- . *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*. Chatham, New York: Chatham Bookseller, 1961.
- Pettis, Joyce. *Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995.
- Reyes, Angelina. "Politics and Metaphors of Materialism in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*". *Politics and the Muse: Studies in the Politics of Recent American Literature*. Ed. Adam J. Sorkin. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989: 179-205.
- Schaeffer, Susan Fromberg. "Cutting Herself Free", *New York Times Book Review* 3 (27 October 1991): 3, 29.
- Stoelting, Winifred. "Time Past and Time Present: The Search for Viable Links in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* by Paule Marshall". *CLA Journal* 16.1 (September 1972): 60-71.

Address:

"Petru Maior" University of Tg. Mures
Faculty of Sciences and Letters
Philology Department
1, Nicolae Iorga Street, 540088, Tg. Mures
Mures County
Romania
andastefanovici@yahoo.com