

ABSTRACT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SMITH, CLARA A.

B.A. AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE, 2000

THE BLACK SURROGATE MOTHER

Committee Chair: Susan P. Wright, Ph.D.

Thesis dated December 2011

This study examines the literary depiction of the black surrogate mother as she is created according to the author's race, gender, background, experience, biases and goals. Even though she is one of the most successful and popular characters of fiction, she is also controversial. Her reputation is iconic as well as dichotomous. For example, she is credited for the exemplary upbringing of her white charges, while simultaneously blamed for neglecting her own children.

Particularly, this paper looks at three black surrogate mothers who conform to the prototypical, often stereotypical, image of the black surrogate mother: Mammy, Aunt Mammy Jane, and Dilsey. The critique substantiates that Mitchell and Faulkner, respectively, were invested in depicting Mammy and Dilsey as representatives of the real black surrogate mothers of their lives. Although, the character of Mammy Jane mirrors Mammy and Dilsey in her commitment and devotion to her white family, Chesnutt employs her as a cautionary warning to the blacks who refuse to accept change and progress after Emancipation. The other three black surrogate mothers, Sofia, Berenice, and Ondine, are antithetical to the stereotypical black surrogate mother. Sofia, an accidental maid, is representative of Walker's intense efforts to deconstruct the image of

the black surrogate mother that plagued her throughout her lifetime. Unlike most white authors, McCullers crafts Berenice as independent, strong, and autonomous, not just as a black surrogate mother of a white child. Morrison provides Ondine with a husband and daughter to be concerned with so that she cannot be cast as the stereotypically loving, nurturing black mother of white children.

The conclusion of this study validates that the literary black surrogate mother is most often a creation based upon her author's specific and personal biases and goals. In conjunction with the above assertion, the critique also contends that the real life black domestic has been and will continue to be significantly influenced by her fictional representative.

THE BLACK SURROGATE MOTHER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS

BY

CLARA A. SMITH

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 2011

©2011

CLARA A.SMITH

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend thanks to my thesis director, Dr. Susan Wright, for her consistent and considerate help during the writing of my thesis. In addition, I thank Dr. Viktor Osinubi, my second reader, for support and contribution in helping me complete my thesis. Also, I am appreciative of the kindness and thoughtfulness of Dr. Alma Vinyard throughout my pursuit of my degree at Clark. I also thank my friend, Dorothy McCormick, who encouraged me throughout this educational process. In addition, other friends I would like to recognize are Joycelyn Thomas and Barbara Daniels. Also, I thank Linda Williams, my aunt and a dear friend. Posthumously, I would like to express thanks to my mother and father, Minnie and Obadiah Jones, my aunts, Catherine Haskins and Ina McIntyre. Even though they are no longer physically with me, their encouragement, support and spirits are continually guiding and supporting me. Finally, but of course, not least of all, I would like to thank my husband Wendell and my daughter Kimberly. They have been extraordinarily helpful in every aspect of my pursuit of my master's degree. I am grateful for their actual help, their emotional aid, and their prayers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: MAMMY	3
CHAPTER 3: AUNT MAMMY JANE	11
CHAPTER 4: DILSEY GIBSON	21
CHAPTER 5: SOFIA	30
CHAPTER 6: BERENICE SADIE BROWN	36
CHAPTER 7: ONDINE CHILDS	49
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....	62
WORKS CITED	64

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history and often times in fiction, the black female domestic has been imbued with special and almost mythical powers over the family that she serves. In literary, film, and television depictions, she is often deemed as the one person who can “talk sense” into the irrational teenager or negotiate family arguments while simultaneously maintaining the perfect household so that the mistress of the house can effortlessly take credit for being the “perfect housewife.” To be sure, this character is one of the most multi-faceted and ubiquitous symbols of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction as she has evolved from the mammy to the black surrogate mother.

As the female domestic transformed culturally, she also evolved literarily, becoming the driving force behind some of the works of major authors, usually developing according to the author’s race, gender, personal agendas, life experiences and circumstances (personal and historical). From this vantage point, I will discuss several literary surrogate mothers, including Mammy, in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind*, Aunt Mammy Jane, in Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*, Dilsey Gibson in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Berenice Sadie Brown, in Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*, Sofia, in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, and Ondine Childs, in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*. Though none of these surrogate mothers is

a main character in the novel in which she appears, all of them relate to the overall themes of the novels: they are significant to the development of the plot, playing a role in the twists and turns that lead to the denouements of the works, and they are integral to the development of main characters, often the protagonists. In addition, black surrogate mother characters offer insight into their authors' apparent racial and cultural biases.

In consideration of this fact, this study will include salient biographical information about the author if it furthers the understanding of the black domestic's evolution in American literature.

As mentioned above, the black surrogate mother evolved from the mammy, who, according to literary critic, Trudier Harris, is defined as follows:

Mammies exist as much as a concept in American culture as actual characters in American and African American literature. They may be defined as older black women who have been shaped by a heritage of slavery; from working close to whites in their homes and taking care of their children, they believe that white people are intrinsically superior to black people and that blacks should therefore be subservient to whites.

(474)

Harris's definition serves as a foundation for this study on the evolution of the mammy character in American and African American literature, a study that analyzes the depiction of black surrogate mothers as they conform to or deviate from this image in relation to the biases of the author, the era in which the novel is written and/or set, and the class and cultural environment in which the novel takes place.

CHAPTER 2

MAMMY

Leading the discussion is Mammy from *Gone With the Wind*. Mammy is known by no other name and is given no individual, family or personal history other than her relationship to the O'Hara family, particularly Scarlett O'Hara, the heroine of the book. However, because the book and the subsequent film reaped blockbuster financial success and world-wide fame, Mammy is probably one of the most famous mammy/surrogate mothers in the history of America. Even though the book and the movie are famously known, some might say notoriously so, the following is a short summary: *Gone With the Wind* chronicles the story of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period in Georgia, particularly Atlanta, as it relates to Scarlett O'Hara, a somewhat selfish and determined woman who is the main character of the story. Mammy is considered by the author, Margaret Mitchell, to be the guiding moral and ethical force to Scarlett as she basically forgoes any and all principles in order to survive during and after the war. In all aspects, Mitchell creates a character that becomes the model for future depictions of the black woman as the mainstay of the white mistress and her family, particularly the children. Therefore, she is the literary embodiment of the mammy/surrogate mother that other such characters have been patterned after or against. In addition, the film of the novel provides an indelible visual of this character that has become entrenched in the minds of many, the overweight, bandanna-headed black woman.

Primarily, one of the most visible and repeated literary characteristics of mammies is that, as Harris says, they are “frequently obese women” (474). Other major elements of the depicted character are fierce loyalty and devotion, moral character beyond reproach, and intense love for the white children under their care. Accordingly, Mitchell introduces Mammy as

a huge old woman with the small shrewd eyes of an elephant. She was shining black, pure African, devoted to her last drop of blood to the O’Hara’s, Ellen’s mainstay, the despair of her three daughters, the terror of the other house servants. Mammy was black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high as or higher than those of her owners. She had been raised in the bedroom of Solange Robillard, Ellen O’Hara’s mother, a dainty, cold, high-nosed Frenchwoman, who spared neither her children nor her servants their just punishment for any infringement of decorum. . . Whom Mammy loved, she chastened. And, as her love for Scarlett and her pride in her were enormous, the chastening process was practically continuous. (42-43)

Within one descriptive paragraph, Mitchell ensures that Mammy fulfills the requirements of the mammy/surrogate mother definition on the counts of visibility, loyalty and devotion, and morality. One of the most consistent characteristics of Mammy in American literature is that of her physical description as “huge.” Just as emblematic are the personality traits that Mammy possesses: devout love, strong commitment, and a powerful influence on one or more children within the white household in which

she serves. Throughout the novel Mitchell provides scenes that demonstrate Mammy's love for and yes, her influence, as much as anyone might have, over the selfishly headstrong Scarlett. Mitchell scripts Mammy as a loving, yet wise, caretaker and servant who knows how to placate and cajole Scarlett and even scold her if necessary.

Molly Haskell, renowned feminist film critic, critically discusses the novel and the film in her book, *Frankly, My Dear*. According to Haskell, when it comes to the O'Hara family and, particularly, Scarlett,

Mammy is, of course, the presiding genius, the soul of the family, its jealous guardian, Scarlett's conscience and scold, the only one who understands and stands up to her. She's a conservative force, much like the black housekeeper, cook, and guardian whom Mitchell employed for most of her adult life. . . . (209-210)

Haskell's description of Mammy is generous and conveniently absent of any reference to the forces of slavery that existed during the time; however, it is consistent with the image that Mitchell presented in the novel. This image is responsible for the iconic black surrogate mother that has pervaded American literature and has also significantly influenced the perception of real black women in relationship to their lives and families. As previously mentioned, Mitchell stays on course with the character traits that have defined the black surrogate mother. The following scene depicts several of the emblematic traits of the mammy: strength, influence, and devout commitment. Scarlett announces that she is marrying Rhett Butler, who is considered a reprobate and of low moral character. Undeterred by his reputation of ill repute,

Scarlett does not care about the opinions of others, not about “...what anybody said, except Mammy.” Mammy’s words are the ones that make her most angry and inflict the greatest hurt:

“Ah has seed you do a heap of things dat would hu’t Miss Ellen, did she know. An’ it has done sorrerd me a plen’y. But disyete is de wust yit. Mahyin’ trash! Ah said trash! Doan go tellin’ me he come frum fine folkses. Dat doan mek no diffunce. Trash come outer de high places, same as de low, and he trash.... Ah’s done heshed mah mouf even if Miss Ellen in de Promis lan’ wuz saying’ ‘Mammy, Mammy!’ You ain’ look affer mah chile right! Yas’m, Ah’s stood fer all dat but Ah ain’ gwine stand fer dis, Miss Scarlett. You kain mahy wid trash. Not w’ile Ah got breaf in mah body.” (784)

When Scarlett tells Mammy that she has forgotten her place, adding that she might just give Mammy money and send her back to Tara, Mitchell instills Mammy’s reply with pride:

“Ah is free, Miss Scarlett. You kain sen’ me nowhar Ah doan wanten go. An’ w’en Ah goes back ter Tara, it’s gwine be w’en you goes wid me. Ah ain’t gwine leave Miss Ellen’s chile, an”dar aint no way in de worl’ ter mek me go. An’ Ah ain’ gwine leave Miss Ellen’s gran’ chillum fer no trashy step-par ter bring up, Hyah Ah is and hyah Ah stays!” (784)

Mammy continues telling Scarlett that she, like Rhett Butler, is “nuthin’ but a mule in hawse harness” (784). Fully aware of Scarlett’s stubbornness, Mammy, just as determined, declares,

“Ef you say you gwine mahy him, you gwine do it, cause you is bullhaided lak yo’ pa. But ‘member dis, Miss Scarlett, Ah ain’ leavin’ you. Ah gwine stay right hyah an’ see dis thing thoo’.” Without waiting for a reply, Mammy turned and left Scarlett and if she had said: “Thou shalt see me at Philippi!” her tones could not have been more ominous. (783-785)

Even though the above conversation is somewhat long, its power is best illustrated in Mitchell’s own words. Possibly because of a scene like this, the myth of the mammy/surrogate mother became idealized to its current iconic yet controversial status. Mammy’s unswerving commitment, to Scarlett, her children, and even to her dead mother, validates the theory that she loves them above all others.

There are other scenes just as demonstrative of the stereotypical mammy/surrogate mother; however, the above scene is multi-dimensional in its depiction of the characteristics of loyalty, devotion, love, and high morality. Adding to the significance of the scene is Mitchell’s clear intention of depicting Mammy as the most influential person in Scarlett’s life, especially after the death of her mother. Consequently, as effective as Mammy’s tirade is in conveying these traits of character, Scarlett’s silent anger is poignantly persuasive in convincing the reader of Mammy’s influence over Scarlett. Mitchell is so determined to symbolize Mammy as Scarlett’s surrogate mother

that at the end of the novel, when Rhett leaves Scarlett and Scarlett feels desolate, she rallies when she decides to return to Tara, her home, and Mammy. The two staples combined—Tara and Mammy—symbolize security and hope for Scarlett: she does not need anyone else but Mammy. Thus, Mitchell stations Mammy at the beginning of the book with Scarlett and then strategically instills her in Scarlett's final thoughts at the end of the story:

...And Mammy would be there. Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately as she had wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days.
(186)

How many readers and authors have read this scene, sentimentalized and idealized it, and, to some degree, tried to duplicate it? How many believed that Mitchell's fantasized version of slavery in the South really existed? Although answers to those questions remain unanswered, what is clear is that, in addition to serving as the surrogate mother of Scarlett and enabling her to facilitate her survival after the Civil War, Mammy also represents Mitchell's attempt to redeem the South from its stigma of slavery. According to Micki MeElya, "...the giving and the taking of care, affection, and responsibility, worked to obscure the brutal coercion of slavery" (9). Mitchell did not depict any of the slave owning families as any other way than loving and appreciative of their slaves. Concurrently, Mammy and other slaves were cast as wanting to remain with their former slave masters after Emancipation.

The book, the film, the character, and even the actress, Hattie McDaniel—the first black to win an Academy Award—who brilliantly played the part of Mammy, are revered by some yet attacked by others because of what some categorize as promotion of a racial fantasy and sentimentality that never existed. Unfortunately, McDaniel was attacked by some of the black civil rights leaders of the period because she continued to play only mammy-like characters after receiving the Oscar. Due to a lack of non-stereotypical roles for blacks, McDaniel had no other choice. Because McDaniel had worked as a maid before becoming a successful actress, Pauline Bartel relates, “Comparing the differences in salaries between working as a domestic and portraying one, McDaniel said she much preferred the film work” (44). The film, which is most visual, is itself seventy-one years old, and its impact upon American culture, literature, and the black community continues to resonate in obvious as well as veiled ways. Television and film are both guilty of duplicating the stereotypical image of the black female domestic throughout the twentieth, and even into the twenty-first century; consider, for example, characters such as Nell Carter in *Gimme a Break*, Annie in the 1959 version of *Imitation of Life*, and the Madea character in several of Tyler Perry’s movies. It should be noted that even though Tyler Perry is black, he has had no qualms about perpetuating this negative image of the black woman. From the great financial success that Perry garners from these movies, it seems that instead of protest, he receives support and validation from black people. His audiences seem to accept the stereotypes he presents, seemingly internalizing them as accurate representations. Even though these stereotypical images

evolved from the bias and prejudices of white society, neither Tyler Perry nor his dominant black audience seems to care.

CHAPTER 3

AUNT MAMMY JANE

After the Civil War, ex-slaves began dealing with the problems and difficulties of adjusting to a South that was violently resistant to the changes of Reconstruction. At this point Charles Chesnutt's Aunt Mammy Jane, from his novel *The Marrow of Tradition*, is introduced as the next mammy/black surrogate mother for discussion. Paramount to Chesnutt was his desire to use his writing to illustrate to his white readers the humanity of blacks and to ultimately uplift them in the eyes of white society. In an 1880 journal entry Chesnutt expressed his belief that through a union of the efforts of blacks and literary prowess, eradication of racism, inhumanity and inequality by whites toward blacks could be achieved: "The Negro's part is to prepare himself for recognition and equality, and it is the province of literature to open the way for him to get it—to accustom the public mind to the idea; to lead people out, imperceptibly, unconsciously, step by step, to the desired state of feeling" (xii). Consequently, the author strived through his writing to illuminate blacks as humans with the same feelings, concerns, needs and motivations as whites, believing that with the awareness of these shared human qualities, previously denied equality and justice would be granted to African Americans.

In pursuit of his goal, Chesnutt conceived a character, Aunt Mammy Jane, who mimicked the stereotypical black surrogate mother often created by white authors. *The Marrow of Tradition* is a fictional version of the race riots that occurred in Wilmington,

N.C., in 1898. The riots occurred during post-reconstruction, a time during which whites had become increasingly antagonistic against blacks as some African Americans became elected officials who had authority over whites. Because of this reversal of power, the violence and destruction predicated upon the black community was brutal. Many blacks died or were seriously injured by whites who carefully organized their attack, having been motivated by inflammatory and mutinous newspaper articles and rhetoric.

According to Eric J. Sundquist, “The Wilmington revolution had its roots in the overthrow of Reconstruction in 1877 and the deterioration of black civil rights through legislative and court action, as well as increasing racial violence, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century” (vii-viii). Parallel to the historical and true occurrences of this horrific event, Chesnutt creates a fictional backdrop that approaches the historical facts from a black perspective, providing characters that might be considered oppositional, yet, in some ways, they are congruent. These characters were pivotal in enabling Chesnutt to use one character to placate the white audience while the other would educate and inform.

Mammy Jane is the stereotypical black female domestic who (even during post-Reconstruction) sacrifices all by literally dying for her white family, the Carterets. Even though she is now feeble and old, Mammy Jane, who previously had taken care of Olivia Carteret and her mother, has been called into service to serve a third generation of this family when Olivia’s son Theodore is born. Complicating the story even further, Oliver’s husband, Major Carteret, is one of the three main organizers of the plot to dismantle the freed blacks who have gained economic and political power in Wellington,

N.C. (a fictional name for Wilmington, N.C., the location of the actual race riot). Major Carteret believes that all freed blacks should continue to behave in the vein of the old, compliant, subservient slaves before Emancipation, just as Mammy Jane does. As the consummate stereotypical black mother, Mammy Jane is boastful and eager to resume her duties as servant to Olivia and nursemaid to the baby. In the following scene, Mammy Jane expresses her consuming devotion and commitment to Olivia Carteret, regardless of her old age and infirmities: “. . .Will I come an’ nuss you’ baby? Why, honey, I nussed you, an’ nusse yo mammy thoo her las’ sickness, an’ laid her out w’en she died. I would n’ let nobody e’sse nuss yo’ baby; an’ mo’over, I’m gwine ter come an’ nuss you too” (3).

With these words, Mammy Jane epitomizes not only the stereotypical surrogate mother but also the literary quintessential mammy. In the literal sense, she typifies the female slave who gives her entire being to her “white family”. Even though the novel is placed during post-Reconstruction, Mammy Jane refuses to move forward. She continues to inhabit the mindset of the antebellum black woman, trapped between the oppressive traditions of slavery and less than fully implemented emancipation. For a clear and concise picture of Mammy Jane, one only has to read the narrator’s apt description of her:

She was never lacking in respect to white people of proper quality; but Major Carteret, the quintessence of aristocracy, called out all her reserves of deference. The major was always kind and considerate to these old family retainers, brought up in the feudal atmosphere now so rapidly

passing away. Mammy Jane loved Mrs. Carteret; toward the major she entertained a feeling bordering upon awe. (43)

However, Chesnutt counters this awesome devotion and allegiance of Mammy Jane with the realistically survivalist attitude of the young black nurse who has been hired by the Carterets. The black nurse is a reversed mirror image of Mammy Jane. Interestingly, Chesnutt stages a scene in which Mammy Jane, wanting to make sure that the nurse is dutiful and watchful of the Carteret baby when she is not there, approaches the nurse with unsolicited advice and threatening admonitions concerning the care of the infant:

“Look a-here, gal,” said Mammy Jane sternly, “I wants you ter understand dat you got ter take good keer er dis chile; fer I nussed his mammy dere, an’ his gran’ mammy befor’ ‘im, an’ you is got a priv’lege dat mos’ lackly you don’ ‘preciate. I wants you to ‘member, in yo’ incomin’s an’ outgoin’s, dat I got my eye on you, an’ am gwine ter see dat you does yo’ wo’k right.” (41)

At this point, Chesnutt leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind as to the lengths that Mammy Jane will go to in order to serve the Carterets. She is subservience personified.

Because Chesnutt wants to balance the scales, the nurse’s reaction to Mammy Jane represents the new school of thought for black caretakers. She is neither impressed with nor intimidated by Mammy Jane:

Had this old woman, who had no authority over her, been a little more polite, or a little less offensive, the nurse might have returned her a

pleasant answer. These old-time negroes, she said to herself, made her sick with their slaving over the white folks, who, she supposed, favored them and made much of them because they had once belonged to them—much the same reason why they fondled their cats and dogs. For her own part, they gave her nothing but her wages, and small wages at that, and she owed them nothing more than equivalent service. It was purely a matter of business; she sold her time for their money. There was no question of love between them. (42)

Surely, the nurse is representative of the new black female caretaker who is educated and skillful in her work and is unlike those of the old school such as Mammy Jane who delude themselves into thinking that the white people consider them as “one of the family.”

Consequently, it is because of Mammy Jane’s belief that she is “one of them” that her devotion and commitment extend beyond her concern for the physical care and nurturing of Olivia’s baby, Theodore (Dodie). Having discovered a mole behind the left ear of the baby, Mammy Jane interprets it as a sign of danger to the child’s life. Trudier Harris, author of *From Mammies to Militants*, expounds upon Mammy Jane’s devout sense of dedication to the Carteret family, particularly Dodie:

There is certainly no one like her in her devotion to the child. Noting, for example, that the baby has a slight mole on its neck, just at the point at which a hangman’s noose would take hold, Mammy Jane decides that in spite of the child’s white heritage, which will surely protect it, she still

needs the help of the black conjure woman. She goes to the woman, gets a charm, and buries it in the yard of the Carteret house. She buries, turns, and reburies the charm when little Dodie is about to have an operation; and, after the baby almost falls from a window, she attaches what she considers to be a more potent charm to the child's very crib. (42)

With Mammy Jane's employment of the conjure woman and her charms, Chesnutt clearly illustrates the extreme lengths that she is willing to go to in order to protect her white family: nothing is too much for her to do to ensure the safety of her beloved family. She is so totally enveloped in the past that she actually views the present with scorn and the future with predictable doom. She expresses these feelings as she muses about Janet Miller, the black half-sister of Olivia who is married to the successful black doctor, William Miller. As Mammy Jane watches Janet ride by in her buggy, she comments, "Well, well! Fo'ty yeahs ago who'd 'a' ever expected ter see a nigger gal ridin in her own buggy? My, my! But I don' know, I don' know! It don' look right, an' it ain' gwine ter las'! you can't make me b'lieve" (110).

Again, Harris zooms in on Mammy Jane with an assessment that further validates Chesnutt's depiction of her as the prototypical mammy/black surrogate mother:

Mammy Jane's actions, paradoxically, at once reinforce and give the lie to the myth of the strength of black women. She is strong—fanatical even—in her devotion to and work for whites. Simultaneously, she is weak in identity derived either from pride or from culture or race. The price she pays for being the ideal servant is to become a black-faced

puppet; sadly, she worships the controllers of her strings. She cannot envision change because she can see nothing wrong with her present condition. Total absorption in where she is and total identification with people for whom she works make her the quintessential southern domestic. (44)

The adulation that Mammy Jane feels for the Carterets consumes her whole life—so much so that she answers the call to come to the Carterets and travels during the riots, risking her life and ultimately dying in her efforts to reach Olivia. After her husband cautiously warned her not to go out the day of the riots, Olivia, obviously fearing for Mammy Jane’s safety, sent for her. Not being at home at the time, Mammy Jane missed the messenger; however, she later attempted to go to Olivia. Unfortunately, Mammy Jane never reached her destination. Dr. Miller, in his search for his wife and child, came upon her barely alive body. Mammy Jane, true to her image, even almost in death, calls out to her white mistress, “Comin’, missis, comin!” (296). The narrator elaborates further:

Mammy Jane had gone to join the old mistress upon whose memory her heart was fixed; and yet not all her reverence for her old mistress, nor all of her deference to the whites, nor all their friendship for her, had been able to save her from this raging devil of race hatred which momentarily possessed the town. (296-297)

Actually, Mammy Jane’s last words and to whom she was referring to can be interpreted in one of two ways: Either she is still desperately trying to reach Olivia or

she has realized that she is dying and believes that she is going to ultimately be united with Olivia's mother, her old mistress. However, the narrator does not hesitate to point out that all of her commitment and devotion could not outweigh the display of racism of which even Olivia's husband, Major Carteret, was one of the primary perpetrators. There were no charms to save her as she had provided for Dodie; no one was there to make sure that she was treated as "one of the family." The Major was so engulfed in reclaiming Wellington from the black people that he never gave a thought to Mammy Jane and the other blacks that he considered as "knowing their place". Much too late, after the inflammatory newspaper articles and in the midst of the uncontrollable and brutal riots, Major Carteret discovers that Mammy Jane is one of the victims of the white people's violence. Still incredulous to the inhumanity and cruelty of their actions, he decides Mammy Jane must have been killed accidentally. The major then vehemently proclaims, "I would have defended her with my own life! We must try to stop this thing" (305).

However, the Major's belated protestations and orders to stop the murderous rampage are to no avail and certainly no help to Mammy Jane and the other blacks like her who falsely believed that they occupied a special place in the lives of their former masters and mistresses. Ultimately, the Major felt justified in his and his collaborators' actions:

"Let us leave this inferno, Ellis," said Carteret, sick with anger and disgust. . . . "We can do nothing. The negroes have themselves to blame—they tempted us beyond endurance. I counseled firmness, and

firm measures were taken, and our purpose was accomplished. I am not responsible for these subsequent horrors—I wash my hands of them. Let us go!” (307)

The above scene and the tragically ironic death of Mammy Jane serve as teaching tools employed by Chesnutt to illustrate the disparity existing between the races. Mammy Jane’s feelings of love and reverence for Olivia and the Major were unrequited and their pledges of protection and loyalty to her never materialized. However, she was to the very end the stereotypical mammy because Chesnutt created her purposely to illustrate the mindset and behavior of ex-slaves like her during Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction who simply could not accept the new world of emancipation. But Chesnutt’s characterization of the young, black nurse as a dichotomy to Mammy Jane is also part of his literary vision to use his writing to fight the prejudice and inhumanity perpetrated toward blacks by the white race. Without a doubt, Chesnutt presents Aunt Mammy Jane as many white authors have__subservient, acquiescent, and totally submissive. But he does not allow her to occupy the pages of the story as the lone black female domestic image. By sharing Mammy Jane’s literary page with the young, black nurse, Chesnutt is firmly rebutting the prototypical mammy/surrogate mother while simultaneously promoting the New Negro. Conclusively, Mammy Jane and the young, black nurse are purposefully written as oppositional characters, connecting directly to Chesnutt’s ultimate goal to inspire blacks to strive for racial equality and to illuminate the hearts and minds of whites to accept blacks as human beings deserving of the same treatment and opportunities that they receive.

Definitely, Chesnutt would not have written a Mammy Jane without the young nurse also residing in the story. In concert with this thinking, Harris writes that “Chesnutt . . . was determined to help pave the way for Blacks contemporary with him to gain “recognition and equality” and to level the caste system in America” (xiv). Mammy Jane was placed in the novel to illustrate the compliant, docile, and subservient servants who symbolized those who could not or would not move forward to the present and advance to the future. As Harris states, “Chesnutt did not suffer those lightly who, like his Mammy Jane, did not take advantage of clear opportunity” (xv). Therefore, Chesnutt positions Mammy Jane in *Marrow* as a cautionary warning to blacks who hold tenaciously on to the past, refusing to move forward and falsely believing that their former white owners will always take care of them.

CHAPTER 4

DILSEY GIBSON

Surely, just as dedicated and committed as Mammy Jane is to the Carterets, so is Dilsey Gibson to the Compson family in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. The differences lie in the depiction of the two women and the agenda of the two authors. William Faulkner positions Dilsey as a moral flag bearer. Written in 1927, *The Sound and the Fury* presents Dilsey Gibson as the perfect symbol of the mammy/black female domestic/surrogate mother brought forward into the twentieth century. Again, Faulkner had deep personal reasons that shaped his characterization of Dilsey, just as Chesnutt had his reason for creating Mammy Jane and juxtaposing her with the young, black nurse in *Marrow*. Probably more than those by the other authors chosen for this critique, Faulkner's depiction springs from the heart because Dilsey is a reincarnation of Caroline Barr (Mammy Callie), the real housekeeper and caregiver of the Faulkner children. To understand Faulkner's intense and enduring tie to Mammy Callie, a background of Caroline Barr and her relationship to William Faulkner and his family is required. Phillip Weinstein in his book, *What Else But Love?* provides this information:

Born a slave, the middle aged Mammy Callie joined the elder Faulkners' family when they moved to Oxford in 1902, and she remained as a house servant with the younger Faulkners' family until her death in 1940. Her early role in bringing up the children was second only to Faulkner's

mother's: 'Mother trusted her profoundly,' Faulkner's brother John writes in *My Brother Bill*, 'and we soon learned to mind one of them the same as the other' (48). William Faulkner was five at the time of her arrival, his two younger brothers were three and one, and his tomboy cousin, Sally Murray, was likewise three. The structural resemblance to the Compson family: three boys, one girl, and a black mammy/maid is hardly accidental. (11)

From the above quote, one can clearly glean the similarities between the Faulkner family and their relationship with Mammy Callie and Faulkner's fictional depiction of the Compson family's relationship with Dilsey Gibson. Distinctly, the description of the Compson children's relationship with Mammy Callie is a close parallel to that of the Compson children with Dilsey. Clearly, factors such as his life experiences, his race, and historical and personal circumstances weigh heavily in his characterization of Dilsey as the black surrogate mother. Faulkner's depiction of Dilsey is hauntingly shaped by his persistence to redeem the South after the Civil War and is sentimentally shaded by his desire to memorialize Mammy Callie. Having complete literary license over Dilsey, Faulkner is able to represent her as the cook, the housemaid and, most of all, as the surrogate mother of the Compson children whose own mother Caroline is lacking in performing her motherly duties. Throughout the novel, Dilsey performs faultlessly as the surrogate mother of Quentin, Jason, Caddy and Benjy; even at times putting herself in harm's way.

After the death of Mr. Compson, Jason, the bitter and disillusioned second son

of the family, becomes the provider and, ostensibly, the head of the Compson Family. It is within the context of Jason's role as provider, along with his demeanor of meanness, greed and selfishness that Faulkner establishes Dilsey as the stalwart fictional surrogate mother that has become the iconic character typifying his and some of the other white authors' view of black women working in the homes of white employees with children. The following scene is exemplary of Faulkner's determination to depict Dilsey as the ultimate black mother to the white child. Jason is determined to beat Quentin (his sister Caddy's willful and wayward daughter) and Dilsey is just as determined to stop him. Faulkner permits Jason to recount the incident:

“Dilsey,” Quentin says. “Dilsey.” “I aint gwine let him,” Dilsey says.
 “Don’t worry, honey.” She held to my arm. Then the belt came out and I
 jerked loose and flung her away. She stumbled into the table. She was
 so old she couldn’t do anymore than move hardly. But that’s all right:
 we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant
 tote off. She came hobbling between us, trying to hold me again. “Hit
 me, den,” she says, “ef nothing else but hittin somebody wont do you.
 Hit me.” She says. “You think I wont?” I says. “I don’t put no
 devilment beyond you,” she says. Then I heard Mother on the stairs. I
 might have known she wasn’t goint to keep out of it. I let go. She
 stumbled back against the wall, holding her kimono shut. (116-117)

It is apparent that Jason has no respect or concern for Dilsey. He is willing to beat her in order to beat Quentin. As if on cue, Dilsey conforms to Faulkner's literary

representation of the stereotypical, surrogate mother. Disabled to the point of almost being unable to move, Dilsey is still willing to suffer any physical abuse Jason might inflict on her in order to protect Quentin. But Jason is not moved by Dilsey's motherly consternations and protective actions toward Quentin. He only stops when he hears the presence of his mother on the stairs. Dilsey has no real influence on him. It seems that Faulkner is really negating the theory of the power of the black surrogate mother yet this is not as he and his siblings felt when his brother John wrote of their obedience to Mammy Callie: ". . .and we soon learned to mind one of them the same as we would the other" (Weinstein, 11). Faulkner's brother John seems to imply that they obeyed Mammy Callie the same as they did their mother. Because in reality the Faulkner children did obey Mammy Callie, one might plausibly assume that Dilsey is fictionally symbolic of Faulkner's surrogate mother, Mammy Callie. However, at this time when distinctly clear borders and boundaries existed between blacks and whites, Faulkner does not hesitate to ensure that his readers understand the peripherals within which Dilsey can operate in the Compson family. Even though Dilsey rises to the stereotypical characteristics of her role definitely, she must not have the power actually to stop Jason. Only Mrs. Compson, as a white southern woman, although woefully lacking as a mother, can have that power, not Dilsey, the black housekeeper.

Another contradiction within this relationship of the surrogate black mother/white child evidences as Jason, halted temporarily by the appearance of his mother but undaunted by Dilsey, menacingly threatens Quentin by making sure she knows that this is just a postponement of the inevitable as he does not consider Dilsey

and his mother as formidable foes.

“All right,” I says. “We’ll just put this off a while. But don’t think you can run it over me. I’m not an old woman, nor an old half dead nigger, either. “You damn little slut,” I says. “Dilsey,” she says. “Dilsey, I want my mother.” Dilsey went to her. “Now, now,” she says. “He aint gwine so much as lay his hand on you wile Ise here.” Mother came on down the stairs. “Jason,” she says. “Dilsey.” “Now, now,” Dilsey says. “I aint gwine let him tech you.” She put her hand on Quentin. She knocked it down. “You damn old nigger,” she says. She ran toward the door. (117)

Although Dilsey is willing to become the whipping post in order to protect Quentin, she is rebuffed and insulted by her. Quentin’s harsh dismissal of Dilsey’s motherly attempts puts the reader at bay and causes many questions to arise: What does Faulkner want the reader to make of this? The dialogue between Dilsey and Quentin is very ambiguous. Is the reader to think that Quentin is referring to Dilsey as her mother and is Dilsey responding as such? Is Quentin, the young white girl, unable to accept motherly affection from the black servant? Is Faulkner illustrating the unacknowledged but inevitable conflict that is innately there in this peculiar relationship between the old black female servant and the frustrated young white girl during this time period in the South? The compromises and confusions of relationships between blacks and whites are reflected in Quentin’s ruthless and insensitive rejection of Dilsey’s motherly overtures. Thadious M. Davis discusses the eternally stagnating breach that defines their relationship, regardless of how much Quentin may need Dilsey’s protection:

The girl Quentin in her relationship with Dilsey is Faulkner's most dramatic rendering of duality in a divided world. Her contradictory feelings toward the black servant prevent her from receiving the maternal comfort she seeks. . . Simultaneously, the white girl reaches out to Dilsey as a mother substitute and rejects "the nigger" who could never be her mother. Some part of Quentin is cut off from her immediate emotional response to Dilsey by a detached stereotype of "nigger." Her rebuke reflects the stratification of the world she lives in. The girl is at once strongly attracted to Dilsey's kind support and repulsed by the "old nigger." Despite her adolescent rebelliousness and need for love, Quentin is locked into acceptance of a divided world, which encourages and condones keeping Dilsey in a "nigger's place." (93)

However, Faulkner's personal opinion of Dilsey refutes the concept of Dilsey being negated to a "nigger's place." In an interview, published in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury* with Jean Stein, Faulkner discusses Dilsey: "Dilsey is one of my own favorite characters, because she is brave, courageous, generous, gentle, and honest. She's much more brave and honest and generous than me" (16). But as much as Faulkner expounds on the virtues of Dilsey's honor, bravery, and courage, his valorization of the Southern Tradition in which blacks are inferior and, therefore, must be kept in their place, prohibits him from stripping Quentin of her stereotypical biases or empowering Dilsey to supersede or even parallel Mrs. Compson in authority. Dilsey, even within the pages of Faulkner's imagination, must keep her

place.

The previous scenes validate Dilsey as the prototypical black surrogate mother who is unfailingly there for the Compson children. In this way, she is somewhat similar to Mammy Jane, willing to risk her life for the Compson children. Yet, as accommodating as Dilsey is to the Compsons, there is a part of her life that she holds as private and restricted from, as she refers to them, the “white folks” (Faulkner 185). Clearly, Dilsey does not have autonomy, but she does have an inner sanctum that enables her to endure Jason’s cruelty, Mrs. Compson’s supposed benevolence, and Quentin’s harsh rejection. To offset the invisible but permanent lines of racism that prevent him from allowing Dilsey real authority, power, and/or high regard, Faulkner imbues her with an irrefutably distinguishable sense of self. Through her silent physicality, Dilsey projects a sort of majestic spirituality that reigns supreme over the noise and clamor of her existence in the Compson household.

Dilsey is resplendent with heart and soul. Faulkner has endowed her with these two vital elements in order to achieve his dual purposes of maintaining southern stereotypical images of black people while simultaneously seeking (in order to eradicate his own guilt) to illuminate their humanity.

Consequently, the Easter Sunday church scene becomes one in which a spiritual epiphany provides the basis of Dilsey’s quiet yet determined reconciliation with the past and her recognition of the future. Even though Mrs. Compson allows Dilsey time off to go to church Easter Sunday, Dilsey must take Ben, the retarded son of the Compsons, with her. Nevertheless, Dilsey is enraptured with the sermon:

In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bolt upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered Lamb. As they walked through the bright noon, up the sandy road with the dispersing congregation talking easily group to group, she continued to weep, unmindful of the talk. (185)

As they continue walking, Frony, Dilsey's daughter, starts to talk about the preacher, "He sho a preacher, mon! He didn't look like much at first, but hush! He seed de power en de glory. Yes, suh. He seed hit. Face to face he seed hit" (185). When Dilsey does not say anything, Frony notices the tears streaming down her face:

"Whyn't you quit dat, mammy?" Frony said. "Wid all dese people Looking. We be passin white folks soon." "I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said. "Never you mind me." "First en de last Whut?" Frony said. "Never you mind," Dilsey said. "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin." (185)

Through the above scene, Dilsey is elevated from being the stereotypical black surrogate mother to the mythical one, the black person who sustains and endures all through religious and spiritual recompense. Dilsey is so moved that she does not care about her daughter Frony's warnings to stop crying because they will soon be coming in contact with the "white folks" (185). She is above them, all of them, Jason, Mrs. Compson and any other whites because she is empowered by the spirit of her faith. What does her portentous statement, "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de ending" mean?

Possibly with all the previous events that morning with Jason, Quentin, and Mrs. Compson, she is thinking about having been with the Compsons from the beginning and now she sees the imminent ending of this gradually decaying Southern family. In this scene the reader is made privy to the private and personal Dilsey. She has Ben with her so she is still the fully committed surrogate mother to her white ward. Yet another element of Dilsey emerges as a spiritual reverence takes over and consumes her to the point that she seems oblivious to the sufferings and travails of her life. She is reverently moved by the preacher's Easter Sunday sermon of the resurrection of Jesus. Faulkner wants the reader to understand how the old black woman can stand up to Jason, can persevere under the complaints and irritations of Mrs. Compson, and withstand the rebuffs of Quentin. Having witnessed the validation of Dilsey's morality, strength, and bravery through the church service, the reader can now accept her as the mythical black surrogate mother whose humanity and morality overwhelm the negative stereotypical image.

CHAPTER 5

SOPHIA

The characteristics of awesome reverence, blind devotion, and undying allegiance used to define Mammy Jane and Dilsey as black surrogate mothers are strongly resisted by Alice Walker as she creates the antithetical black surrogate mother. Sofia, of Walker's *The Color Purple*, belies the image of the prototypical black surrogate mother and is given the voice and autonomy to express her sentiments concerning this iconic literary and real figure of society. Again, the purpose of the author, his/her personal connection, and ultimate goal figure prominently in the creation of the character.

Influenced by the negative images and connotations of the black woman in her childhood and throughout her adult life, Walker's characterization of Sofia is shaped by her desire to debunk these stereotypes that she feels have permeated throughout time, society, and circumstance. In her book, *Anything We Love We Can Save*, Walker tells of the enduring consequences of the Mammy/Aunt Jemima/Surrogate mother stereotypical image:

Through the years, because of the unspoken connection I felt between Aunt Jemima, "Mammy," and my mother, I struggled with this image. For generations in the South it was the only image of a black woman that was acceptable. You could be "Aunt Jemima, sexless and

white-loving, or you could be unseen. There were Aunt Jemima dolls sprawled in shops where black women could not try on dresses. There were ashtrays, cookie jars, lemonade dispensers. Everywhere you looked, that open, beaming fat black face. Guileless. Without any attempt to fool you. Here I am, the smile said. I will neither reject not judge you. After all, I am yours. (138)

From the above quote, one can easily glean Walker's intense desire to create a character such as Sofia, an antithetical black surrogate mother. Therefore, she devises a plot in which Sofia's evolvment as a domestic maid is accidental as she deliberately charts a course to rebut the stereotypical, negative image that ubiquitously plagued her throughout her life. Sofia is not and has never been a maid. Because her identity is as a wife and mother, when the mayor's wife asks Sofia if she would like to become her maid, she feels insulted. She answers the mayor's wife with a resounding "hell, no." Then when the mayor asks her what she just said to his wife, she repeats it. It is at this point that the mayor slaps Sofia, provoking her to defend herself and hit him back. She was then incarcerated for this so-called "crime" and only released on the provision that she was to work for the mayor's wife as her maid.

Ironically, as a result of Sofia's forced employment with the mayor's family, his daughter, Eleanor Jane, grows up feeling very close to Sofia. In fact, when Eleanor Jane met her future husband, she took her fiancé to Sofia's house to introduce him to her. To her, Sofia mattered. Celie wrote about the meeting in one of her letters to her sister Nettie:

“Sofia raise me, practically,” say Miss Eleanor Jane. “Don’t know what we would have done without her.” “Well, say Stanley Earl, everybody round here raise by colored. That’s how come we turn out so well.” He wink at me, say, “Well, Sugar Pie, to Miss Eleanor Jane, time for us to mosey along.” (262)

This dialogue establishes two of the premises associated with the black surrogate mother: often times the white child really has sincere feelings for the black domestic, and it is pretty much a foregone conclusion that these colored women do usually raise the white children. Additionally, a third aspect of this conversation may be gathered from Stanley Earl’s wink at Celie. He assumes complicity with Celie concerning the role of African American domestics. Stanley Earl thinks that Celie will be flattered when he says black women are the reason that white children are so well brought up. In a way, he is simultaneously including Celie and all other black women while giving no special significance to the relationship of Eleanor Jane and Sofia.

Yet Eleanor Jane grew up loving and depending on Sofia, truly believing that Sofia had the same love for her and her child. She believed that their relationship was special and unique. However, in the following scene, Sofia refutes the notion of her loving Eleanor Jane’s baby, resisting even Eleanor Jane’s tears:

“No, ma’am, say Sofia. I do not love Reynolds Stanley Earl. Now that’s what you been trying to find out ever since he was born. and now you know. . .” Eleanor Jane start to cry. She always have felt something for Sofia. If not for her, Sofia never would have survived

living in her daddy's house. But so what? Sofia never wanted to be there in the first place. Never wanted to leave her own children. (264)

Sofia's admission that she does not love Eleanor Jane's little baby is more than Eleanor Jane can bear. She immediately tries to find reasons to deny Sofia's true feelings for the child. She says it is because he looks like her father who is responsible for Sofia's incarceration and time away from her own children. Eleanor Jane pleadingly continues about the way other colored women always say they love the children of their white employers. She is puzzled by Sofia's reaction to Reynolds Stanley Earl, "I don't understand. . . All the other colored women I know love children. The way you feel is something unnatural" (265). Sofia feels compelled to explain her feelings in detail:

"I love children, . . . But all the colored women that say they love yours is lying. They don't love Reynolds Stanley any more than I do. But if you so badly raise as to ast 'em. What do you expect them to say? Some colored people so scared of white folks they claim to love the cotton gin." (265)

Eleanor Jane is so stunned at Sofia's disavowal of love for her child, she cannot accept it as truth. Her mind races, stretches, and grasps at anything to assure herself that even though Sofia says she does not love Reynolds Stanley, she must surely love her. Then Eleanor Jane talks about how she feels that Sofia is the only person who has ever loved her, having not felt loved by her mother or father. Again, when Sofia refuses to accept that honor or burden and tells her that now she has a husband to love her, Eleanor Jane dismisses him as loving "nothing but the cotton gin" and "playing poker with the

boys” (266). Now Sofia, like a dam let loose, refuses to show sympathy or feeling for Eleanor Jane and her plight. She tells her to leave her husband, move away to Atlanta, and get a job. Of course, this suggestion is so foreign to Eleanor Jane that she is rendered speechless.

Walker uses the above scene to illustrate her concept of the true feelings of many so-called black surrogate mothers. She, unlike Faulkner, and some other Southern white writers, is not invested in aiding and abetting Southern whites in eradicating feelings of guilt for centuries of slavery and its aftermath. Black surrogate mothers have been working and performing their jobs to the best of their abilities in order to survive, doing what they must do to make a living. With the creation of Sofia, Walker begins the process of redefining the often falsely presented image of the black female domestic in literature and film. Through Eleanor Jane’s consistent pleas for reciprocal love from Sofia for her and her son, Walker demonstrates the special feelings and attachment that the white child might have for the surrogate mother.

Yet, because Walker feels committed to dismantling centuries of appropriated stereotypes of this character and false depictions and portrayals of the real life domestic black woman, she does not allow Sofia to become waylaid with concern for Eleanor Jane’s feelings. Uppermost is the staunch declaration from Sofia, disclaiming any special love for Eleanor Jane and her son. Because of Walker’s “struggle with these images,” she permits Sofia to cite only a general love for children to Eleanor Jane, not a specific love for her as a child or for Eleanor Jane’s child (260). Walker deconstructs the false images created by some white authors, even the one rendered by Charles Chesnutt.

CHAPTER 6

BERENICE SADIE BROWN

Not all white authors have written black female domestics as “mammies” or surrogate mothers. And some who have depicted black women in these roles, have depicted them as strong, independent, and autonomous. Berenice Sadie Brown, in Carson McCullers’ novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, is a prototype of this type of surrogate mother character created by a white author.

As there is no other adult female in the Addams household, it is evident that Berenice functions in the dual roles of housekeeper and surrogate mother. She was hired as cook and housekeeper by Mr. Addams because Mrs. Addams died during childbirth when Frankie was born. With no other adult woman there, Berenice evolves into the role of surrogate mother to Frankie, a twelve year old girl who stands shakily on the brink of adolescence.

The story takes place in a small southern town during World War II. Frankie feels lonely and excluded. She desperately wants to belong to and be a part of something. The narrator says, “She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world ” (3). When her brother, Jarvis, announces his wedding date to his fiancé, Janice, through Frankie’s imaginary reveries, she becomes a part of their relationship. There is a week before the wedding and during that time Frankie assumes the persona of F. Jasmine Addams, a means by which she daringly (yet sneakily) embarks upon excursions to the

more seedy area of town. Symbolically noting the transformation of Frankie from childhood to adolescence, McCullers gives Frankie three names to denote the different stages of her rapid development during this period: Frances (her given name), Frankie (her nickname), and F. Jasmine (her assumed persona). The absence of the mother and any other dominant adult female in the household signals the cue for the entrance of Berenice as the black surrogate mother. Yet McCullers creates a dichotomy here that establishes Berenice as one of the few, if not only, antithetical black surrogate mothers created by a white author.

In some ways, Berenice's role is somewhat restricted as the surrogate mother and instead is more like that of a confidante/advisor to Frankie. Margaret B. McDowell explicitly describes Berenice as a most unique and multi-faceted character who, due to her creator, defies the "mammy" image:

Berenice is at different times the affectionate or stern mother, the primitive seer, and the black queen who once lived with her dream-lover, Ludie Freeman, in a beautiful land of ice and snow. In her perception of herself, Berenice possesses an even broader range of identities: the grieving widow, the insulted divorcee, the battered and disfigured wife, woman fearful of aging, the exploited black servant, the woman who greatly enjoys sex, and the perennially hopeful bride (81).

From the offset, McDowell's analysis of Berenice presents an image that is antithetical to the prevailing, iconic surrogate mother depiction. McDowell's use of the phrase "perception of herself" is an anomaly when discussing most fictional black

surrogate mothers; rarely, do authors endow them with thoughts and actions concerning themselves, their families, and their world. Rebutting the disempowerment of blacks, McCullers empowers Berenice, allowing her to be dominant, yet flawed, in her relationship with Frankie. Although Berenice and Frankie's relationship reflects an unusual laxness, it is traditionally cohesive. Illustrating this unique relationship, McCullers permits discussions between the adolescent Frankie and the middle-aged black maid that might not be considered the norm. It is because of this looseness of their relationship that Frankie is allowed to talk to Berenice in the manner that she does and about some of the topics that she discusses with her and vice-versa. For example, Berenice has confided to Frankie about her past four marriages and especially the one love of her life, her first husband, Ludie Freeman. He and Berenice were happily married for nine years and lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, until Ludie became ill and died. Afterwards, Berenice remarried three times but each husband seemed worse than the one before, indicating to the reader that no man can replace Ludie in Berenice's life.

Confiding to Frankie (F. Jasmine), Berenice tells her the reason she will never marry again, even though she has finally found a decent man. This scene (nuanced and explicit) is illustrative of the unique connection between the woman and the girl, definitely defying the average black surrogate mother/white child relationship:

"Sometimes I almost wish I had never knew Ludie at all," said Berenice.

"It spoils you too much. It leaves you too lonesome afterward. When you walk home in the evening on the way from work, it makes a little lonesome quinch come in you. And you take up with too many sorry

men to try to get over that feeling.” “I know it,” F. Jasmine said. “But T. Williams is not sorry.” (88)

When F. Jasmine asks Berenice if she will marry T.T., Berenice goes on to talk about T.T being such a fine gentleman; however, she declares that she will never marry him because, “...he don’t make me shiver none” (89).

The above conversation between Berenice and F. Jasmine, substituting for Frankie, reads so matter-of-factly that McCullers deflates the familiar and usual stereotypical image of the surrogate mother. Berenice has obviously forgotten or does not care that she is talking to a twelve year old child. McCullers has allowed her to become so immersed in her concerns that she talks about things that adults do not discuss with children, such as getting shivers from being with a man. The mammy image is not intact here. At this point, McCullers dismantles that image, taking the reader beyond the borders that characterized traditional literature of this fixed relationship. Because she wants Berenice to have an outlet that is not usually afforded to the domestic, McCullers creates a uniquely reciprocal union, one in which both Frankie and Berenice obtain what each one needs in a positive way. In this unusual dialogue between Berenice and Frankie, the scales are imbalanced; to a certain extent, they are tipped in Berenice’s favor. Does Frankie, as a twelve year old, (even as F. Jasmine) understand the meaning of “shivers?” Whether she does or not is irrelevant to Berenice because the conversation with Frankie provides her with an opportunity to discuss her feelings, to vent about things that she possibly would not feel free discussing with someone else.

One thing in particular here, Berenice does not have to worry about Frankie

betraying her confidence to someone else. By the same token, McCullers also allows Frankie to derive something from the conversation. Either she does not understand the meaning of “shivers” or she does not care because she goes on to appropriate it in a personal way, to suit her own needs, such as relating it to the recent death of her Uncle Charles.

After a moment, F. Jasmine said: “To think about the wedding makes me shiver.” “Well, it’s a pity,” said Berenice.

“It makes me shiver, too, to think about how many dead people I already know. Seven in all,” she said. “And now Uncle Charles.” (89)

In addition to McCullers writing Berenice and Frankie at times as mutual confidantes, she uses Berenice as a literary symbol of the disenfranchisement and isolation of blacks. As such a symbol, Berenice is written as Dilsey’s polar opposite when comparing the two as black surrogate mothers. Whereas Faulkner insists that Dilsey, along with her motherly and domestic depiction, represent the redemption of the Compson family and the South, McCullers positions Berenice as a human commentary on the plight of the lonely, alienated, and isolated people of society, particularly blacks. For example, during a dramatic episode with F. Jasmine in which Berenice has subdued Frankie after she becomes hysterical about the narrowness of identities and a person’s inability to move from the limiting identity of one’s birth, Berenice tells Frankie, “We all of us somehow got caught. We born that way and we don’t know why. But we caught anyhow” (113).

McCullers also positions John Henry (Frankie’s six year old cousin) as a child

who seems to transcend the parameters of age. When she situates him in the scene, McCullers crafts an oddly congruent triumvirate that works for this relationship. As Berenice continues to discuss this unavoidable entrapment of life, she talks about the uniqueness and aggravated degree to which blacks are trapped. John Henry, as the inquisitive, seemingly mature beyond his age boy, evokes even more opportunities for Berenice to be reflectively conversational about the status of blacks. When John Henry asks why it is worse for her than Frankie and him, Berenice answers:

“Because I am black,” said Berenice. “Because I am colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done drawn completely extra bounds around colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner off by ourself. So we caught that first way I was telling you, as human beings is caught. And we caught as colored people also . . . Sometime it just about more than we can stand.” (113-114)

Berenice’s words illustrate Carson McCullers as a Southern white female writer during the 1940s affording a black female domestic character the agency to comment about the inherently unique hardships of being black. Dilsey is never given the chance to express any feelings about the troubles of her life as they are innately related to her race. Even the church scene cannot be solely about her life outside of the Compsons; she must take Ben with her as if she must forever maintain her connection to him in order to validate her existence. If Dilsey cannot be seen as the loving and nurturing mammy, then she cannot be seen at all. On the other hand, McCullers clearly intends Berenice as the opposite of the “mammy” image, giving her a life and family that are

integral to her existence, her survival as a human being.

Thadious Davis describes Berenice this way:

This Berenice in the novel is a woman with a fixed “we of me,” which Frankie envies. Berenice has a life of her own outside the Adams household; she has family and a suitor, her organizations and church. She has a social life in which she, T.T. and Honey go out to supper at the New Metropolitan Tea Room. She is secure in her sexual identity, as her revelations about marriage and the treatment of women and wives illustrate. (100)

A woman such as Davis describes does not meet the requirements of the black surrogate mother. McCullers strikes down the stereotypes of this literary character by allowing the reader to be privy to Berenice’s personal life away from the Adams household. What is the motivation of McCullers in creating this unique black female character, one who definitely stood out as different, especially during the forties? The creation of Berenice might be a reflection of McCullers’ desire to illuminate the injustices and inequalities and, if possible, to give voice to those who suffer from these wrongdoings. This resonates particularly with her view of southerners and their role in the oppression and disenfranchisement of blacks. Virginia Spencer Carr, in her book entitled *Understanding Carson McCullers*, quotes McCullers as she expresses herself concerning the complicity of Southerners:

The human heart is a lonely hunter___ but the search for us Southerners is more anguished. There is a special guilt in us. . . a consciousness of guilt

not fully knowable or communicable. Southerners are the more lonely and spiritually estranged, I think, because we have lived so long in an artificial social system that we insisted was natural and right and just—when all along we knew that it wasn't. (Carr, 17)

Consistent with the thesis that the authors' personal feelings, beliefs and opinions contribute greatly to their creations of the black surrogate mothers, the above words of McCullers provide a window into her motivations for writing *Berenice* as a black who could, in her own voice, inform society, especially the South, of its complicity in this unnatural and unjust social system. Giving literary voice and autonomy to her black characters, McCullers illustrates them as complex, frustrated humans who struggle to be free from their inborn prisons, like any other human being. Her efforts to literarily right these wrongs did not go unnoticed by black authors such as Richard Wright.

After reading McCullers' debut novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Wright was struck by McCullers' "astonishing humanity" and thought "that as a white writer, she wrote "Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race" (195). Wright's assessment of McCullers specifically illuminates her distinction as a white author who has the ability to balance the good and bad of blacks and whites. Along with her innate sense of concern for all disenfranchised, she realizes that the intensity of being alienated is heightened for blacks.

Therefore, McCullers, intent on creating black characters as described by Wright, refuses to allow *Berenice* to be the prototypical black surrogate mother. Not allowing

Berenice and Frankie's relationship to mirror those of the typical black female domestic and the white child, McCullers creates a bond between the two that involves nuances and depths that are absent from similar relationships as they are written by most white authors.

McDowell discusses the uniqueness of the relationship, one that is not all sweetness and light:

Though Frankie and Berenice experience similar fears and hopes, they often become extreme antagonists. Their differences are as great as their similarities. In the relationships existing between the two women, McCullers can dramatize most effectively the conflicts between black and white, between old and young, and even between mother and daughter. . . . McCullers goes beyond the two individuals to show the violent and complex conflicts both women experience within themselves.

(86)

It is noteworthy that McDowell refers to Berenice and Frankie as "the two women." To some degree, McCullers has convinced McDowell that Frankie, who is only twelve years old, should be perceived as an adult woman equal to Berenice.

Perhaps this characterization might emanate from the unique dialogue, which is sometimes hostile, often bold and even shocking at times. For example, the following scene is illustrative of the multi-textured conversations between the two. Berenice is teasing Frankie about having a crush on her brother and his fiancé. She continuously sang: "Frankie got a crush" (35). When Frankie demands that she stop,

Berenice continues and the situation becomes even more hostile and dangerous when Frankie threateningly picks up a knife. After a back and forth volleying of words, Berenice ordering Frankie to put the knife down and calling Frankie “devil,” Frankie finally carefully throws the knife down, barely missing Berenice. Such a scene gives testimony to McCullers’ persistent and continuous refusal to allow Berenice to be automatically lumped with other literary black surrogate mothers.

Berenice’s teasing of Frankie about having a crush on her brother and his fiancé is not typical, surrogate mother behavior. When she refuses to stop after she knows that she is annoying and possibly hurting Frankie, Berenice’s actions can be construed as petty and juvenile. Definitely, the relationship between Berenice and Frankie can sometimes be characterized as paradoxically orthodox because there are times when the natural order of age, race and circumstance supersede any other aspects of their relationship. The reality of Berenice taunting Frankie conflicts with the image of the loving black surrogate mother or any mother for that matter yet there are other scenes in which Berenice does exhibit motherly concern for Frankie. One in particular occurs when Frankie, anxious and hysterical, wildly starts running around the kitchen table with a knife in her hand. Berenice tries to verbally stop her. Unable to do that, she finally subdues Frankie by seizing her by her petticoat. Berenice then anxiously checks to see if Frankie has a fever and asks her if she is sick. Frankie responds as F. Jasmine:

“Sick?” asked F. Jasmine. “Who, me?”

“Set here in my lap,” said Berenice. “And rest a minute.”

F. Jasmine put the knife on the table and settled down on

Berenice's lap. She leaned back and put her face against Berenice's neck; her face was sweaty and Berenice's neck was sweaty also, and they both smelled salty and sour and sharp. (112-113)

As the scene continues, Frankie settles down from Berenice's displays of concern and affection. John Henry, enviously attempts to nudge himself in Berenice's embrace also: "He put his arm around Berenice's head and held on to her ear. Then after a moment he tried to push F. Jasmine out of her lap, and he pinched F. Jasmine with a mean and tiny little pinch" (113). When he is chastised by Berenice to "Leave Frankie alone," (113), he claims to be sick, too. However, Berenice, clearly intent on demonstrating her love and concern for Frankie, admonishes John Henry: "Now no, you ain't. Be quiet and don't grudge your cousin a little bit of love" (119).

At this point in the story, McCullers wants Berenice to epitomize the black surrogate mother and she does so in full iconic dress. Not only is Frankie in need and desirous of her love, but so is John Henry. McDowell elaborates further on this scene:

Berenice's behavior toward Frankie is characterized as much by her shouting "Devil" at Frankie as by inviting Frankie to climb into her lap when she feels most alone. . . McCullers' "precision and balance" lie also in this skilled fusion of opposing emotions, like love and anger, which characterize the relationship throughout the book between Frankie and Berenice...(86)

By instilling dichotomies within the traditional, McCullers rejects the prototypical surrogate mother image. However, the movie and stage production

of the book did present Berenice (with Ethel Walters portraying her) as more of the stereotypical surrogate mother. In fact, according to McDowell, “Ethel Walters may have brought Berenice in the stage play and motion picture too close to the “Mammy” stereotype, for McCullers’ conception of her is much more complex” (86).

At the end of the novel, the wedding has occurred and Frankie is disappointed because she does not join her brother and his new wife on their honeymoon and their new life as husband and wife. She is desolate and runs away. After she is located by the police and returns home, McCullers allows her to deal with her disappointment. As school begins, Frankie seems to naturally and effortlessly arrive at her normal teenage destination of puberty. She meets a new friend and begins to adjust to seventh grade in the A section. However, she is sad and confused about John Henry’s sudden sickness and eventual death from meningitis. Ultimately, Frankie and her father move to the suburbs to live with relatives. Berenice, also, is gravely grieved over the death of John Henry and simultaneously has to contend with the imprisonment of her foster brother, Honey. Yet, above all, Berenice is a survivor. Although grief-stricken and frustrated, she does not bow to her negative circumstances. McCullers continues to endow her with decision making prowess so Berenice decides not to follow the Addams family to their new home as a housekeeper. She chooses to marry T. T., compromising between her individual autonomy and settling for a good man even though he does not give her “shivers” (89).

In reviewing *The Member of the Wedding*, the reader cannot deny that Frankie is the main character of the story, yet McCullers posits Berenice as a main supporting

character who is proactive in her own life. She is not passive as Mammy Jane is, only reacting in ways that affect her life with the Carterets. Nor is her existence only validated by her relationship with the Adamses as Dilsey is mainly there to verify the past, present and uncertain future of the Compsons. Consequently, because of McCullers' desire to achieve some sense of equality for those that she considers "fringe" characters, Berenice defies the stereotypical image that other white authors so vividly have portrayed.

CHAPTER 7

ONDINE CHILDS

Toni Morrison, strongly invested in debunking the stereotypical image of the black surrogate mother, created the character of Ondine Childs in *Tar Baby*. Morrison presents Ondine as the antithesis of the mammy images of Chesnutt's Aunt Mammy Jane and Faulkner's Dilsey Gibson, particularly when Ondine is compared with Dilsey. The two characters are worlds apart in several ways: first, Ondine is located on a Caribbean Island during the early seventies. Other than approximately fifty years time separating Dilsey and Ondine, there are other differing factors that distinctly set these characters apart as black surrogate mothers. There is no doubt that the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties has had an affect on Morrison's depiction of Ondine. Therefore, a character created by a Southern white male (Faulkner) endlessly lingering in the space and time of the antebellum South would definitely differ from one created by a black female author (Morrison) invested in rescuing black female domestics from the suffocating and enduring negative image of the mammy/surrogate mother to white children.

Pursuing that end, Morrison positions Ondine and Sydney (Ondine's husband) as servants in residence at the Caribbean island home of their employers, Valerian Street and his younger wife Margaret. Valerian is a wealthy transplant from Philadelphia who has employed the Childs for decades. The Streets have a son, Michael, who after becoming an adult, leaves home and is estranged from his parents because as later

revealed, he was physically abused by his mother.

Ondine, in possibly her most overt act of surrogacy motherhood, cared for the child during these abuses. However, she cloaked this knowledge in a shroud of secrecy and never revealed it to anyone, not even telling Margaret that she was aware of her abusive treatment of her son. The revelation of this secret becomes one of the most explosive scenes in the novel and one which Morrison deftly employs to illustrate her commitment to limiting Ondine as the prototypical surrogate mother.

Like the previous authors, Morrison had her own personal bias and reason for creating a black female domestic character in the likes of Ondine Childs. For Morrison, it seems that her aim was to definitely refute the stereotypical image that pervaded and intruded upon the black community for decades. Because her own mother was a maid, Morrison invests personally in the creation of Ondine to diffuse the surrogate mother image. In the case of Ondine, Morrison erects several stop signs in order to ensure that Ondine is not perceived as the prototypical black surrogate mother: First, she provides her with a husband, not just a husband such as Dilsey has in *Roskus*, one who is ineffectual and less emphatic than Dilsey, but a viable husband, one who is protective and nurturing of Ondine. Sidney Childs is the antithesis of Roskus Gibson. His relationship with his wife is intimate and cohesive. In a 1983 interview with Nellie

McKay from *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, Morrison discusses the inner dynamics of Ondine and Sydney's relationship:

I like the relationship between Sydney and Ondine. He is, in the jargon of the seventies, a good old Uncle Tom. But I feel enormous respect for him.

He is not befuddled and confused about who he is. And when all the world seems as though it is horrible, he takes over. He does not want to do so, but if Valerian is not going to run things, he will. There is the touching and tenderness between him and his wife. They have an abiding trust in one another. . . Sometimes we have perfect conversations, as with Sydney and Ondine. They don't have to feed each other sentences.

(McKay, 148-149)

Morrison demonstrates her belief in Sydney's ability to assume authority when things go awry, such as the explosive incident on Christmas day that ensued when Valerian fired the couple Sydney and Ondine hired as helpers. Sydney and, especially, Ondine are upset that they were not even consulted concerning the firing of the couple. Valerian is outraged at the very thought that he must defer to Ondine, ". . . All of a sudden I'm beholden to a cook for the welfare of two people she hated anyway? I don't understand" (207). Ondine's response to Valerian defied her stereotypical status, "I may be a cook, Mr. Street, but I'm a person too" (207). On cue, Sydney becomes only Ondine's husband and protector. He is no longer Valerian's longtime, loyal employee. He is exclusively Ondine's husband, taking charge: "Mr. Street," said Sydney, "my wife is as important to me as yours is to you and should have the same respect" (207).

The rendering of Sidney as an enabling and loving black man aids Morrison in her rebuttal of Ondine as the surrogate mother. For there is another legacy which evolves from the mammy/black female domestic/surrogate mother phenomenon: the black woman's supposed emasculation of the black man. Lisa M. Anderson

discusses some of the lasting elements due to this prevailing image of black women, especially as it has populated the symbol of the “mammy/surrogate mother” as a cultural, racial and political influence. She comments on a report which was done by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan that left a lasting and negative effect on black women because they were cast as the reason for the failure of the race, and particularly the failures of black men:

Moynihan’s characterizations of black women as matriarchs and emasculators in league with white men influenced the black men who were coming to power. Moynihan’s report played on the black and white patriarchal fears of the nascent women’s movement. . . The matriarch described in the report recalled these old white stereotypes of black women. The mammy became the matriarch incarnate, invoking images of McDaniel and Beavers. Black women’s work outside the home, previously valued as a contribution to the household, allegedly eroded the black man’s sense of manhood. Any images of black women that contradicted those perpetuated by the dominant culture were obscured, if not silenced; some of them had been lost over the years. (23)

Before they were characteristically dismantled by Moynihan’s report, these women were lauded as the stewards of their families, community, and race. By necessity, they were the main economical support of their families because for many years segregation and discrimination prevented black men from working in the homes of white employers. After Moynihan’s report, black women acquired another burden to

carry because the report blamed them for the failure of black men, and ultimately for the failure of the black community. Morrison contradicts this stereotype by presenting Ondine and Sidney as a couple in unison with Sydney and Ondine both working and providing for their family.

However, there is one aspect of Morrison's portrayal that conflicts with the anti-black surrogate mother image__the domain of the kitchen. The previous scene continued to the point that Ondine felt that the whole incident initiated over the fact that Margaret wanted to bake apple pies for her son Michael who was coming home for Christmas. However, the glitch occurs when the island couple hired by Ondine and Sydney as extra help steal apples and Valerian fires them without consulting Ondine and Sydney. Ondine is upset and when Sydney defends Ondine to Valerian, demanding that she is granted respect the same as Margaret, Ondine angrily shouts, "More," I should have more respect. "I am the one who cleans up her s--t!" (207).

When both Sydney and Valerian in utter shock, call her name in unison and Valerian exclaims "This is impossible!" (207), Ondine becomes even more enraged, shouting:

"I'll tell it, . . . Don't push me, I'll tell it. . . I'll tell it. She wants to meddle in my kitchen, fooling around with pies. And my help gets fired!" "*Your* kitchen? *Your* help?" Valerian was astonished.

"Yes, my kitchen and yes my help. If not mine, whose?"

"You are losing your mind!" shouted Valerian.

Ondine was fuming now. "The first time in her life she tries

to boil water and I get slapped in the face. Keep that bitch out of my kitchen. She's not fit to enter it. She's no cook and she's no mother." (207)

As much as the above scene is explosively revealing of Ondine's territorial feelings about the kitchen, it is also acutely conflicting with the original depiction of Ondine as the antithetical black domestic/surrogate mother. Why does Morrison back track and depict Ondine as the black maid who claims authority over the kitchen? For decades, the kitchen, more than any other room in the master's/employer's house has been regarded as the domain of the black domestic/cook. Does Morrison put stock in this particular stereotype that has significantly contributed to the lingering image of the black maid/black surrogate mother? Or does she cleverly maneuver the concept in order to enhance her depiction of Ondine as the antithetical domestic/surrogate mother? Possibly, in order for Ondine to verbally stand up to her white employer, she must be invested in a sense of ownership of the kitchen that really belongs to Valerian, not her. Therefore, Morrison uses one stereotype to refute another one.

Because Ondine is so incensed about Margaret invading *her* kitchen, she abandons all employee protocol when she orders Valerian to keep Margaret out of *her* kitchen. As she does so, the image of the loving, obedient black domestic fades into the background and Ondine takes center stage as the antithetical black surrogate mother/domestic image. Had she not been so empowered in her belief that the kitchen was truly *her* kitchen, she might not have risked her job. She risked her job by speaking up to Valerian and by finally revealing Margaret's abuse of her child.

Another stop sign erected by Morrison to prevent the characterization of Ondine as the stereotypical surrogate mother is the omission of children as present, ongoing characters in the story. In the present ongoing plot, Michael has left home and there are no children interacting with Ondine. She deals with only adults, the Streets, Valerian, and Margaret. However, Ondine does not permit Margaret to be the recipient of the usual benefits and spoils that the white woman gains from the surrogate mother: accommodation, comfort, self-sacrifice by the surrogate mother, and subservience, to name a few.

In an interview with Charles Ruas in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, Morrison discusses her views on the enabling of white women by black female domestics:

It's my view that one of the things that black women were able to do in many situations was to make it possible for white women to remain infantile. Margaret has been thoroughly crippled by her husband, who kept her that way, and Ondine helped. In a sense, such women are not innocent victims, but they really are victims of a kind of giant romantic stupidity. (Ruas 103)

The following scene between Ondine and Margaret elucidates Morrison's perspective. There is no doubt that Ondine did "help" yet there were boundaries and borders constructed in order to prevent the complete acquiescence of Ondine. Possibly, Ondine should have gone to Mr. Street to tell him of his wife's abuse of Michael or she should have at least tried to stop Margaret by threatening to expose her. As it turns out,

Margaret claims that she would have preferred that Ondine had gone to Valerian.

“I suppose I should thank you for not saying anything, but I have to tell you that it would have been better, Ondine, if you had. It’s terrible living in the same house with your own witness. But I think I understand it. You wanted me to hate you, didn’t you? That’s why you never said anything all those years. You wanted me to hate you.”
(240)

Even though Margaret insists upon making Ondine somehow the culprit, Ondine staunchly refuses to comply, telling her that she was not even thinking of her. However, Margaret persists in making it all about her, “Oh, yes I was, and you felt good hating me, didn’t you? I could be the mean white lady and you could be the good colored one. Did that make it easier for you?” (240). Margaret brings in the race issue, not Ondine. Margaret is desperate to obscure the facts so she resorts to relying upon the stereotypes of the “mean white lady” and the “good colored one”. She wants some way to be exonerated from the abuse of her child, wanting instead to blame Ondine because she did not tell anyone or even try to stop her.

Margaret and Ondine continue talking in an effort to affect some sort of truce. However, the verbal acrobatics are everywhere. Even after a somewhat effected apology, Margaret wants more. She continues to chide Ondine by telling her that it was her responsibility to stop her from abusing *her* baby. But Ondine, greatly invested in the agency and sense of self that Morrison has given her, will have none of that. She wants Margaret to understand that it is not her responsibility as the housekeeper to mother

her or her son. But Margaret again becomes sentimental. Wanting Ondine to be a mother image, not just an employee, Margaret says, “No. It’s not your job, Ondine. But I wish it had been your duty. I wish you had liked me enough to help me. . .” (241). Margaret is fully aware of the black surrogate mother image and she calls Ondine on her lack of compliance, her refusal to play the role as society and fiction have dictated it. In some sense, Margaret is similar to Eleanor Jane when she demands that Sofia love her baby. In the vein of Aunt Mammy Jane and Dilsey, Ondine is supposed to sacrifice all to save Margaret and her son. However, Ondine is not the loving, all giving surrogate mother to the point of neglecting her own family. Morrison does not want Ondine to fall into the stereotypical abyss of black female surrogate mothers; therefore, she constructs a plot that holds Margaret accountable even some twenty years later when Ondine becomes angry with her and tells everyone of her abuse: burning her child with cigarettes and sticking him with pins.

Although Morrison makes it clear that Ondine saw the baby suffering and responded in a naturally humane manner, she never posits Ondine as the main caregiver of the child. Morrison defiantly avoids the literary powder key of surrogacy motherhood as it relates to Ondine because she is invested in obliterating the explosive and splattering legacy of the role. The caveat here, which Morrison has rigidly put in place, is that Ondine’s priorities are her husband and their jobs at the Streets. This becomes clear in the following scenes. Ondine explains why she did everything she could to protect the child other than tell Valerian about his wife’s abuse of their son. She explains that because “It was woman stuff,” she did not want to tell either husband, Sydney or

Valerian (240).

“Why didn’t you tell me? I mean, why didn’t you scream at me, stop me, something. You knew and you never said a word.”

“I guess I thought you would let us go. If I told Sydney he might tell Mr. Street and then we’d be out of a job--a good job. I don’t know now what I thought, to tell the truth. But once I started keeping it--then it was like my secret too. Sometimes I thought if you all let me go there won’t be anyone around to take the edge off it. I didn’t want to leave him there, all by himself.” (240-241)

Despite Morrison’s intense efforts to convey Ondine’s concern for Sydney’s and her economical survival as antithetical to the stereotypical black surrogate mother, she cannot help but deflect somewhat to Ondine’s innate human instinct to protect the child. So whether intentional or not, it is clear that when Ondine says, “I didn’t want to leave him there, all by himself,” she cares about Michael’s welfare. Therefore, staying and keeping the secret served two purposes: job security and protection of Michael. Like Sofia, Ondine did what she had to do to get by. Both characters are created specifically to challenge the stereotypical myth that has permeated throughout American and, especially Southern, culture since slavery: black mothers neglect their own children in favor of devoting themselves to their white charges.

Tar Baby is the perfect vehicle for Morrison to explore and illustrate the antithesis of the black surrogate mother in action. Because of the sub-plot of abuse by Margaret, and Ondine’s complicity in maintaining the secret, Morrison is able to present a black

domestic who puts her own interests clearly before the white child and mistress, yet one who demonstrates a natural concern for any child who is suffering. Weinstein summarizes Morrison's literary approach to the mammy/surrogate mother issue:

From the beginning, Morrison assesses the black maids in white houses as paid servants whose subjective life is lived on other terms than their caring for white charges. If they are also mothers, the children Morrison concerns herself with are black. Her focus is diagnostic, eschewing the rhetoric of white gratitude in order to explore, first, the interior dysfunction that attaches to black mothers who double as mammies for white families and, later, the intricate economy (simultaneously psychological and monetary) of racial oppression operating within a family frame. (19)

So in the case of *Ondine*, Morrison deliberately gives her a life in which Margaret and her son, Michael, are basically incidental to Ondine's life. To even further guarantee that Ondine does not allow herself to become vital to their lives or vice versa, Morrison supplants Margaret and Michael with Jadine, Ondine's niece. If there is anyone Ondine is surrogate mother to, it is Jadine. Orphaned at the age of sixteen, Jadine has since lived with the Childs. Through the generosity of Valerian, Jadine has been educated in European schools. She has returned home and plans to start her own business.

Casting Michael and Margaret even further in the background is the somewhat thwarted, conflicted relationship that Ondine has with Jadine. Even though Ondine and Sidney have loved Jadine completely, as though she is their own biological child,

Jadine has held back. And now as an adult, the scene becomes more complicated. Immersed in her own problems with Son, the man who comes to the island and captures her heart, (a man intensely disliked by Ondine and Sydney) Jadine leaves the island with him, traveling to the United States, virtually disregarding any cautionary words from Ondine and Sidney. After the relationship disintegrates, Jadine returns to the island, albeit only through a circuitous route back to Paris. Jadine, determined yet still fragile from the shattered relationship, fervently hopes that Ondine does not need anything from her. Having shed herself of the emotional baggage of Son, Jadine only wants to travel light from this point on. She has no vacant compartments in her heart free to be a loving, concerned daughter to Ondine and Sydney. However, Ondine is not going to allow Jadine to leave without expressing her disappointment in her as a daughter, even if she is a somewhat surrogate daughter.

When Ondine tells Jadine that, “. . . if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can’t never learn how to be a woman,” Jadine misconstrues Ondine’s comment, thinking that she wants Jadine to “parent” her (281). Ondine counters her:

“I am not asking you that. I’m just saying what a daughter is. A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her. No, I don’t want you to be what you call a parent. Not me, and not Sydney either. What I want from you is what I want for you. I don’t want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours.” (281)

By illustrating the deficiencies of the mother/daughter relationship between

Ondine and Jadine, Morrison is strongly combating the stereotype of the black surrogate mother as derelict to her own family. Ondine's heart is dedicated to Jadine, not Margaret and Michael. Just as McCullers is really telling Frankie's story instead of Berenice's in *The Member of the Wedding*, so is Morrison really telling the story of Jadine instead of Ondine/Sidney's story. However, there are elements in Jadine's story that are pivotal to Morrison's depiction of Ondine as an antithetical black surrogate mother. Actually, Jadine is the linchpin factor that safeguards Morrison's characterization of Ondine as oppositional to the popular yet stereotypical image that pervades literature and protrudes into the real life black domestic.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Through the representation of literary sketches, this paper has focused on black surrogate mothers as they are particularly fashioned according to their authors.

Adamantly, each writer created a concept of this iconic character to suit his/her own needs and goals. Through their literary portrayals, American culture took its cue because writers often are precursors of societal and cultural changes. And so, as it often happens, some real black women have internalized the negative stereotypes generated by memorable characters born among the pages of classic literature. As previously mentioned, the lines between fiction and reality often blur as the iconic black surrogate mother takes center stage and the real black domestic fades into the shadows.

In the final analysis, Dilsey Gibson, as the moral trumpeter of the Compson family, reincarnates Faulkner's own black surrogate mother, Caroline Barr. Mammy, envisioned as the protector of the O'Hara clan, created by the pen of Margaret Mitchell and portrayed by Hattie McDaniel, became the most copied, visually, of all mammy/black surrogate characters. Mammy Jane, Charles Chesnutt's duplication of the mammy as she is traditionally perceived by white authors, serves as a warning and a reminder that unfortunately some blacks refuse to accept change and progress, choosing instead to stay mired in a past that dooms their fate eternally. Sofia, Walker's own creation of resistance against the negative image that haunted her throughout her life,

dismantles one of the most powerful and recurring misconceptions associated with the black surrogate mother: the neglecting of their own families for the children of their white employers. However, Carson McCullers' unique crafting of Berenice Sadie Brown as the autonomous, independent, and opinionated black surrogate mother, defied the prototypical image that is usually characterized by white authors. Finally, through the creation of Ondine Childs and her husband Sydney, Morrison dispels another frequent fallacy derived from deliberate distortions to exonerate white society from any responsibility or guilt for the state of the black race, especially black men: the image of black women as emasculators of black men. Sydney is the foil to this negative image that is a prevalent by-product of the black surrogate mother.

For better or worse, the black surrogate mother image persists and endures throughout literature, history, and time, mainly because, for writers, she has always been and still remains the stable, supportive character who is often the crux of the important literary plots and, in turn, leaves an indelible imprint on American culture through literature.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Lisa M. *Mammies No More: The Changing Image of Black Women on Stage and Screen*. New York: Rowman, 1997.
- Bartel, Pauline. *The Complete Gone With The Wind Trivia Book*. Dallas: Taylor, 1989.
- Carr, Virginia Spencer. *Understanding Carson McCullers*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1990.
- Chesnutt, Charles W. *The Marrow of Tradition*. Eds. Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning. Boston: Bedford, 2002.
- Davis, Thadious. "Erasing the 'We of Me' and Rewriting the Racial Script: Carson McCuller's Two Member(s) of the Wedding." *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*. Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: Hall, 1996. 206-219. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 27 Feb. 2011.
- . *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.
- Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. Ed. David Minter. Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 1994.
- Harris, Trudier. *From Mammies to Militants*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982.
- . "Mammy." *The Oxford Companion To African American Literature*. Eds. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

- Haskell, Molly. *Frankly, My Dear*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.
- McCullers, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*. New York: Bantam, 1958.
- McDowell, Margaret B. *Carson McCullers*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.
- Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone With The Wind*. New York: Scribner, 2007.
- McElya, Micki. *Clinging to Mammy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2007
- McKay, Nellie Y. "An Interview with Toni Morrison." *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, Ed. Danielle Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi P, 1994. 138-155. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Tar Baby*. New York: Penguin, 1982.
- Ruas, Charles. "An Interview with Toni Morrison." *Toni Morrison*. Ed. Danielle Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi P, 1994. 91-118. Print.
- Stein, Jean. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Ed. Michael Cowan. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1968. 16-18.
- Sundquist, Eric. Introduction. *The Marrow of the Tradition*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1993. xlv-ix.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt, 2003.
- *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*. New York: Ballantine, 1997.
- Wright, Richard. "Inner Landscape." *New Republic*. 103 (Aug. 1940): 195.
- Weinstein, Philip M. *What Else But Love?* New York: Columbia UP, 1996.