

The Double Consciousness of Cultural Pariahs—Fantasy, Trauma and Black Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate the pathological condition of identity formation by reading Morrison’s novelistic reflection of the pathology of cultural pariahs in light of the psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy and trauma. By reflecting on the issue of black identity in *Tar Baby* through Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian approach to ideology and the ethics of trauma proposed by Cathy Caruth and Petar Ramadanovic, this paper wishes to formulate a more sophisticated understanding of black identity and of the relationship between the subject and ideology. The discussion of the paper will first, by addressing the complex of “black skin, white self,” explore the alienation of black subjects in the white world and the identity crisis brought about by black embourgeoisement. The second part of the discussion will focus on the complexity of Morrison’s “double vision,” as embedded in the double consciousness of the protagonists, and on the pathological and ethical dimensions of double consciousness. The last part, then, will

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tackle the intertwining relationship between black trauma and the reconstruction of black identity. The double consciousness of blacks as cultural pariahs, I would argue, can be taken as signifying the libidinal economy of the black subject and pointing to the double burden of the cultural pariah: this is a task of confronting the seduction of white culture and the legacy of black trauma and thus of confronting the real of black identity.

Key Words: double consciousness, fantasy, identity, *Tar Baby*, trauma