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Men Trading Wives for Younger Women: Freudian Overtones in the Representation of Male Midlife Crisis in So Long a Letter and Jazz

Babacar DIENG[*]

Abstract

This article discusses the representation of midlife crisis in the works of two transnational women writers from Senegal, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979), and the US, Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992). It shows that both Ba and Morrison represent the instability and "irrationality" of middle-aged men through the characters of Modou Fall and Joe Trace who engage in extramarital affairs with girls who are barely their daughters' age. It argues that both critical female narrators in the narratives of our focus satirically describe men going through their midlife crisis as driven by the dictates of their ids and not responding to the suggestions of their egos and superegos.

Résumé

Cette étude comparative se penche sur la représentation de la crise masculine de milieu de vie comme motif intertextuel dans *Une si longue lettre* (*So Long a Letter*) (1979) de la sénégalaise Mariama Ba et Jazz (1992) de l'américaine Toni Morrison. Elle démontre que les deux auteurs s'attèlent à peindre l'instabilité psychologique et l'irrationalité qui caractérisent les hommes à mi-vie à travers les personnages de Modou Fall et Joe Trace qui se lancent dans des aventures amoureuses avec des gamines qui pourraient être leurs filles. L'auteur de cet article s'efforce de prouver que dans les deux romans, les narratrices aux regards réprobateurs décrivent de manière satirique les victimes de la crise de milieu de vie comme étant assujettis aux dictats de leurs ids et sourds aux suggestions de leurs egos et superegos.

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As one makes a cursory survey of contemporary world literatures, one can assert that the times when Virginia Woolf deplored in "A Room of One's Own" the marginalization and silencing of Shakespeare's sister and the impoverishment of literature resulting from the doors' being shut upon women are long gone. Today, women are no longer exclusively discovered through the reductive prism of male perspective in the literary field. They have acquired great presence on the literary scenes. One can, without exaggeration, say that they have indeed found "a room of their own" and gained voice in world literatures to represent their own selves and experiences and help their counterparts cope with the challenges and hurdles in their lives while at the same time addressing important issues in their countries and around the world. In the process, female writers even reverse the patriarchal gaze, sometimes not just to portray men, but to psychoanalyze them also so as to better understand some psychological behaviors directly affecting their relationships with their wives and the family. The family sphere constitutes a privileged site in these women's representations, which lends credence to the gynocritics' view that women's writings center on the domestic sphere. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979) and Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) constitute relevant examples of this empowerment through the pen and preoccupation with the domestic sphere. Though their authors hail from different societies, cultures, and geographical locations, these two novels share many common concerns in their narrative discourses. Both Morrison and Ba are preoccupied with the lives of women in their respective societies, the fate of the family, and the general problems affecting their societies. More particularly, both writers interweave the motif of male midlife crisis in their textual tapestry. Indeed, in characterizing male characters, Ba and Morrison both emphasize the instability and turmoil middle-aged men experience and how it affects their companions and/or families. Their narratives even bear psychoanalytical overtones as they attempt to depict middle-aged men and explain the unconscious determinisms they are subjected to.

Whereas these novels have been studied from various angles, there has not been to date a work scrutinizing the motif of midlife crisis in them or reading them from a psychoanalytical perspective.

Mariama Ba's novel has been the subject of several interesting scholarly productions focusing on the ideological, discursive and formalist dimensions of the novel. Barbara Klaw, among many other critics, relevantly points out in "Mariama Ba's *Une Si Longue Lettre* and Subverting a Mythology of Sex-Based Oppression," that many works read the novel from a feminist perspective. Médoune Guéye echoes Klaw's words when he says that Dorothy Blair, Christophe Miller, Susan Stringer, and many other critics emphasize feminism in Ba's work (309). This aspect of the novel continued to draw attention in more recent studies of the narrative: Mbye Cham, Gibreel Kamara (2001), Medoune Gueye (1998), Rizwana Habib Latha (2001), and John Champagne have also brought contributions to the discussion of this issue. Most of the remaining critical works focus on the postcolonial dimension of the novel or the study of the narrative structure (McElaney Johnson 1999; Larrier 1991).

Most critical works on Toni Morrison's *Jazz* focus on its themes, aesthetics, postmodernism, and narrative voice. For example, Katy Ryan analyzes the problematic of self-destruction and suicide in *Jazz*. Stephen Knadler explores the representation of domestic violence in the narrative. Derek Alwes analyzes the concept of choice in *Jazz*, focusing on the character of Joe Trace. Joe Yeldho and Neeklakantan G. scrutinize the representation of the city in the narrative. Megan Sweeney discusses the concepts of commensurability, commodification, crime and justice in *Jazz* and Morrison's latest fiction. The novel's narrative voice and the techniques Morrison utilizes to create an original culturally rooted type of narrator with postmodern tendencies have however drawn more critical attention. Page (1995), Hardrack (1995), Lesoinne (1997), and Treherne (2003), among other critics, have discussed Morrison's postmodern and African-American strategies of writing and the characteristics of the "unreliable" narrator who invites the reader to participate actively in the complex process of reading the talking book. Other works moving along the same line of thought explore the motif of music in the narrative. For instance, Alain Munton, in "Misreading Morrison, Mishearing Jazz: A Response to Toni Morrison's Jazz Critics," discusses the presence of jazz music and the various interpretation around the motif in Morrison's text.

Though some critics have touched upon Joe's psychology, they have not discussed it against the backdrop of midlife crisis or Freudian theory.

Our work departs from previous trajectories of interpretation because it combines psychoanalysis and feminist criticism to illustrate through a close reading of the texts how both writers represent midlife crisis and delve, like psychiatrists or psychoanalysts, into the psyche of male characters to try to understand the working of this disorder. This article proposes a reading of these two texts as psychological novels instrumentalizing psychoanalysis in their representation of male midlife crisis. Building on antecedent criticism and combining narratology and psychoanalysis, it attempts to scrutinize how these transnational writers problematize midlife crisis in their works and take the reader into the male characters' psyches so as to reveal the motivations behind their acts. In a first stage, I will present the concept of midlife life crisis as defined in popular culture and scientific research. Then, I will present some key Freudian concepts used in the interpretation of the narratives of our focus. Finally, I will try show that Ba and Morrison represent midlife crisis in their psychological novels. I will also argue that through the derisive way they present the irrationality of Modou and Joe, both narratives posit men are victims of their pleasure principle and subjected to their ids. Their inability to transform object-cathexes suggests a silencing of their egos and superegos.

Midlife crisis is a very much textualized motif in American and world popular culture and the subject of several studies that confirm or dispute its existence. Some scholars consider middle age as a relatively stable period in adult development and believe midlife crisis is merely a construct. However, a considerable number of scholarly works, literary and film representations concur that this period of adult development can be particularly difficult and challenging. For instance, Stanley and Farell who reviewed extensively the issue of midlife crisis from a scientific and literary perspective, explain in "Identity and Crisis in Middle Aged Men" that more and more studies show that several of the signs of personal disorganization—neurotic and psychotic disorder, alcoholism, marital dissatisfaction, psychosomatic and

hyponchondriarchal problems—prevail among middle-aged Americans. Although these findings are consistent and clear cut, they remain puzzling. On the one hand they are supported by some clinical and conceptual formulations and widespread cultural stereotypes supporting that these problems are related to midlife crisis. On the other hand, "more systematic attempts to confirm or disconfirm the existence and impact of such a crisis have proved no evidence in support of the construct....." (134).

Whether it is a construct or a reality, midlife crisis or what some term 'midlife transition' is generally presented as a period of turmoil and life changes associated with disorder that most adults experience at varying stages in their middle age as a result of several factors ranging from fear of aging to dissatisfaction with the goals achieved. "Midlife crisis," for Wethington, "connotes personal turmoil and sudden changes in personal goals and lifestyle, brought about by the realization of aging, physical decline, or entrapment in unwelcome, restrictive roles" (86). Psychoanalysts and psychologists believe it is a universal and inevitable human developmental stage (Stanley and Farell 134). Most of them situate its advent around the age of forty. Freund and O. Ritter conjecture that "reviewing the literature on middle adulthood, Staudinger and Bluck conclude that middle adulthood is typically seen as starting at age 40 and extending to age 60, but with vague and fuzzy boundaries regarding beginning and end" (583).

This period is generally considered as a quite painful and difficult interim phase characterized by substantial changes in personality or disorder resulting from the adult's desire to give new directions to his life after measuring his achievements. Midlife is indeed viewed as a period of self-introspection, for it is the time when the adult reflects upon his past and measures his achievements based on the standards he set at a younger age. It is a period of change because after having taken stock of his achievements, the adult reinterprets his future self and makes plans for the second half of his life (Hermans and Oles, 1405; Freund and O. Ritter, 584). These adjustments may result in drastic changes that may seem irrational to other people. Although men may respond differently to it depending on their ethnicity, class, and structure of personal defences, it is generally believed that they sometimes try to

escape by engaging in frantic activity or sexual adventures. Marylin Mercer, in "Infidelity," corroborates this view when she describes middle-aged people as being especially vulnerable to extramarital affairs. Middle-age is a time when many couples find themselves heading in opposite directions. According to Lombardi, the most common stereotypes associated to the crisis are the following ones: men purchasing expensive cars like Porsches, getting hair plugs and trading in their wives for younger girlfriends (4). In other words, middle-aged men who undergo midlife crisis seem try to regain a youth lost and engage in affairs with younger women.

To better illuminate the presence of psychoanalytical texts in the narratives, it is necessary to clarify some Freudian concepts expostulated in *The Pleasure Principle* and *The Id and the Ego*. Freud is probably one of the theorists who dealt the most with the inner workings of man's psyche and sexuality. In *The Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud conjectures that feelings of pleasure and unpleasure act imperatively upon human beings. Though pleasure does not dominate over the course of mental processes, there is in our minds a strong tendency towards the pleasure principle. Fortunately, that "tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so the final outcome cannot be always in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure" (5). Those forces are embodied by the ego and the superego, which control the id. For Freud, the id constitutes the "dark, inaccessible part of our personality;" It is "a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations" full of energy reaching it from the instincts. It has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to satisfy the instinctual needs "subject to the observance of the pleasure principle." Even if the ego's instincts of self-preservation replace the pleasure principle with the reality principle, the first still does not abandon the goal of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but rather demands and carries into effect the delaying of satisfaction and temporarily accepts unpleasure. In Freud's view, the logical, rational, and orderly ego acts as a mediator between the often antagonistic demands of the id and the superego, opting for liberation and self-gratification sometimes and censorship and conformity on the other. The superego, let it be reminded, is the site reflecting societal beliefs, behaviors and pressures. It stores social norms and mores and suggests us to

"make sacrifices even when sacrifices may not be in our best interests.

Freud argued that we often repress what the id encourages us to think and do—things the superego and ego correspondingly tell us not to think and do—thereby forcing these "unacceptable" wishes and desires into the unconscious. Sometimes, the ego is able to "bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id; that is, the ego ideal or superego "represses, but also expresses the most powerful impulses and most important libidinal vicissitudes. Injunctions, prohibitions and repressions produce guilt because conscience exercizes the moral censorhip" (Freud, *The Ego and Id*, 27). For example, in instances of successful negotiation of the Oedipus complex, the ego desexualizes the object-cathexis and the pleasure principle cedes its place to the reality principle. Freud also warms that "if the ego has not succeeded in properly mastering the Oedipus complex, the energy cathexis of the latter springing from the id, will come into operation once more in the reaction-formation of the ego ideal" (Ego and Id, 20-29). For Sigmund Freud, the pleasure principle long persists as the method of working employed by sexual instincts, which are hard to "educate". These instincts often succeed in overcoming the reality principle (6). Freud also conjectures that women are more able to negotiate the dictates of the id, because they can transform object-cathesises better than men. We shall see further how these concepts enter into consideration in Ba's and Morrison's narratives.

The representation of midlife crisis in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* forms part of the narrative's feminist discourse and denunciation of the polygamy. Ba's story takes the form of a long letter the narrator, an actor in the story, addresses to her best friend and confidante, Aissatou, who works as an interpreter at the Senegalese embassy in the US. The epistolary form, let it be noted, used to be a form privileged in psychological novels such as *Pamela* and *Clarissa* of Samuel Richardson, a psychological novel being "a type of novel in which the main interest lies in the mental and emotional aspects of the characters" (OED). Like Ba's novel, such psychological novels did not emphasize the action undertaken by main characters but rather focused on motivation and character development. Ramatoulaye's psychoanalysis of Modou Fall and men

in her surroundings is motivated by a quest of understanding which begins after the "mirasse" ceremony and continues during the forty days' period of mourning following Modou Fall's death. Those days constitute a unique time of introspection for the narrator because she has to refrain from wearing makeup, fine clothes, and attending to her appearance in a way that is socially recognized as consistent with situations of happiness and joy. Besides, she has to stay home unless she has to go out for essential business. Thus, she has ample time to take stock during this mourning period. McElaney relevantly points out that "the 'diary' records a journey of self-understanding" and a means for Ramatoulaye to examine her experience (111), but I believe that Ramatoulaye does simply attempt to understand herself, but also the others, particularly Modou Fall and the other male characters.

This quest for understanding males is triggered by her desire to discover what motivated Modou Fall's abandonment of his first family after the "mirasse" ceremony, a ceremony during which the deceased person's wealth is shared between the members of the family. "The mirasse" had exposed to others what was carefully concealed" (9): it "had revealed that Modou Fall had been engulfed into a mire of expenses; he died penniless and had left a pile of acknowledgements of debts from "cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car purchase installments" (9). Modou also still owed money to Sicap for the purchase of the villa he had bought for his second wife and to the bank, for he had borrowed four millions to send his in-laws to Mecca. These revelations make Ramatoulaye wonder if Modou Fall was subject to a form of disorder, and they also trigger a series of questions in her mind. The text echoes these questions twice: "Was it madness, weakness, irresistible love? What inner confusion led Modou Fall to marry Binetou?" (11). Further, she asks herself: "Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible love? What inner torment led Modou Fall to marry Binetou?" (12). Ramatoulaye is thus like a psychoanalyst studying events in retrospect to know the motivations behind Modou's irrational actions.

In the ensuing analeptical narrative characterized by several digressions, the narrator seems to come to the conclusion that Modou Fall was uniquely guided by his pleasure principle and his

ego ideal was silenced. The omniscient narrator first goes through past events to recall Modou's actions and motivations. She departs from the first narrative line to recount with a happiness tainted with nostalgia her falling in love at first sight with Modou, her wedding, Aissatou's union with Mawdo Ba, the crisis in Aissatou's life resulting from Mawdo's taking a second wife instigated by his mother Nabou. These digressions enable the narrator to insert several texts psychoanalyzing men in her tale to deliver her feminist discourse and expose at the same time Modou's crisis. For example, Aissatou's letter to Mawdo Ba when he took a second wife under the pressure of his old mother constitutes in fact an embedded narrative showing men's submission to the pleasure principle and the dictates of their id. The narrator shows that though Mawdo pretends that he married Nabou to prevent his old mother with a declining health from dying from grief. Truth of the natter is he is rather driven by his id, or the pleasure-seeking part of his psyche. Aissatou infers that Mawdo Ba falls victim of his instincts and silences his superego. The Freudian conceptualization becomes obvious in Aissatou's embedded narrative, as she proclaims: "Mawdo, man is one: greatness and animal fused together. None of his acts is pure charity. None is pure bestiality" (32). The discourse about the prevalence of the id over the ego and superego in male psyche is supported by the narrative discourse when Mawdo justifies the visible outcome of his intimate relationship with his second that he pretends not to be in love with as an instinctual act. "You can't resist the imperious laws that demand food and clothing for man" he says. "These same laws compel the "male" in other respects. I say male to emphasize the bestiality of instincts…You understand…A wife must understand, once for all, and must forgive; she must not worry herself about the 'betrayals of the flesh'" (34). The discourse about man's instinctual behavior and unfaithfulness is further supported by the depiction of Samba Diack as a downright unfaithful man who made his wife Jacqueline plunge into a profound state of depression.

Aissatou's story constitutes the first part of the narrative's indictment of men's unfaithfulness and their instinctual behaviors which are further shown in the narrator's recounting her own predicament resulting from Modou Fall's midlife crisis. She begins

with the Imam coming to announce to her that Modou took a second wife. The narrator insists on the underhandedness of Modou's actions, his ridiculous and irrational behavior. Indeed, she shows how Modou, a man in his late forties or early fifties, had secretly and beyond all suspicion wooed and married Binetou, a teenager and friend of her daughter barely seventeen. In describing Modou's "legalized" affair with young Binetou, the narrator borrows a quite derisive and ironic tone drawing attention on the ridiculous and pathetic sides of his behavior. She reveals how Modou followed a strict diet to "break his stomach egg." Further, the compassionate but derisive narrator draws the reader's attention on Modou's attempt to regain a lost youth:

> And Modou would dye his hair every month. His waistline painfully restrained by old-fashioned trousers, Binetou would never miss a chance of laughing wickedly at him. Modou would leave himself winded trying to imprison youth in its decline, which abandoned him on all sides (48).

Still, in the same vein, she reports rumors about Modou's going out with Binetou to night clubs where they would meet Daba and his boyfriend. The text is quite eloquent and does not need any comments: "It was a grotesque confrontation: on one side, an ill-assorted couple, on the other two well-matched people" (50). The narrator insists that Modou was the laughing stock of young people who named him "cradle-snatcher." In describing, Modou's behavior, the narrator also relates with pain how Modou had made new life plans that did not include his first family any more. This life change seems irrational to the narrator. The narrative emphasizes the irrationality of his behavior by juxtaposing it with his previous characterization as a rational and practical trade union leader.

From the narrator's perspective, Modou Fall thus seems to be driven, as Freud would say, by "only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of his "instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle." The object of his pursuit is Binetou and he sacrifices his first family at the altar of love. By wondering what inner confusion led Modou to marry Binetou and satirizing Modou's pursuit of Binetou and critically presenting his

abandonment of his first family, Ba's text clearly suggests that Modou has lost all form of common sense and reason and that he is subjected to his id. Modou's ego and superego can therefore be said to be submerged by the forces of his id. The satirical presentation of his relationship with Binetou corroborates his lack of common sense and impermeability to social and moral norms.

Modou Fall presents all the symptoms of the man going through his midlife crisis. As noted above, the middle-aged man suffering from midlife crisis often goes through a stage of introspection or evaluation during which he measures his achievements. This evaluation may result in drastic life changes. Like middle-aged men undergoing their crises, Modou has traded in his wife with a second one, a friend of her daughter. Going from the portrayal of his infuriated then sympathetic first wife narrating the events after his death, Modou Fall was undergoing a period of disorder and disorganization. Indeed, Modou had given a new direction to his life and projected a future that did not take into account his first family that he had rejected: "His abandonment of his first family (myself and the children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his existence without taking our existence into account" (9). Although the narrator is very critical towards Modou's behavior, her examination of male psyche and the conclusion that the male submits to the dictate of his id in midlife lead her to forgive her husband. Though Ramatoulaye is angry at the beginning of the narrative, she ends up transcending that pain after her psychoanalytical exercise. Indeed, Ba's text seems to associate midlife crisis to men's particular predisposition to fall victim or pursue their pleasure principle. Through Modou Fall's characterization, Ba's text problematizes unfaithfulness and polygamy as a practice related to gender and male sexuality. The narrator conjectures that whereas women become more faithful and loving over years of marriage, men are rather driven by their id or pleasure-seeking principles as they become older:

> Whereas a woman draws from the passing years the force of devotion, despite the ageing of her companion, a man, on the other hand restricts his

> field of tenderness. His egoistic eye looks over his partner's shoulder. He compares what he had with what he no longer has, what he has with what he could have (41).

This interpretation of Ba parallels Freud's opinion that women are more able to transform object-cathexis than men.

The second narrative of our focus, *Jazz* (1992), shares representations, discourses and approaches with Ba's text as we we'll endeavor to show even though it is postmodern. Whereas Ba's psychological novel, even though multi-voiced, discusses midlife in a quite linear way, Morrison's postmodern creative work complicates the reader's process of deciphering the "talking book" that avoids stable meanings and/or constructs and deconstructs them. Several critics have pointed out the unreliability of the narrator because they consider that she questions her own tale. For example, Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris argues that "the narrative voice eventually admits to "invent[ing] stories" (220) about the characters" (229). I concur that Morrison's text requires a hermeneutic approach insofar as the reader has to gather fragments of discourses emerging from the textual polyphony to construct meaning. However, the narrator does not so much point at the unreliability of her story, but rather at her inability to deliver a grand master-narrative telling us with accuracy the lives of the characters, especially when telling involves prediction. Her predictions fail to circumscribe the evolving lives of the characters that develop, change, and escape her grasp sometimes. Thus, it is not the story which is questioned but rather some of her predictions about the characters. Through the choice of this type of narrating instance, Morrison replicates the complexity of language and life and lets the reader hermeneutically unveil the meaning of the narrative. Morrison's *Jazz* lends itself to multiple readings by virtue of the fact that many thematics are woven into the discourse. Among these, it is noteworthy to make mention of the symbolism of the title, Jazz, which is historically significant; for, Morrison's story took place in 1926, at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance. That period was dubbed the Jazz age, an era of amazing creativity. The fact that musical jazz is characterized by improvisation, may explain the

sense of confusion and absence of predetermination of characters through the narrator's discourse experienced by the reader. This purposeful sense of wantonness and dynamism perhaps gives meaning and credence to Editor Deborah McDowell's cogent remark about the character as process and not essence.

Morrison's text parallels in several respect Mariama Ba's one. Like Ba's text, Morrison's narrative can be considered as a psychological novel as it focalizes Joe's motivations and development throughout the different events that lead to his midlife crisis. The talking book takes the reader into the meanders of Joe's mind to describe his turbulent midlife transition. The narrative utilizes three main ways of exposing Joe's psyche: the gossiping narrator's story, the characters' speeches, and the unforgiving non-narrative comments. Using a stream of consciousness-like technique, the polyphonic narrative switches to different perspectives. Fragments disseminated throughout this polyphony of texts present a complex psychoanalytical portrait of Joe in his midlife crisis. Joe Trace's crisis parallels that of Modou Fall in several respects. Like Modou, Joe is a middle-aged man who has been married to his spouse for over twenty years. Like his Senegalese counterpart, the fifty-year-old American character trades his wife with a young girl who could have been the daughter he lost. Dorcas is barely seventeen years old, a young girl buying candies when Joe first catches a glimpse of her. The narrative plays on the metaphor of the candy—Dorcas is assimilated to Joe's candy—to ironize on Joe's affair which is presented like a mental regression.

Joe's midlife crisis seems to originate from several factors ranging from the alienating effects of the city, a resurging Oedipus complex, marital dissatisfaction coupled with a quest for the sensations he had lost. After twenty years in the alienating city, Joe's marital life had come to a dead-end: he had no kids with Violet, which did not bother him, but his life was becoming monotonous. Violet communicated more with the birds than with Joe who was annoyed, puzzled, and depressed by his wife's silence (24). This distancing between Joe and Violet seems to be a result of the alienating effects of their new environment. Indeed, little of the busy and artificial city life "makes for love, but it does pump desire. The woman who churned a man's blood as she leaned all alone on a

fence by a country road might not even expect to catch his eye in the City" (*Jazz* 34). Several factors lead to Joe's unfaithfulness, but the text clearly posits that he is over all driven by the pleasure principle, and his supergo's injunctions are completely drowned in his quest for pleasure. As a matter of fact, Joe was unable to come to terms with losing the sensations he felt with Violet. He could remember the dates but had forgotten what it felt like. Whereas Modou Fall has the possibility to take a second wife because his culture and religion allow him to, Joe engages in an extramarital relationship. His affair with Dorcas is an attempt to relive the sensations he used to have in Vesper country, and Page supports this view when he states that Joe "attempts to relive his remembered joy (his "Victory") in Vesper country" (56). Joe had rented Malvonne's room some time before he met Dorcas and "chose" her. Joe, in fact, unlike Modou Fall is not so much driven by passion or love, but rather by a conscious will to reenact love. He "didn't fall in love with Dorcas, but he rose in it" (135). In my view, he never so much loved Dorcas, but rather what he re-felt when he was fleshly involved with her. In reference to his feelings after satisfaction of his carnal instincts with Dorcas, Joe reminisces: "You would have thought I was twenty, back in Palestine satisfying my appetite for the first time under a walnut tree" (129). This revelation illustrates Joe's substitution; Dorcas is an object-cathexis that filled the void left by Violet; thus a substitute Violet. Besides, After Dorcas' death, he reveals that he is not stuck on Dorcas, but rather on what he felt about her. Joe still loved Violet, but did not remember what it felt like. The narrative reveals that love when Felice observes, in reference to Joe: "I really believe he likes his wife" (206). The narrator also recounts the display of public love when Joe and Violet reconcile at the end of the novel.

Thus Joe is driven by his id and is trying to relive the fleeing sensations he had with Violet back in Virginia when they were both young. Alice Manfred suggests like Mariama Ba's Ramatoulaye that men are concupiscent beings when she says that Joe may do it again.

Morrison's representation of midlife crisis is however complicated by the motif of the missing mother. Whereas, Ba's text assigns midlife mostly to men's pursuit of the pleasure principle,

Morrison's narrative links Joe's midlife crisis to a more complex psychological process. Indeed, Joe is no doubt seeking pleasure, but he also seems to be affected by a resurfacing Oedipus complex. Freud had explained that the mother constitutes an object-cathexis in the boy's early developmental stage, and as he grows up, the mother's figure is transformed into an alteration of the ego through moral censorship and identification. He warns that "if the ego has not succeeded in properly mastering the Oedipus complex, the energy cathexis of the latter springing from the id, will come into operation once more in the reaction-formation of the ego ideal" (*The Ego and the Id*, 29). The narrative suggests that Joe's affair with Dorcas constitutes an attempt to come to term with his Oedipus complex. He did not have a chance to come to terms with his Oedipus complex because not only did his mother—Wild-- who was crazy not nurse him, but she had abandoned him at a very young age. Joe only saw traces and signs of his mother in the woods where she lived like an animal. He longed for a sign that would confirm that he was Wild's son and felt ashamed for being her son at the same time. In *Jazz*, Dorcas constitutes a reaction-formation of his superego. Joe recreates his mother or as Page says so eloquently, "reconstructs her in Dorcas" (56). Dorcas, in Page's view is thus a reiteration of Joe's never acknowledged mother, Wild and Joe's doubling of Dorcas and Wild becomes explicit in Joe's metaphor of tracking: "I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, and I tracked her Dorcas from borough to borough" (130)" (Jazz 57).

Several textual clues support the view that Joe's midlife crisis and instability result from the effects of a resurging Oedipal complex, which makes his superego inoperative. Joe and Dorcas bond because they are both suffering from the loss of their mothers. Because he does not know his mother, Joe carried a void inside of him, an "inside nothing that traveled with him from then on, except for the fall of 1925 when he had somebody to tell it" (37). Like Joe, Dorcas had a "nothing" because she had lost her mother as well. Another association between Dorcas and Wild, which illustrates a conflict between the id and the superego, lies in the ambivalent feelings Joe has towards the lover and the mother. I

had explained earlier that Joe dreaded the confirmation that he was Wild's son and he felt pleasure and shame at seeing her. He has the same ambivalence towards Dorcas: On the one hand, the "young good God girl" was a blessing to his life. On the other hand, she "makes him wish he had never been born" because he felt shame. This association between the young girl and the missing mother is further signified in the murder of Dorcas. When he was younger, Joe used to track Wild like a hunter and was reminded that Wild was not an animal but somebody's mother. In a state of mental confusion resulting from Dorcas' abandonment, Joe tracks her like he used to track Wild and shoots her. Besides, Joe is depicted as a child in the narrative. Joe's predilection for candy is quite illustrative of his regression or mental stage. Dorcas, for instance is "Joe's personal sweet—like candy."

Like Ramatoulaye in Ba's text, the gossiping female narrator presents Joe's midlife crisis as a transgression of social and moral norms, a period of change, instability, and confusion. She presents Joe's behavior as something ridiculous and shocking, which suggests that Joe's superego is not operational. The gossiping female narrator insists on the difference of age, when the narrative enquires if Dorcas was the daughter who took the man or the daughter who had fled the womb. In addition, the narrator derides Joe's immaturity or mental regression. She and Alice describe Joe as a kid. The narrator explains that even though he wears "button-up-the-front and round-toed shoes," Joe is a "kid, a strapling, and candy could still make smile" (121). Joe's mental regression and lack of maturity and common sense are further illustrated in these lines, when she says in reference to Dorcas:

> She was Joe's personal sweet—like candy. It was the best thing, if you were young and had just got to the City. That and the clarinets and even they were licorice sticks. But Joe has been in the city for twenty years and is not young any more. I imagine him as one of those men who stop somewhere around sixteen inside…..he's a kid (121).

Thus Joe is portrayed like a man who blindly pursues pleasure and behaves like a kid. Like Modou Fall he seems to have lost all common sense, which suggests that his superego and ego fail to contain the instincts surging from his id. Looking back on his life, Joe, himself acknowledges that his involvement with Dorcas was ridiculous. He even suggests that he was experiencing a period of confusion and lack of discernment when he compares himself to a snake that had gone blind before shedding skin for the last time (*Jazz* 129).

Thus, Both Ba and Morrison represent male midlife crisis in their narratives through the characterization of Modou Fall and Joe Trace. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye's husband, Modou Fall, trades her first wife for a beautiful young girl who has not even graduated from high school. To add to Ramatoulaye's pain, this girl is the very friend of her daughter who used to study in her house. In addition to that, Modou Fall completely deserts her first family because her young wife would get angry as soon as he talked about the first family. Modou Fall does even respect the usual shifts between the two families. He no longer comes home and leaves his first wife alone to face the heavy burden of bringing up her numerous children and satisfying the financial and emotional needs of her large family. Modou Fall's behavior is symptomatic of the middle-aged man going through midlife crisis. His behavior becomes irrational and he seems to have mentally regressed and gone back to a stage of youth. The irrational behaviour of Morrison's middle-aged Joe in *Jazz* parallels that of Modou Fall in several respects. Like Modou Fall, Joe is a middle-aged man in his fifties who had been married to her youth sweetheart for over twenty five years. He also trades his wife for a girl who could have been his own daughter. Indeed, the young girl he secretly meets in Malvonne's place and goes on trips with, Dorcas, is a young girl barely eighteen. Like Binetou, she has not even graduated from high school. Both men seem to be subjected to the dictates of their ids and experience a period of instability and confusion. They are portrayed as lacking common sense. *Jazz* and *So Long a Letter* can also be termed psychological novels because their critical and ideologically-oriented female narrators do not simply show and tell

the behaviors of Joe Trace and Modou Fall, but they also try to depict the motivations and forces behind their "irrational" actions. They posit that men are mainly driven by the pleasure principles and the id. Joe Trace's midlife crisis seems to be more complex because a resurging oedipal complex complicates his crisis. Both narratives bear Freudian overtones in their characterization of the main male characters.

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