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Dimensiones traumáticas en la ficción de Toni Morrison
Traumatic dimensions in Toni Morrison's fiction

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DIMENSIONES TRAUMÁTICAS EN LA FICCIÓN DE TONI MORRISON

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Tesis Doctoral presentada por
DAVID YAGÜE GONZÁLEZ
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A few months ago I had a discussion with some colleagues respecting this very section. In this discussion my peers concurred that in a scholarly work of the magnitude of a dissertation such as the one you, reader, are holding in your hands at this very moment this section was unnecessary or even "tacky" as the work of the academic is a lonely one, therefore it was idle to be grateful to someone other than a handful of people. I could not disagree more or more strongly. I would never be the scholar I consider myself to be without the help and inspiration of the people accounted in this section. The words uttered in this volume would have never come to being without their inspiration. More importantly, I would not be the person I am today without the inspiration of the people accounted in this section. And for that, I am extremely grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

There were things that were already there that had either
been buried, discredited, or never looked at and
I feel it particularly strongly with black literature
because it really is new.
Toni Morrison, Interview with Carolyn C. Denard (64)

In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1993, Toni Morrison spoke about language and how the writer relates to it. She proposed a parable in which a group of young people attempt to trick an old black woman – "[b]lind but wise" as Morrison describes her (198). In order to test – and to some extent, mock – the old woman's clairvoyance and wisdom, the youngsters ask the woman to say whether the bird they are holding in their hands is alive or dead. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands" (198), the old woman answers. For Morrison, as she later explains in the same lecture, the old woman represents the writer while the bird represents language. In this interaction, the writer is explaining to the reader – symbolized by the young people – that the vitality of language largely depends on him or her. Through this story, Morrison is urging the audience/reader to become an active participant in the reading of her novels, not so much a passive recipient of the author's story. For Morrison, a narrative should

describe a situation to the reader and push him or her to acknowledge this circumstances described in Morrison's work and move him or her to change it, or rather to motivate a change in him or her.

> So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. … Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her – "Is it living or dead?" – is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. (199–200)

Toni Morrison's obsession with language and the art of storytelling is evident throughout her work. Born Chloe Anthony Wodford in Lorrain, Ohio, in 1931, the second of four children, her career started as editor at Random House. However, her need to tell stories pushed her to publish her first novel in 1970, *The Bluest Eye*. With this novel, as she would tell Eliza Chappell in 1992, she fulfilled her role both as writer and as reader, as she "only wrote the first book because I thought it wasn't there, and I wanted to read it when I got through. I am a pretty good reader. I love it. It is what I do, really. So, if I can read it, that is the highest compliment I can think of" (69). This first work inaugurated a career followed by ten other novels – the last one published in 2015 – a myriad of essays, two theater plays, poetry, a libretto and even three children's books to date. Her works opened up new spaces for African American literature and continued the fight for equality and inclusion within a larger literary canon. Morrison's objective was not to be disregarded only as a "minority" literature but to enter the greater literary American tradition, changing the marginalized role that African American writers had in it and place these works as part of the larger canon.

To create her own language, Morrison stepped away from the master or canonical narrative – though she did not altogether dismiss it – and created texts in which she explored the different historical traumas that the African American community had endured. As Audre Lorde would affirm, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (112), urging individuals outside the norm – race minorities, sexual minorities, religious minorities – to "take [their] differences and make them [their] strength" (112) by creating a new language. In much the same way, Morrison needed to make a language that would reflect her voice caught in the struggle of liberating itself from the resources and tropes that were so much a part of white American literature. Such would be the path towards dismantling racist elements in a language she yearned to purify through her own expression. As Morrison affirms

> I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. (*Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* x–xi)

Through her novels, Morrison analyzes the problematic history of the African American community. Her works run back and forth in this history, illustrating pre-slavery times in *A Mercy* (2012), bondage in *Beloved* (1987), the Harlem Reinnassance in *Jazz* (1992) and the Civil Rights Movement in *Love* (2003) and *Tar Baby* (1981). However, her description of these struggles is not only historical but contains the traumatic experiences that the individuals suffered due to a dominant culture filled with stereotypes intended to keep minorities from gaining dignity and equality. An example of the aftermath of such traumas include the examination of stereotypical physical beauty in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the obsession with the creation of a pure all-black town and the consequences of such forms of eugenics may have on a community in *Paradise* (1997), or

the search for one's roots and the creation of a black male identity in the first half of the twentieth century in *Song of Solomon* (1977).

Two major elements drive Morrison's narratives: language and race. For her, both her aesthetic work and her socio-cultural endeavors are intertwined, though as Justine Tally points out, "art in Morrison's work is never sacrificed to propaganda" (11). Morrison's efforts, in other words, are more literary than political, letting her positioning around different issues show through her narrative. Her stories make the reader confront experiences that were often too uncomfortable or too violent for authors in previous centuries to narrate, transmitting the traumatic experience in a lyrical tone, breaking the silences that were put in place by the master / canonical narrative. Language for Morrison should direct the reader towards the discovery of experiences or facts of African American history he or she had previously been unaware of. As she recollected in her Nobel lecture, "whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction" (203).

Throughout the years, most of the criticism revolving around Morrison's craft has mainly focused around race, trauma, and the aesthetic interpretation of these tropes in her novels. Her works have been analyzed from African American, feminist, and the lens of trauma studies, as these three elements are at the core of all of her works. Some of the most important volumes on Morrison are *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. from a multidisciplinary point of view, *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010) by Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, who analyzed Morrison's novels from a trauma studies perspective, and *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (2007), edited by Justine Tally, which observed her work mainly from a feminist angle. Moreover, a myriad of readers and case studies on each of

her books are constantly published for scholars and students alike. Probably the most important collection around Morrison's work is that included in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, edited by Harold Bloom from 1999 to 2011. What seems clear is that critics such as the aforementioned Justine Tally, Nellie McKay, or Linden Peach, to name but a few, have focused their attention in the intersection of three elements – African American culture, feminist implications, and trauma. The work carried out in this dissertation will in fact align itself with these three approaches.

In order to comprehend the extent to which trauma, feminism and African American culture intersect in Morrison's work, it was deemed necessary to address studies by Dominick LaCapra, Laurie Vickroy and Kali Tali. Although these scholars are generally regarded as trauma studies critics, their respective works invite a simultaneous exegesis of feminist and African American considerations that enriches the conceptualization of trauma. Their research on Lacan's conception of the ego, the inheritance of traumas from one generation to the next, and the need to express one's experiences in order to overcome them, add up to a solid set of theories that will prove to be fundamental for a thorough analysis of Morrison's tropes. Books such as *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) by LaCapra, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002) by Vickroy, and *Worlds of Hurt* (1996) by Tal are the pillars in which this investigation will be set.

LaCapra's concepts of 'acting out' and 'working through' is of capital importance for this study, – and in it the reader will probably recognize re-elaborate echoes of Freud's theories around trauma as described in *Remembering, Repeating, Working Through* (1914). It is through the unconscious traumatic repetition of behaviors – what LaCapra defines as acting out – and its interactions with the concepts of melancholia and mourning that a considerable part of characters in Morrison's work suffered. On the one

hand, for LaCapra, melancholia is directly related to acting out, as the traumatic past is re-lived in the present. Because of this inaccurate identification, the state of melancholia or acting out stagnates the individual, stopping him or her from working through his or her past. Mourning, on the other hand, is a process by which the individual is able to differentiate between the past and the present, which allows him or her to detach himself or herself from the traumatic experience and create the necessary distance to work through the trauma. This is also directly linked to Nietzsche's three methods on history – monumental, antiquarian, and critical – in which the first two, monumental and antiquarian, are closely related to melancholia, as they venerate and try to perpetuate the past, while the third one, the critical method, would be linked to the elaboration of the past.

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Vickroy's interpretation of the traumatic past takes a more through approach as she does not only deal with the original trauma that the victim suffered but also analyses the repercussions this event may have on the victim's children. Through what she describes as legacies of trauma, Vickroy studies how the incapability to work through traumas due to the fragile situation of the victims will affect their sons and daughters. This traumatic repetition will be perpetuated and the behavior interiorized by the second generation. The victim's children will not be able to work through the original trauma as some of them might not know of its existence, and so the pathological conduct is dangerously preserved. Vickroy takes into consideration Morrison's work, using as examples for her theories characters such as Pauline and Pecola Breedlove from *The Bluest Eye* and Sethe and Denver from *Beloved*,. In *Jazz*, Joe and Violet Trace also emerge as embodiments of inherited traumas. As Vickroy contends, both characters are abandoned by their parents and are unable to penetrate the traumas that haunted their forefathers.

Kalí Tal's approach to the traumatic, both personal and communal, and how the subject's verbal articulation of his / her trauma helps the individual is of particular interest for this dissertation. In her depiction of the victim and the internalization of traumas, Tal explains how a damaging event transforms the individual, often making it impossible to go back to the initial community, and this isolation will further deepen the trauma. Tal deems vital the creation of a community of survivors in which the victim can confide. Through the act of sharing their traumatic past, survivors will be able to work through the traumas not only individually but communally as well. The creation of a community will allow the individual to find a means through which to articulate the traumatic event. The verbal construction and reconstruction of the trauma is essential in Morrison's work, particularly considering the fact that, because of the violent history of the African American community in the United States, the events were considered too difficult for the general public to approach. In her novels, nonetheless, communities may emerge as positive forces much in the line of Tal's research – as for instance the female community at the end of *Beloved* and *Home*, – or as negative ones – as in the case of *Paradise*, where the community in the town of Ruby is not able to heal from their past.

To further the analyses of the texts and stretch the exegeses into additional revealing terrains, this dissertation will also use critics such as Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, or Henry Louis Gates, Jr., among others. Lacan's conceptualization of both the Other and the gaze will be necessary throughout this analysis. On the one hand, the Lacanian Other refers to someone which is not the individual or who is odd though has some similarities with the person. On the other hand, the gaze makes reference to the mirror stage of the individual, by which the child perceives that he or she is a physical entity that can be seen by others and therefore prejudged by them. Because of the historical misapprehensions around the African American community both of these

Lacanian concepts are of particular interest as the African American individuals are both strangers to white society and subject to their values. For Butler these values are also of particular importance for the construction of the identity, as she analyzes both gender and race as social constructs that are internalized by the individual. As for Gates, his contributions to the study of African American history and literature are of the outmost importance for this dissertation, as they will guide the historical analysis of the black community in the American territory.

In order to convey her message, Morrison's narrative is filled with motifs that depict African American life. This dissertation will focus on four dimensions of the human experience present in all of Morrison's novels: body, mind, house, and community. All these elements are connected through her work – even in her essays and plays – as they signify the public and the private, the individual and the social, the traumatic and the healing. Throughout her novels, these four dimensions are tainted with trauma: the body suffers the physical scars of the punishments carried out under slavery, the mind struggles with the creation of an identity within a racist society, the house stands as both the place of solace and the place of suffering, and finally the community has the power to either isolate the individual or to heal him or her. These elements are so closely intertwined in Morrison's narrative – and often so much so that the lines between them become blurry – that even though they will be analyzed separately for the purposes of this dissertation, readers should be aware as to the extent of their overlapping qualities.

The first part of this dissertation will confront the body. Through the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987), this section will try to analyze the importance of physical appearance for the African American individual in a world that perceives them as different – much like Ralph Ellison had once suggested in his novel *Invisible Man*

through the concept of hyper-visibility, whereupon the African American individual is regarded as invisible by society at large. The first chapter of this part "The curse of Narcissus: Fragmented Bodies and Misrepresentations of Self in *The Bluest Eye*" will focus on the conceptualization of beauty and the destructive connotations that such a racialized construct will have on the main characters of *The Bluest Eye*. A beauty-obsessed society, needless to say, will consolidate itself with the advent of cinema and the mass distribution of movies at the beginning of the twentieth century. This analysis will rely on Lacan's concept of the gaze, as the individual sees these ideal features on the silver screen, and on the legacy of traumatic behaviors as explained by Vickroy. In the second chapter "The Flesh That Needs to Be Loved. Memory and Incarnation in *Beloved*," the analysis will turn to *Beloved* and to the impossibility to fully cure the psychological wounds inflicted by a system such as slavery. The wounds are often visible through the scars left in the victims' body, and it is necessary for the victim to fully acknowledge them in order to work through the past traumas. By returning from the dead, Sethe's daughter Beloved is forcing her mother to confront the past, to reconstruct it by expressing it with words and thus destroy the silence that plagues her memories. Such an analysis of the text will allow us to study the complicated power dynamics between slave and slave master and the repercussions that the Emancipation Proclamation Act of 1863 had on the African American individual's sense of identity.

The second part of this dissertation will turn to the house as the space of both trauma and familial bliss. Through the Thoreauvian concepts of space and place – in which space represents the unfamiliar locus while places are filled with positive memories – this part will study the creation of a home for those who have endured a traumatic event. Such conceptualization divides the locus into space – that is, the physical appearance/qualities of a setting – and place – the psychological elements with which the

individual identifies such a scene. Victims of a traumatic event usually associate the negative experience with the space and repeat the pattern established by these events when they are physically located within such a context. For this analysis, this dissertation will first focus with the chapter "The long way home. The return from the urban to the rural in *Home*" on Morrison's novel *Home* (2012) and the journey that Frank Money, a Korean war veteran, will have to go through in order to finally articulate his experiences in the war and how they threaten and even destroy the possibility of 'building' a home. The journey, a common motif in Western literature, will be used to describe the physical and psychological process by which the main character will come to terms with the traumatic past. For Money, the conversion of a traumatic space into place, into a haven, goes hand in hand with the reconciliation with his sister, an instrumental factor in the overcoming of the original trauma. In this same manner, the second chapter of this part "This house is not a home: Scenes of domestic trauma and urban landscapes in *Jazz*", deals with how Joe Trace and his wife Violet struggle to understand the place they live in, the city of New York in the beginning of the twentieth century, as they cannot seem to escape the ghosts of their rural past in the novel *Jazz* (1992). It is because of their cyclic repetition of damaging patterns that they have been unable to build a home. Using Derrida's concept of trace – an idea that closely resembles Morrison's own notion of re-memory, the victim's subconscious interaction of the past and the present – this chapter will study the need to identify past traumas in order to work through them and how in order to do so, spaces must become places for the individuals inhabiting them.

The third part will focus on the mind and the creation of the individual's identity within a social setting. By studying how gender and racial constructs interact with the subject and his or her creation of the self, this section will try to elucidate how individuals from ethnic minorities can build their own identity. These social constructs

are thoroughly explained by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (2008), where she argues that such social norms must be broken for the true identity of the person to come through. For this inquiry two elements will be analyzed: recognition and communication. To carry out this analysis, this dissertation will first address Morrison's play, *Desdemona* (2012), on the chapter entitled "'I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose': Voicing trauma after death in *Desdemona*" in which she re-tells Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604). To fully comprehend the extent and the implications of Morrison's art of rewriting, this chapter will first consider the implications surrounding racialized and gendered bodies elicited in Shakespeare's classic. Then it will turn to Morrison's revision so as to examine how social barriers and their effects are envisioned through her narrative. The individuals in Shakespeare's play are unable to fully communicate their own selves to one another. In Morrison's play – set in the afterlife – these social constructs vanish, and so the characters can speak their minds without the prejudice associated to social constraints. Part three then turns to the analysis of *A Mercy* (2008) with the chapter "'My telling can't hurt you': Writing through trauma and finding one's self during slavery in *A Mercy*," set in Maryland in the second half of the seventeenth century, and to its implicit connections to other slave narratives such as those by Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs, or Ellen Craft, among others. In undertaking a diachronic, comparative approach, this chapter will review and revisit the wide array of misconceptions and myths surrounding the African American community at the time. Using Lacan's concept of the gaze and how it relates to the different historical and religious misapprehensions surrounding the black individual, this chapter will analyze the creation of one's identity through the act of writing and the subject's need to be recognized when stuck within a situation of inequality.

Finally, the fourth part of this dissertation will examine the community and the power it has over the individual. As mentioned above, the community can have both a positive and a negative effect on the individual – it may prove to be beneficial, but it can also expose its own cracks and limitations. Following Tal's research on the creation of a community of survivors and the need of these victims for a safe space to communicate, this section will first focus on *Love* (2003) with the chapter "I blame her for the hate, I blame him for the theft. (Re)making the community in *Love*." The two-person community developed in the novel provides safety and comfort to the reduced number of members; however, their union poses a threat to the larger community which will ultimately lead to their undoing. In order to fully understand this community it will also be necessary to approach Kristeva's conception of the stranger as a wanderer in need of meeting another stranger – a valid reflection of the characters of Heed and Christine Cosey. The last chapter of this dissertation "Bewaring the Furrow of Their Brow: Racial Sin, Utopia and Community in *Paradise*" will then focus on the creation of a utopic all-black community of survivors in *Paradise* (1997). This utopia will be short-lived due to the restraints and limits set by the community under self-preservationist pretenses. This analysis will be carried out following Nietzsche's methodology on history alongside the concepts of majority and minority as explained by Deleuze and Guattari and the interactions of these concepts with the stranger, how the moment the majority is threatened the way to defend it – according to Morrison's novel – will be through violence.

From an interdisciplinary approach and using eight of Morrison's work as a starting point, this dissertation will try to elucidate the complex situation of the African American individual in the United States. The interactions of these four dimensions of trauma – body, mind, house, and community – will be the tools to gain a deeper

understanding of how Morrison employs narrative and language to ignite a positive change.

PART ONE: THE BODY

The physical aspects of the human experience have been usually considered minor or lesser in comparison to the enlightened mind. After all, Western civilization has always deemed everything related to the body as less virtuous than the potential ideas of the mind as Judith Butler points out in her canonical work *Gender Trouble* (2008). In her book, Butler exposes how philosophers have created a hierarchy in which the consciousness, the mind, rules over the unconscious, the body. This misguided pecking order, she continues, was transferred onto men and women, identifying men as the cerebral dimension of the dichotomy while women undertook the corporeal role.

> The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism. As a result, any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized. (17)

This same assumption could be directly linked to the experience of the African American community during slavery. Connected to manual labor and disavowed of the essential human characteristics – those of self-discernment and production beyond manual work, – slaves were continually seen as tied to their bodies and what they could do with them. Furthermore, as they were banned from exercising any kind of reasoning, slaves were not able to fully embrace the myriad elements that shape the human experience, which can primarily be explored by the traditional five senses. Even though slaves worked mainly in the fields, they could not fully enjoy what the sensations that their nervous system was trying to translate for them. And out of these senses, none was more undervalued than sight.

Through their eyes, black slaves were able to see all sorts of horrors that took place on the plantations. Because of the experiences they had to bear witness to – the constant rape of their women, the exploitation of friends and family, the refusal to acknowledge them as fellow men and women – sight was deemed a rudimentary mechanism that allowed them to perform their duties, choosing to not give it prevalence because of the horrors it brought up. The eye was regarded as another way to suffer, much like the rest of their bodies, not a powerful tool that could help them explore and discover through reading or just to enjoy nature.

However, throughout her books, Toni Morrison has re-claimed this otherwise disregarded sense. Through powerful descriptions and scenarios, she has been able to describe plateaus of the African American experience throughout the ages. From the pre and post slavery times in *A Mercy* (2008) and *Beloved* (1987) respectively, to the Harlem Renaissance era in *Jazz* (1992) or the stages right before the Civil Rights Movement in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison has made of sight the privileged sense. Her books are filled with colors that both the characters and the readers explore and discover, much

like Baby Suggs – one of her characters in *Beloved* – does once she has been freed from slavery.

The aim in this part of the dissertation to analyze how both body and sight are examined in Morrison's works and how they are connected to the traumatic experience of the African American community. To carry out this research, two works have been selected: *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. In the former the power of the eye is already foreshadowed in its title while in the latter it will be the body and the scars it bears that will be scrutinized. After all, as Eliza Schreiber points out "[t]rauma and recovery are complicated, layered processes for all individuals because both personal and cultural memory reactivate past experiences stored in bodily circuits. Hope for agency lies in coming to terms with how the body stores trauma" (3).

1.1. The curse of Narcissus: fragmented bodies and misrepresentations of the self in *The Bluest Eye*

> The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain
> of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present
> of the subject – it is the field of that living being in
> which the subject has to appear.
> Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (203)

According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), Narcissus was the son of the god Cephicos and the Nymph Liriope. When he was born, his parents asked the seer Tiresias to foresee the future of the baby. The Oracle answered that Narcissus would live to be an old man as long as he did not look at himself. Forbidden to see his own image in a looking glass, Narcissus only had those around him to judge his external appearance, making them his constant mirrors. As a handsome young man, the image that everyone reflected of him was a positive one, mustering the lust of everyone around him, even as he continuously rejected every woman or goddess infatuated with him. Due to her jealousy, the goddess Nemesis cursed the young demi-god to fall in love, which he did when he was tricked into contemplating his own image reflected in the water. From that moment on, Narcissus lived just to contemplate himself, dying when he realized he could not possess his lover.

This portrayal of external beauty and its reflection on the other is connected to the theories by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan explained this process when

he enunciated his theory on the ego ideal and the Other in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1977). According to Lacan, the individual needs the community around him or her to create an image of him or herself. This image would then be the ego ideal, to which we aspire in order to feel loved and satisfied. The parents, who project their feelings onto their offspring, originally create this first image. It is this primal image that the parents convey to their children that starts the formation of the ego of the infant.

Therefore, even if the individual may use mirrors in order to form an image of him or herself, it is only through the opinion of others that the person can form his or her own idea of self. The assumption of certain values such as beauty, ugliness, or slenderness, among others, is in most cases a social construct. Beauty was one of the highest values in classical Greece, for example, Plato even placed it as the highest Idea. This ideal Beauty was taken by the Renaissance painters and writers who depicted athletic men and women as the perfection to strive for as can be seen on the many paintings of Venus that were made at the time, often accompanied by gods like Mars or Adonis portrayed as athletic, powerful men. This paradigm of beauty shifted when the Age of Reason began as full-figured men and women were seen as the archetype of beauty in paintings by Flemish painters like Rubens. In fact, much of this shift had to do with the idea of full-figured women been more apt to bear children and also as patrons were mostly stout as they had the money to eat meat. Like Umberto Eco would remind the reader on his treaty *On Beauty* (2004) "Rubens's woman … expresses a Beauty devoid of recondite meanings, glad to be alive and to show herself" (209).

Alongside this projection of the external value of beauty, another concept must be taken into account: recognition. When all of Narcissus' suitors wanted to seduce him, they all recognized him as part of their community. Even though he was a demi-god, all of his external features – his body, his scars, his eyes – were those of a handsome young

man. Hence they saw in him an equal, someone who was in fact part of their society. It was only when he rejected all of them that they realized their mistake and asked for the gods to punish him.

The fact that the members of the community were able to recognize him as a man was what pushed them to acknowledge him as part of their people. The identification of an individual with a group – be it religious, ethnic, gender, sexual, or any other, – to perceive said group as an assembly of persons alike oneself is another key element that helps the subject to create his or her own personality. Paula B. June affirms when talking about the female community – and the same paradigm would stand for any other part of society – that it is only through the recognition and subsequent admission of a woman into the community that she might be able to work through past traumas, traumas underlying those which are permanently visible through wounds, scars, or deformities in one's body. And June continues "[t]he symbol of the fragmented body – marked by the wound, the mutilation, or the scar – often represents historical traumas of a person or community" (12).

Therefore two processes take place in the creation of individual and group identities. First, the group must recognize the subject as an equal, someone whose physical, psychological or spiritual features are in agreement with the communal ones. Secondly, the person must identify him or herself with the people, seeing in them the equivalent features to the ones he or she offers and also the potential to grow physically and intellectually among them. These two reciprocal movements, to be recognized and to identify oneself with a group, are necessary for a community of equals.

However, what happens when the individual or communal psyche is broken? What happens when a community has traditionally been identified as inferior to another due to their physical appearance? This is of particular importance for the Africanist

persona, as Morrison refers to it, as the African people had been traditionally seen as ugly or even evil by the Western world, as Umberto Eco points out on his book *On Ugliness* (2007) where, quoting James of Vitry, an author from the Middle Ages, he tells the reader that "we find black Ethiopians to be ugly, but among them it is the blackest who is considered the most beautiful" (10). Morrison poses the question regarding external beauty and rejection from the mainstream white society in her novels, most specifically in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). In her first novel, she analyses how the images portrayed by the cinema industry and other media can transfer erroneous paradigms of external beauty onto the African American community, which was then under represented and mistreated. As she points out in her book *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992),

> How did the founding writers of young America engage, imagine, employ, and create an Africanist presence and persona? In what ways do these strategies explicate a vital part of American literature? How does excavating these pathways lead to fresh and more profound analyses of what they contain and how they contain it? (51)

Even though positive images of black men and women were portrayed in the media in the first half of the twentieth century, some of the misconceptions and stereotypes still carried on through this time. In spite of figures like Sarah Vaughan, W.E.B. Du Bois or Zora Neale Hurston, among others, who demonstrated the power, wit and beauty of their community in the public sphere, the misconceptions created in the previous centuries around African Americans were still in vogue. The image of the black man as either an Uncle Tom figure, good but nevertheless dimwitted, or as a monstrous attacker who populated the nightmares of white women, were still considered somehow true, though these myths were slowly being torn down by a few positive images of black men in the media. This can be seen in characters like Mr. Bojangles, one

of Shirley Temple's dancers, an infantilized and asexual black man – heir to the Mary Beecher Stowe character – or the blot of blackface in movies, that is, white actors who portrayed the afore-mentioned negative paradigms in order to create caricatures of black men.

Concurrently, misconceptions about black women were also commonplace. As women were generally regarded as inferior to men, African American women were considered less than their male counterparts, only deemed able to take care of the house or childrearing. Apparently innocent caricatures of black women such as Aunt Jemima (a character spread around the United States at the turn of the century due to the song "Old Aunt Jemima") or Mammy (a figure popularized by Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) and its Hollywood version in 1939[1]) populated the American imaginary of the beginning of the twentieth century. Black women were hired in wealthy white households to perform lesser duties that white women would not perform.

This is the frame for which Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Set in the aftermath of the Great Depression in an industrialized city, Lorrain, Ohio – where the author was born and raised, - the novel chronicles the life of the Breedlove family. Narrated from the point of view of one of the main characters, Claudia McTeer, the novel tells the story of a family unattached to the rest of the community, as their identities were in complete opposition to what being African American meant for the town. Unable to see themselves as they truly were, they looked for recognition in the gaze of the others. However, unlike Narcissus, the image that the Breedloves received was a negative one, creating a distorted image of themselves. This is particularly true in the case of the two women in the family, Pauline and Pecola Breedlove, mother and daughter respectively.

[1] Hattie McDaniel's portrayal of the character Mammy in the cinematographic version of *Gone With the Wind*, however, made her the first African American to win an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1939.

As a young woman, Pauline lived in rural Kentucky, the ninth of eleven children. At the age of two, she stepped on a nail and as a result deformed her foot. Because of this deformation, she becomes a stranger to her own family, who does not recognize her as one of their own. She is deemed unable to attend classes or become part of the community, so she is given the task of caring for her two baby brothers while her mother is away. In her seclusion, she seeks order and peace through compulsively organizing the different objects in the house, trying to take pride in what she does in order for her family to recognize her as one of their own. The separation from the rest of the family and the incapacity to identify with them makes her particularly vulnerable to exterior stimuli. Even though she tries to obtain her family's approval through the cleaning of their house, the inability of the family to see her as an equal leaves her without the positive image that could protect her against the unforgiving gaze of the rest of the community, as Morrison describes her in the novel.

> Slight as it was, this deformity explained for her many things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible: why she alone of all the children had no nickname; why there were no funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done; why no one ever remarked on her food preferences … why nobody teased her; why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace. (86)

Pauline is locked away in the privacy of her home, not belonging to her own community or even her family. The only escape she has is to take pride in her house, her home, as a reflection of her psyche. As Valerie Sweeney Prince points out "[t]he act of place making, like all other constructions of identity, is necessarily communal. It operates in terms of inclusion and exclusion, and consequently precipitates the construction of binary oppositions like inside versus outside or 'us' versus 'them' – and these are debatable constructs"(69). Through the creation of an orderly house and by separating herself from her ostracizing family, she is able to create a persona detached from

mainstream African American culture, something that will make her particularly vulnerable later on.

It is only when Cholly, a young man from the South, finds her, that she can finally experience belonging to someone / something. Left by his mother in a garbage can when he was born, Cholly was raised by his great aunt Jimmy without any knowledge of who his mother or his father were – the only reference his aunt gives him of his father is that he was "'[t]hat Fuller boy, I believe it was … He was hanging around then, but he taken off pretty quick before you was born'" (103). Even though the image her aunt reflected of him was a positive one, due to his parent's abandonment he always feels unable to connect with the rest of the people that regularly populate his aunt's house. Only when she passes away can he build up the courage to go locate his father, trying to find a sense of self that will be denied when his father first identifies him as his son but then immediately rejects him. Due to the inability or unwillingness of his father to acknowledge and welcome him as his son, Cholly loses control over his bowels and soils himself, in an episode filled with shame and rage – a scene that will be echoed in *Beloved* (1987), Morrison's fifth novel and the topic of the next chapter, when Sethe first encounters Beloved waiting at her doorstep. Because of this rejection, as J. Brooks Bouson points out, "he feels exposed to the humiliating gaze of others. The literally dirtied and helpless Cholly imagines that his father will see him and laugh and, indeed, that everybody will laugh." (35)

In addition to this rejection, another important episode in Cholly's life is his frustrated first sexual encounter. When he was a teenager in the rural South, he fell in love with a friend, Darlene. As the episode moves along in the book, various joyous images are conjured by the author: how she tickles him, how they both laugh, how they are enjoying what many would describe as an important rite of passage into adulthood. It

is at this point that two white men appear with a flashlight and force the young man to continue while they watch. This otherwise happy moment turns sour due to the shameful acts of these voyeurs. However, instead of turning his hatred towards them, the experience generates hatred towards *her*, Darlene.

> Cholly, moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her. He almost wished he could do it – hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much. The flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile. He stared at Darlene's hand covering her face in the moon and lamplight. They looked like *baby claws*. (117, italics mine)

Cholly bestializes Darlene in his hatred, calling her hands "baby claws," therefore mixing the human and the animal. According to the psychoanalytical theories developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) on his book *The Ego and the Id* (1923), this transformation of the lover's extremities into monstrous baby claws could be a manifestation of what he defines as "obsessional neurotic" (78). The individual suffering from this disorder displaces all the shame or negative feelings that he or she could have of himself or herself and relocates them in another person or object, thus protecting him or herself from potentially endangering his or her own life and safeguarding the ego. Furthermore

> [i]n the obsessional neurosis it has become possible … for the love-impulses to transform themselves into impulses of aggression against the object. Here again the instinct of destruction has been set free and it aims at destroying the object, or at least it appears to have this aim. (78)

These two traumatic events – the rejection by his father and the sexual encounter with Darlene – point to the original rejection by his mother when he was only a baby. Furthermore, the inability to control his bowels, as if he were a toddler when his

father dismisses him alludes to a traumatic return to the original refusal. This cyclical return to a traumatic event is one of the most common tropes in Morrison, mentally returning to a situation that was either not completely resolved in the past or whose participants have not been able to work through it[2]. Even though Cholly, as the author points out in a 1976 interview "has done *everything*… he was able to do whatever his whims suggested [with an] absence of control" (19), he is unable to move on from the traumatic past that haunts him. In fact, in order to avoid confronting these ghosts of the past, he has created a confident and self-sufficient persona. Cholly will use this defiant character as a shield to avoid confronting deep-rooted traumas such as the ones exemplified by these two episodes. In fact, the black community will see Cholly's personality *a posteriori* as a representation of everything that they reject, as Bouson indicates in her article.

Cholly refuses the role of victim and embraces the role that society wants him to fulfill: that of an "angry black man." He will no longer be the victim of white society but actually the unknowing participant in an on-going stereotype that will lead him to victimize the members of his family. As Bouson continues in her study "Cholly's defiant displays of shameless behavior – his shamelessness serving as a defense against his deep-rooted shame-anxiety – catapults him 'beyond the reaches of human consideration.' An object of communal contempt and disgust, Cholly is viewed as a degenerate type" (36).

However, when Pauline and Cholly meet, they both feel complete for the first time. As Pauline would recall "when Cholly come up and tickled my foot, it was like them berries, that lemonade, them streaks of green the June bugs made, all come together. Cholly was thin then, with real light eyes. He used to whistle, and when I heerd

[2] Examples of this traumatic cycles can be found in *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) or *Love* (2003), as will be analyzed further on the next chapters.

him, shivers come on my skin" (90). Cholly celebrated what for the rest of Pauline's family was a sign of separation, her foot. It is through the recognition of this "flaw" as something positive – and something that would later on be linked to their sexual experiences – that Pauline feels validated as a woman. She no longer needs to take care of her younger brothers or her house; she is free to pursue a relationship with Cholly. They recognize in the other their own flaws and identify them with their painful past, hoping that creating a community of flawed individuals would help to work through their traumatic pasts.

Through their mutual recognition, they exit the passive role of being the object of the Lacanian gaze, being observed by their families as strangers, and become active subjects. They are able to become part of the society around them as they have finally been accepted as members of a community of their own – something that will be explored at length later on in this analysis using *Jazz* (1992) and *Love* (2003). And as Cholly and Pauline are not part of any kind of group, rejected by both society and family in the South, they decide to create a new life and become part of a larger community up North, where factories and work were easier to procure for uneducated individuals. However, due to their lack of positive images of a community that supports them and only relying on the image that the other portrays, their happiness is momentary in Lorrain, Ohio. Even though they arrive to the city with great expectations of a new beginning in a more welcoming environment than their rural origins they are unable to become part of the larger group in their new residence due to their lack of a firm image of themselves and their ignorance around the rich culture that the African American community had had during the first half of the twentieth century. They are the outsiders, everything that society considers wrong in their own race and they are unable to become a part of the mainstream African American culture. Because of it, they are engorged by

society and they passively accept the negative stereotypes of the black community that have been explored.

On the one hand, Cholly embraces the role of an "angry black man." Due to his lack of positive image and to his unsolved traumatic past, he is unable to keep a steady job. Furthermore, the happiness with Pauline is ephemeral, as even though he thought she reflected a positive image of him, this image is short-lived. Rejected by his own people and seen as a danger for society at large, he will become a pariah, a drunk that will lead his family to its own destruction because of his psychological shortcomings.

On the other hand, Pauline finds herself lost in a society she does not understand. Used to being locked away in the privacy of her home, putting order in an otherwise chaotic house – which could be seen as a reflection of her psyche as was pointed out – she is unable to integrate with the rest of the community in Lorrain. The ostracism to which she was accustomed with her own family and the absence of Cholly both in their marriage and their house pushes her further towards an incapacity to create deep connections / relationships with the rest of the women in the town.

Even though she tries to establish her power in the realm of her home, the absence of a connection with her husband and her first born makes her try to get out of the house. But as the rest of the African Americans in Lorrain sees her as an outsider, incapable of joining them in celebrating her own community, she cannot find solace in the rest of the women as other characters do in the novel. For example, the narrator's mother, Mrs. MacTeer – throughout the novel, the positive paradigm of a black woman – has a group of female friends that meet in order to talk about the different problems and gossip that go around the city. In this way, Mrs. MacTeer's daughters are in close touch with affirmative models of femininity, women that celebrate their own sexuality and independence within the mainstream society.

Unable to access these positive archetypes of black womanhood, Pauline secludes herself in the only place where she will not be judged by the gaze of the others: the movie theater. In the darkness of the movie theater, nobody looks at her; she can be herself and feast on the stories on the silver screen. In this paradigm, the Lacanian gaze is unidirectional, that is, the subject is not seen by the images on the screen or the figures depicted in a painting, he or she is the only one judging the images – even though they do not feel his or her judgment. Nevertheless, there are hidden traces of the painter or the director's gaze in the work of art. As Lacan points out

> The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which, in part, at least, of the painting, might be summed up thus – You want to see? Well, take a look at this! He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. (110)

Therefore the spectator is invited to incorporate the paradigms presented in the work of art. The painting does not see the spectator directly; it is not the one inflicting the gaze onto the subject. However, the painting acts partially as the channel of the painter's gaze as part of the paradigms that he or she believes in or wants to transmit through the piece that will be passed on for the audience to absorb passively. Through the work of art, the artist can pass to a certain extent his or her views on moral or aesthetic values, most of them standing on the dichotomies pre-established by society: right or wrong, obese or skinny, ugly or beautiful.

The same model can be extrapolated to other works of art, such as books or, in the case of Pauline Breedlove, movies. While museums required for the individual to be in the same city where it is located or the means to trave to wherever the museum was and books required the ability to read and write, everyone could, as Morrison points out in the novel, enjoy the latest movie with "Clark Gable and Jane Harlow" (96). Through

the Hollywood industry, these movies would enforce models of life that would not have otherwise reached such a vast group of people, imposing their own views on them. The role of men in the house as bread winners and the ones who were able to deal with the outside world, and the role of women was keeping the maintainance of the house and the rearing of the children, were models that, even though already existing in society's imaginary, were perpetuated by the film industry. Individuals who tried to rebel against that system in the movies – like the *femme fatale* in the detective stories – were often deemed unfit to be a part of society and hence portrayed as evil and ultimately either murdered or transformed by the angelical touch of the main character – in the case of the detective stories, their male counterpart.

Another of the ideas that movies perpetuated – and more rapidly and violently that other works of art ever did – was the ideal of beauty. Actors portrayed impossible models of beauty that men and women tried to copy. As Ed Guerrero points out "it is this 'look' that Hollywood always tries to efface from the consciousness of the spectator so that one may identify with one's 'ideal ego image' in the story world and deeply submerge into the film's verisimilitude" (30). Along with these ideals, misrepresentations as well as under-representation of the African American community in mainstream movies of the time were also commonplace. In the absence of these positive images of beauty in popular media, black men and women either accepted the stereotypes or tried to resemble the white actors on the screen, hence arguably reversing the phenomena of blackface, creating through the whitening of their features a caricature of what they would observe in the media, with even more negative consequences, and their own identity as proud black individuals. Notwithstanding, during the first half of the twentieth century there were many beauty products popular among black men and women to

whiten their skin or to straighten their hair[3] - something that would not start to change until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's with the "Black is beautiful" campaign. As Morrison would affirm in 2008 in this particular campaign

> The best example of instant and reactionary myth-making can be found in the slogan "Black Is Beautiful." One was immediately tempted to say, "So what?" Of course, young people loved it – beauty, physical beauty, was important to them (like being "popular" in school). After all, they had grown up with Marilyn, Miss America and Mademoiselle. Older people liked it too, for it seemed to liberate them from the fretful problems of hair and Nadinola. But most of all white people loved it because, at last, somebody had said aloud what they had worked so hard to hide: their overwhelming attraction to us. Still, other than this brief foray into self-congratulation, that slogan didn't help us any more than that other myth of beauty helped Narcissus. You will recall that he fell in love with his reflection and pined away into death at the lip of pool – while the world went on. (37-38)

The lack of a strong sense of identity and the inability to join the community in Lorrain makes Pauline the perfect candidate to adhere to all these values conveyed by the media. Pauline passively gobbles the fantastical plotlines and impossible ideals of beauty in Hollywood, ideals that she herself cannot achieve due to the color of her skin. As Guerrero explains

> She is therefore forced to look at and apply to herself a completely unrealizable, alien standard of feminine beauty and to experience the dissatisfaction resulting from the contradiction. The problem for Pauline with the dominant gaze built into classic cinema is that, in her specific situation, it conjures up the triple devaluation of being female, black, and poor.(30)

[3] Not surprisingly, Morrison exposes this phenomenon further in the book *The Black Book* (1974), book she edited for Random House, where she collected advertisements of some of the bleaching products typical of the era, among other things. These products will re-appear in her novel *Jazz*, where one of the main characters, Joe Trace, will be a door-to-door salesman of these types of products.

The transmission of these values and the impossibility for Pauline to attach to them is evident when she tries to copy the hairstyle of one of the actresses. With her new hairstyle, she goes to the movie theater and sits in the dark movie theater, starting to feel confident about her looks. It is then that Pauline loses one of her front teeth, making it impossible for her to ever be beautiful according to the paradigms presented through Hollywood. Like she says "[e]verything went then [when she pulled her tooth]. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly" (96). Even Cholly makes fun of her when she comes back home, hence finishing the short lived time of peace between both of them that was brought upon by her pregnancy with her first child, Sam.

The dream of belonging to someone / somewhere that Cholly gave to Pauline starts to shatter the moment she loses that first tooth. It is a sign that the mirage of happiness that she achieved next to Cholly was starting to fade, doing so completely when she gives birth to her second child, Pecola. Though at first she is happy about the birth of her second child affirming that "I 'member I said I'd love it no matter what it looked like. She looked like a black ball of hair. I don't recollect trying to get pregnant that first time. But that second time, I actually tried to get pregnant" (96), the way the doctors treat Pauline during the birth of Pecola makes her reject both her daughter and the idea that black could be beautiful. She describes the first mother-daughter encounter as "[t]hey give her to me for a nursing, and she liked to pull my nipple off right away. She caught on fast. Not like Sammy, he was the hardest child to feed. But Pecola look like she knowed right off what to do. [...] But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (96). By accepting her role as ugly and inferior, Pauline finally submits to mainstream society's rules and stereotypes and starts working at a white

household as a servant. Ironically, once in this contexts and subjugated to the desires of the white family, she can finally thrive.

It is with her white patrons that she can finally access social acceptance through the assigned roles that the white community – and Hollywood – have given her. Pauline's employers, the Fishers, are not distressed by her foot or by her physical appearance. They do not care if she is an active member of the African American community or not. They are only interested in her work, in her keeping the house organized and clean, which is something that due to her rejection by her family she has been trained to do. Even though the separation from her own community and the acceptance of images linked to her new role are negative, she finally belongs somewhere.

> More and more she [Pauline] neglected her house, her children, her man – they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely. (99)

Additionally, the Fishers gave her a nickname, Polly. A custom well documented by authors such as Maya Angelou, white families tended to change their servants name to one of their liking, hence trying to negate their roots and their belonging to a family unit other than the role they played within the household. Much like the role of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, white employers – and in the past, white slave masters – saw themselves as responsible to name and change the creatures around them, no matter what the outcome of such practice would be. As Maya Angelou remembers in her book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)

> 'Well, that may be, but the name's too long. I'd never bother myself. I'd call her Mary if I was you' […]
>
> Miss Glory's face was a wonder to see. 'You mean Margaret, ma'am. Her name is Margaret' . . .

> 'Twenty years. I wasn't much older than you. My name used to be Hallelujah. That's what Ma named me, but my mistress give me 'Glory,' and it stuck. I likes it better too.' (104–106)

However, in the case Angelou, she rejected such imposition, leaving the houses where she worked as housekeeper. For Pauline, the fact that the family gave her a nickname was seen as something positive for her. Unable to get one from her family, she looked at this imposition as a chance to create her own persona in a place where the master's gaze would not judge nor impose an image other than the one she already had of herself – ugly, maniacal about how a house should be run, and sexless. Moreover, she fulfilled this paradigm more perfectly by identifying the little girl the Fishers had as a replica of Shirley Temple, the image of infant beauty of the time, which not only should be adored but also protected from external factors that could pollute her innocent self. Sethe was then fulfilling the role of Aunt Jemima – a female version of Uncle Tom, a naïve and servile woman – in a twentieth century household and perpetuating this stereotype in the American imaginary.

The question that arises at this point is: if Pauline protected this little white girl, how would she protect her own daughter, Pecola? And the answer would be not at all. Pecola is for Pauline the personification of all the negative values that the African American community sees in herself. Ugly, inferior, worthless, and unable to belong to a proud community, Pecola is left helpless "outdoors," as Claudia, the narrator, tells us.

> There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (11)

Pecola embodies the notion of the outsider, and as such, is the perfect vessel for all of the community's insecurities and the faults that mainstream society sees in

them. However, her youth should negate this statement, as she should be counted as part of the community and accepted as an innocent girl. At this point, another use of the gaze should be added to those that have been analyzed before, what Ralph Ellison defines as "hyper-visibility." According to the introduction of his novel *The Invisible Man* (1947), the African American individual – because of the color of his or her skin – cannot be invisible for society. They cannot hide their ethnic background since it is inscribed in their skin. However, instead of these features being celebrated by society, they are deemed invisible, making them hyper-visible. As Ellison affirms "despite the bland assertions of sociologists, 'high visibility' actually rendered [the African- American citizen] un-visible" (482). That is, society chooses not to see what would be otherwise obvious to the eye.

In the instance of Pecola Breedlove, the fact that she is deemed unfit to join her community makes of her the perfect scapegoat for their faults. African American individuals are suffering under the constant negation of positive reinforcement models from mainstream society, as has been evidenced with the case of Pauline. They are forced to impose society's gaze on someone who is not protected in order to fulfill their own vision of themselves. "Everywhere the message resounds in American culture that black cannot be beautiful; indeed, as the Breedloves' self-loathing demonstrates, the blacker, the less beautiful." (Matus 41)

The hyper-visibility that Ellison described goes one step further where Pecola is concerned. Not only does the rest of society victimize her but also she is not seen at all. As Claudia points out in one of the passages of the novel "[a]ll of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her." (162–163) This is particularly evident in the passage with Mr.

Yacobowski, the Jewish shopkeeper. In it, Pecola went innocently enough to buy candy and the shopkeeper was unable to see her at all. Where she was standing, there is a "total absence of human recognition", a "vacuum" of sorts, as Morrison herself puts it (36). An outsider himself, as he is a Jewish man in a black community, he is unable to acknowledge the little girl.

In order to acknowledge Pecola, an innocent girl, as the perfect vessel for the community's faults, the root of her own identity misconception or shortcomings must first be analyzed. And the answer would lie with Pauline and Cholly, as pariahs in their own community, and unable to counteract the effects of society on their children. Instead, not only do they perpetuate these myths and stereotypes but they magnify them in the case of their children. Unable to personify strong and balanced role models for Pecola and Sam, they act as broken mirrors in which their children try to reflect, only to receive crippled and crippling versions of their own self. When Pecola turns to her mother for positive values, Pauline is unable to give her any, as Pecola is the constant reminder of her own faults according to the silver screen and society. This feeling starts when Pauline is giving birth to Pecola. Even though she already went through this process with her son, Sam, she is feeling happy at the thought of having a little girl. However, when she goes to the hospital to give birth, she encounters the crude reality of medicine at the time, which perpetuated the myths created during slavery that black women did not feel pain during birth; she is treated like an animal.

> I went to the hospital when the time come. So I could be easeful. I didn't want to have it at home like I done with the boy. They put me in a big room with a whole mess of women. The pains was coming, but not too bad. A little old doctor come to examine me. He had all sorts of stuff. He gloved his hand and put some kind of jelly on it and rammed it up between my legs. When he left off, some more doctors come. One old one and some young ones. The old one was learning the young ones about babies. Showing them how to

> do. When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. (97–98)

The brutalization Pauline suffers during the birth makes her reject Pecola completely. Unable to get the approval from her mother and defenseless towards the insults of others, Pecola eagerly seeks the key that might help her enter the African American community. She turns to school but she is confronted by the mainstream models of beauty and family are sustained there by the "Dick and Jane" primer with which Morrison's book begins. In this pedagogical method common in the first half of the twentieth century, young boys and girls learned to read bearing witness to Dick and Jane's perfect life, perpetuating white lifestyle models. Both children are the ideal white brother and sister, sharing games in their white picket fence dream house where their mother cooks dinner for them, a dinner that will be ready by the time their father comes back from work, therefore portraying the American Dream so coveted by society.

Not only are these paradigms a way of continuing patriarchal modes of living but they become an American Nightmare for black individuals and lower class citizens. The lower class community of the United States of the time – and even the current one – were trapped between the American dream and reality, as couples cannot live in a utopic world in which the woman can spend her days without contributing to the household budget and the man has a perfect white-collar job and comes back home fully realized after the working day. Often both spouses need to work in blue-collar jobs, with high physical stress, and often for an unfair salary, making it impossible for them to achieve the 'perfect' household and forcing them to be content with what they have. Easily, they can turn to frustration that can be projected onto the children, as in the case of the Breedloves, if they do not have a fixed image of themselves. This archetype is however not always applicable when the individuals are well adjusted in their own community as

in the case of the MacTeer family, in which both parents work but nevertheless do not try to access unattainable lifestyle models, as they celebrate being part of the black community and try to break with the stereotypes imposed by white society.

Rejected by family and school, both attempts to become part of the community, Pecola must turn to cinema in order to pursue her quest for happiness. After all, her mother before her found there the ideals to validate her own persona. And it is here that Pecola finds Shirley Temple, a modern day Narcissus for the young girl. In the little starlet Pecola sees everything that she lacks: a beautiful face, loved by everyone, envied by both white and black girls alike, and wealth. However, when dissecting what makes Shirley Temple different from herself, Pecola is unable to point at any physical features – apart from the color of the skin – that would make them so divergent. The only feature that she can identify is her eyes, and therefore Shirley Temple's piercing blue eyes are the goal that Pecola wants to reach. It is in these blue eyes that the secret of beauty and the solution to all her problems resides for the little girl, and she prays for them constantly. With these eyes, she imagines that her mother would love her as much as she adores the little white girl Pauline works for and society would welcome her into their community, and she would no longer be a pariah. However, this distinctive Caucasian feature is not one that Pecola can achieve easily – or at all, for that matter.

Pecola will nevertheless try to obtain these blue eyes through the intervention of the mysterious figure of Soaphead Church. After what could be considered one of the most haunting scenes of Morrison's work – Pecola's rape by her father, Cholly – Pecola is desperate to be accepted by her mother and society, in an effort to keep her sanity shattered after such an atrocious act. In order to do so, she resorts to this man, a healer of sorts and an outcast himself, to give her blue eyes. Feeding on the girl's despair, Soaphead Church pretends to give her these blue eyes and the innocent Pecola believes

him. This action, which could be seen as cruel by the readers, is nevertheless observed by the man as an act of kindness. As Morrison explained in an interview in 1994

> I had to have someone – her mother, of course, made her want it in the first place – who would give her the blue eyes. And there had to be somebody who could, who had the means; that kind of figure who dealt with fortune-telling, dream-telling and so on, who would also believe that she was right, that it was preferable for her to have blue eyes. And that would be a person like Soaphead. […]. I needed someone to distill all of that, to say, "Yeah, you're right, you need them. Here, I'll give them to you," and really believe that he had done her a favor. Someone who would never question the request in the first place. (22)

Instead of achieving the approval of her mother and society, Pecola is driven crazy by her desire to have blue eyes. Her inability to deal with her rape, as she is too young to fully understand what has happend, makes her unable to join a community that would help her work through it. Futhermore, the fact that she was violated by her own father, she is pregnant as a result and her mother subsequently blames her for the pregnancy, will signify the ultimate downfall for the little girl. In fact, the community around her, as Claudia would explain, puts the blame on Pecola as they repeat that "[s]he carr[ies] some of the blame" (149). The only community that she is finally able to join is the community she creates with her other self, dissociating herself from what has happened. Shirley Temple and society's views on beauty finally condemn her to a life of madness as is portrayed by Morrison in this dialogue between Pecola and her imaginary self.

> If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world.
>
> *That's just too bad, isn't it?*

Please help me look.

No.

But suppose my eyes aren't blue enough?

Blue enough for what?

Blue enough for... I don't know. Blue enough for something. Blue enough... for you! (161)

In conclusion, the three different types of gaze that the individual can receive can have devastating consequences. Firstly, the gaze of one's peers can separate the individual from them if he or she is deemed unfit to join the community – or family. This first gaze that the individual endures sets the pillars for later interaction with other members of society and can be damaging in as far as he or she may not be able to join this larger community without a stable self. This is true in the cases of Cholly and Pauline, whose damaged self-image are the aftermath of being neglected when young. Secondly, the gaze that mainstream media projects on the individual may create unobtainable goals that can separate the person from their own reality and values. These ideal values produce anxiety in the individual, who can only manage such anxiety by separating himself or herself from their own community, as is exemplified first by Pauline and then by Pecola, who focus on the ideals of beauty and life portrayed on the silver screen only to reject and not conform to the reality they live in. Lastly, the incapability of scaping the white gaze by the African American individual along with the lack of positive values adhered to their ethnicity poses a threat to the black person. The stigmas that society has adhered to being black may turn out to be devastating for young boys and girls that were and are unable to fully grasp the values of their own community, driving them away from rejoicing in their own individuality.

1. 2 The flesh that needs to be loved. Memory and Incarnation in *Beloved*

Stop haunting me now
Can't shake you no how
Just leave me alone
I've got those Monday blues
Straight to Sunday blues
Billie Holiday. *Good Morning Heartache*

During the Renaissance, master painter Leonardo Da Vinci started to use a peculiar technique with which he wanted to explore distorting the object in the painting, leaving the spectator to guess what this object might be.[4] With this procedure the Tuscan genius was trying to deceive the viewer, shifting the attention from the main object of the painting to what was at first sight ignored, but which would be later discovered to be the central piece of the work of art by the spectator. This technique is called *anamorphosis*, and it has been used by many artists then and since. One of the most well-known examples of this style is the painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) by German artist Hans Holbein The Younger in which we can see two men, representatives of the Church and the State, surrounded by iconographic objects of the classical subjects – geography,

[4] This change of perspective was not accidental, as many contemporary scientists were changing the perspective of their own research, bringing upon an anthropocentric era, shifting the balance of power and importance from God to men. As Ernest Gilman reminds us in *The Curious Perspective* (1978) it is at this point that Da Vinci coined his popular remark "*l'uomo è la misura del mondo*" "man is the measure of the world" (8, my translation)

astronomy, music, among others – and at the bottom of the painting a dark stain that frames the bottom of the scene. This stain that might be at first ignored by the viewer is later discovered – if looked at from an extreme lateral position – to be a skull, representing death surrounding all the aspects of life exposed by the painter.

This technique has been used throughout the different arts and sciences, gaining particular importance in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By using anamorphic depictions of objects or scenes, authors such as William Shakespeare or John Donne forced the spectator or reader respectively to alter their position in order to completely understand the statements that were being made. Examples of these objects can be found in the cauldron of the three witches in *Macbeth* (1606), as the image they see in the cauldron is distorted and only visible by them from an angle, or *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning* (1611) when Donne speaks about the lovers' souls connected as the two sides of a compass and therefore never too far apart. Even if at first sight the lovers are not connected, if looked from a different angle – above –a link can be found between them.

One of the main characteristics of this peculiar procedure is the interaction with the audience. The public must interact with the work of art in order to fully understand the message conveyed by the author. Furthermore, as Jen E. Boyle points out

> [a] crucial aspect of the anamorphic experience […] is the way in which it requires that the experience be written on the body, that the body carry with it the cognitive and autonomic traces of having been unmoored from perceptual anchors and pushed into a mode of spectatorship aught up in affective intensity and perceptual uncertainty. (1)

The physical aspect of the painting or the book is then required to perceive the work of art. Not only does the spectator's gaze interact with the work of art, but the subject must be a willing participant and adapt to the rules stated by the object to

embrace its hidden meaning. Therefore, what may seem something of little to no importance, an afterthought by the artist, yields the utmost importance in the composition. Hidden but critical matters are present not only in the works of art of Renaissance artists and authors, but also in common life and current society matters that are too uncomfortable to bring up in conversations but that, like the skull in Holbein's painting, loom in the background, fester and gain subconscious power over society. One such a topic is slavery and the ways it is still a challenging and uncomfortable topic to tackle after one hundred and fifty years since its abolition in the United States. Even though authors have tried to confront this issue, acknowledging its existence and trying to work through the diverse ramifications of this dark episode of American history, there is still much resentment and silence surrounding it.

Many authors have undertaken the study of slavery from diverse points of view, giving voice to an otherwise silent wound in American culture. From the slave narratives of authors like Frederick Douglass, Mary Prince or Harriet Jacobs – among many – to novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) or William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Amidst these authors, Toni Morrison has made slavery one of her most recurrent tropes, be it directly in works such as *A Mercy* (2008) or indirectly like in the case of *Jazz* (1992). As she said

> [s]ilence from and about the subject [of slavery] was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing narrative. What I am interested in are the strategies for maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it. How did the founding writers of young America engage, imagine, employ, and create an Africanist presence and persona? In what ways do these strategies explicate a vital part of American literature? How does excavating these pathways lead to fresh and more profound analyses of what they contain and how they contain it?(*Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 51)

These strategies to which Morrison is referring to are the reasons behind the creation of her novel *Beloved* (1987). In it, she examines the silence that covers the terrible institution of slavery, exploring the difficulties of former slaves once they have escaped and how the community confronts this issue. Morrison does so by fictionalizing the true history of Margaret Garner's story[5] and through Beloved, the dead daughter of the main character Sethe who returns from the dead. However, this resurrection raises the question, why is the physical presence of Beloved necessary for the past to come back? How do the characters in the novel confront the issue of their past traumas by bringing to the center that which was in their peripheral vision? It is the physical appearance of this traumatic past and how trauma and history interact that this chapter will focus on, evidencing the connection between trauma and the body.

Slavery in the Americas started almost as soon as the first European set foot on American shores. When the Conquistadores arrived to South America, apart from conquering land and erasing local cultures – be that by violence or by contagious diseases brought from Europe, to which the locals had little to no immunity, - they also introduced a system of enslavement of the conquered, something that had been common since Roman times. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes forcing the native tribes to work through a system called *encomienda* – "a mix of feudalism and slavery" (8) – the Spanish decimated the populations of Mexico, Peru, Chile or Hispaniola, among others. The situation was such that in 1542 Charles V of Spain promulgated a law that "banned Indian slavery in Spanish America and promoted basic rights for Indians such as the right to own property" (8).

[5] This way the author intertwines the concepts of History, as the description of facts and persons recorded and celebrated in mainstream culture, and history, as the private life of individuals that might not have had relevant lives but that nevertheless deserve to be recognized.

With the indigenous population of these regions rapidly decreasing and the prohibition to enslave Amerindians, the colonizers required new workers to work their newly acquired fields of cane sugar and mines, so they resorted to importing slaves from Africa. This trade was a common practice between the Empires of Spain and Portugal and the western areas of Africa – what was then called Guinea. The British and Dutch, who established settlements along the coasts of North and South America, continued this practice, making the slave trade between the west coast of Africa and the Americas flourish for the next three hundred years.

By 1863, when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation Act, two years before the official end of the American Civil War, more than sixty million Africans had left their homes and been brought to America enslaved, with many of them dying on the Middle Passage – that is, the voyage from one shore to the other of the Atlantic ocean. The Emancipation Proclamation, one of the political tools used by the North in United States Civil War (1861-1865), gave slaves legal freedom from their masters, acknowledging their humanity and eventually giving them equal rights in the whole country. Even if the reasons behind this historical Proclamation are many – as organizations had been in favor of this change for decades – slave narratives, that is, autobiographies of slaves telling their own experiences of the cruelty of their masters, were capital in the country's shift of ideals. Stories such as those of Olaudah Equino, Sojourner Truth or Ellen Craft helped society to acknowledge the dilemma posed by having people born and raised in the United States – "the land of the free" – but that were nevertheless not consider citizens. As Frederick Douglass said when talking about what the Fourth of July, the celebration of the United States' independence from the United Kingdom, represented for the African American slave

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. (163)

Before the Proclamation, many slaves escaped their plantations towards the North of the United States where slavery was virtually non-existent – and even to Canada or the United Kingdom. However, even if they had run away from their masters, the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) protected slave owners, who could hire bounty hunters in the free states in order to find their precious workers and re-claim them as their own, making them come back to their lands. Instances of the terror instilled into the runaway slaves by this law can be found in Harriet Jacobs' autobiography where she declares "I had heard enough about Massachusetts to come to the conclusion that slaveholders did not consider it a comfortable place to go to in search of a runaway. That was before the Fugitive Slave Law was passed; before Massachusetts had consented to become a 'nigger hunter' for the south" (585–586). Thus, the life of former slaves in some Northern states was full of tension, as their condition as free individuals – though not citizens – was always threatened by the haunting notion of bounty hunters looking for them and taking them back to their previous life.

When Lincoln's Proclamation evolved into the 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution in 1865, abolishing slavery permanently within the nation, African American individuals were finally recognized as citizens and those still enslaved attained their freedom. Some of them struggled to leave behind their previous condition as slaves,

as their legal status simply changed from one day to the next without giving them the tools they would need to become real citizens. They lacked the education and the economical means to create lives of their own. The forty acers of land and a mule to work that had been promised never arrived to most former slaves and as such they struggled to survive in a land in which even though their previous condition had been legally abolished, much animosity still existed. Moreover, they still had to claim their bodies as their own, not the property of a slave master but rather part of their humanity.

Former slaves encountered prejudices mostly linked to the color of their skin and their bodies, something they could not escape as was analyzed in the previous chapter with Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* (1976). As shown there, one of the themes in this novel lay in the visibility / invisibility / hypervisiblity of the individual in opposition to society though in the case of slavery this was not the only detriment. While the color of their skin was a component in their battle for equality against a prejudiced society, the bodies of the slaves often bore the signs of their previous enslavement in the form of scars and deformities caused by the brutal punishments they had to endure. Accordingly, the labor of leaving the past behind became an arduous one as the tracks of their trauma were in many cases permanently inscribed in their skin. Furthermore, forgetting said trauma in many cases did not entail working through it, analyzing the traumatic event in order to fully comprehend it and heal it, but it signified just glossing over it or never speaking about it, as is the case of Sethe, the main character of *Beloved*.

If slaves were considered inferior, and even "psychologically and cognitively like 'children'" (Dunaway 75) or compared to animals, slave women posed a conundrum due to their ability to bear children. This seemed like a profitable opportunity, as slaveholders often commended slaves to get married and procreate even if State laws did not recognize marriage amongst slaves and both spouses were against the marriage.

Following this same disregard for their slaves' needs, slaveholders often deemed it convenient to rape their slaves in order to generate more wealth in the form of children that could be sold or could become new members of their workforce.

Not only did the slave women not possess their own bodies but they also did not have any claims to their children. The child of a slave followed the condition of the mother – that is, if the mother was a slave, the child was automatically a slave at the moment of birth, – this law protected the masters' right to multiply their fortunes by abusing their female slaves sexually. More often than not, the offspring that these rapes produced were sold, removing a possible social stigma that could be linked to this otherwise accepted practice as "masters sold slaves who were considered 'social risks' to the community or to the master. A few Appalachian slaveholders only disposed of 'social embarrassments'; that is, they only sold 'free-issue' slaves who were their own descendants" (Dunaway 42).

Thus, it is not difficult to imagine why slave mothers were terrified of having a girl, as they were certain of the future that awaited them. Women had to work hard in the fields, having little to no time to recover from childbirth, and they had to either bring their newborn to the fields with them to nurse or leave him or her behind to the care of either an older slave woman or even other children. And when the girls were of age, the mothers, in many cases, were certain of their fate at the hands of the slaveholder. Women were not in control of their own bodies, unable to fight rape or other forms of physical abuse. As Sethe, the main character of *Beloved* tells herself when she remembers her own mother

> "You mean my mother? She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,'

> and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.' […] 'Yes, Ma'am,' I said. 'But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me, too,' I said."
>
> "Did she?" asked Denver.
>
> "She slapped my face." (72–73)

The mark of ownership in the slaves' body negated the possibility to claim their own flesh. Just like a farm animal, with this brand they were forever linked to the plantation and the slave master's family, the mark on their flesh attaching them to this condition forever. However, this was not the only mark on the slaves' bodies that reminded them of their status: physical punishment was constant, often wounding the body permanently.

These scars on the flesh have two dimensions for the slave. On the one hand, they were permanently linked to the physical suffering the body of the man or woman underwent at the hands of the perpetrator, the slave master. On the other hand, these wounds acted as reminders of being considered a lesser being, compared to a farm animal, and thus caused psychological damate to the individual. Because of the indelibility of the marks, the mental issues that they imply/create/demarcate/incarnate could not be overcome, but they lingered with the individual until he or she could make peace with these facts. For that reason, the permanent signs of violence on Sethe's back act as a constant reminder of her previous condition and call attention to the psychological traumas associated with her enslavement.

Even though Sethe was not branded as her mother was, the injuries produced by the severe whipping on her back function as a sign of her status as property. When she tried to escape, nine-months pregnant, the slave holder and his two nephews caught

up with her and left what Amy Denver – a white woman Sethe encounters who is on her way to Boston to buy red velvet – describes as "a chokeberry tree […] red and split wide open, full of sap" (93). The "tree" on Sethe's back will still be in bloom, as Amy Denver says, well after their encounter, and, indeed, Paul D will years later see it. The tree that the runaway white woman chooses (and after whom Sethe's little girl will be named) is particularly significant as Sethe's husband was hang from such a tree, as many members of the slave group at their plantation, Sweet Home.

The indelible existence of this tree on Sethe's back acts as a constant reminder of her former existence as a slave and also as something she cannot completely acknowledge and embrace in order to move on. It is on her back, in the past, but the impossibility of seeing it, of acknowledging it and working through the trauma, paralyzes Sethe. The scars on her back represent the trauma that needs to get out, to be recognized, the trauma that haunts the house at the beginning of the novel, trapping its inhabitants, until it is heard. As Dennis Patrick Slattery affirms when talking about *Beloved* "[t]he novel includes a powerful set of voices as well as wounds, and the wounds want to voice their own origins through those who carry these violations, so they will be heard by the national ears of our country" (211).

The haunting of a community by the ghosts of the past is a common motif in ethnic literature. Even if this idea gained importance within the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth century gothic fiction, where the ghost usually represented a personal encounter with the unknown, as Kathleen Brogan affirms, it changed its nature when it was translated to ethnic literature. In this tradition the spirit's mission is "to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present" (4). Nevertheless, the lack of corporeality in the case of the baby ghost at the beginning of *Beloved* makes it harder to

acknowledge, as it requires a proper vehicle – a voice – to expose the reasons why it is there. As Morrison declares at the beginning of the novel, "124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children" (3). In fact, as Sethe and Denver comment later on

> 'For a baby she throws a powerful spell,' said Denver.
>
> 'No more powerful than the way I loved her,' Sethe answered. (5)

This haunting comes to an abrupt end when Paul D, a former slave in Sethe's plantation, arrives to 124 Bluestone Road. When he enters the house, and Sethe's life after a sixteen-year long hiatus, the spirit besieges the house, though both Sethe and her daughter Denver have grown accustomed to its presence. According to Denver, the ghost in the house is her sister whom her mother had to kill when she was a baby. Sethe and her daughter live under the tyranny of this baby who cannot communicate her suffering or why she is still there. Paul D acts as an exorcist, casting the spirit out of the house and freeing them from its influence.

> "God damn it! Hush up!" Paul D shouting, falling, reaching for anchor. "Leave the place alone! Get the hell out!" A table rushed toward him and he grabbed its leg. Somehow he managed to stand at an angle and, holding the table by two legs, he bashed it about, wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house. "You want to fight, come on! God damn it! She got enough without you. She got enough!" (22)

This purification is nevertheless short-lived as the spirit comes back in corporeal form as Beloved, a girl who looks about sixteen and who settles in the house. Through the act of re-incarnation, the spirit of Sethe's baby girl forces her mother to exit her state of paralysis, to face her past, to remember. In order to make herself present in the current life of her mother, the baby ghost must as well be re-membered, to re-

incarnate, as a way to constantly relive her past. Both the memories of her traumatic past and the physicality of such traumas are equally important. As Carol E. Henderson insists "[t]he corporeal body has continually served as an emblem for the conceptualizations of national identities. As sign, the body's narrative prowess stems from its contentious development as an ambiguous social entity. That is the body's identification" (3).

Bodies historically have served as signifiers of a community and as such it is not surprising that slaveholders tried to disown their slaves of their bodies, along with their humanity. By equalizing them to cattle or objects that could be transferred from person to person, the slave traders negated both dimensions of their humanity: their physique and their psyche. Even though the psychological dimension of the human experience is often deemed superior to the physical one, they are however indissoluble. It is not only the cogito of the individual that matters but also the material dimension. This is a constant trope in the novel, as Schoolteacher readily makes his students list the animal characteristics of the slaves, something that Sethe will never allow to happen again, either to herself or her children, as the narrator explains in the novel: "no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. Maybe Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused – and refused still" (297).

Even if Sethe had refused being lined up with the animals, she cannot accept what being a human entails. She negates the physical in order to praise the psychological, trying to silence the stories told by the scars left on her and other members of the community, and mocking the efforts of those, like her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, who valued the corporeal side of the human experience. A former slave herself at the same plantation as Sethe and Paul D, Baby Suggs's was freed her son, Sethe's husband, who bought her freedom by working every Sunday at another man's plantation. Once he paid

for her freedom, she welcomed that which had been negated to her until then: her complete humanity.

> Something's the matter. What's the matter? What's the matter? she asked herself. She didn't know what she looked like and was not curious. But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, "These hands belong to me. These my hands." Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing? She felt like a fool and began to laugh out loud. Mr. Garner looked over his shoulder at her with wide brown eyes and smiled himself. "What's funny, [Baby Suggs]?"
>
> She couldn't stop laughing. "My heart's beating," she said.
>
> And it was true. (166)

It is through the sensation of her heart beating and the knowledge that no one else owned her heart that Baby Suggs fully understands her condition as a free woman. Unlike Sethe, she sees the connection between her body and property and how she is not a property that can be bought or sold anymore but a woman. Through this line of thought, she becomes the spiritual leader of the community, encouraging others to do as she did and accept their bodies as part of their human experience.

While Sethe's scars are linked to her traumatic past, Baby Suggs makes an effort to connect with her own body to the present. Even if they have undergone the same experiences as former slaves, due to having achieved her freedom by buying it instead of by running away, as Sethe and her family had, Baby Suggs can focus on what the world and the community have to offer and what she can offer in return. She experiences the world with the eyes of an infant, focusing on that which was negated to her before.

> Now I know why Baby Suggs pondered color her last years. She never had time to see, let alone enjoy it before. Took her a long time to finish with blue, then yellow, then green.

> She was well into pink when she died. I don't believe she wanted to get to red and I understand why because me [Sethe] and Beloved outdid ourselves with it. (237)

Not only does Baby Suggs try to elucidate the daily mysteries of life that were once denied to her, but she also embarks on a semi-religious mission to show them to her community. She organizes gatherings in the forest, where she encourages the individuals to celebrate their own bodies and freedom. Instead of separating these two dimensions of the human experience, body and mind, she tries to perform a communion between them. As her own experience has shown, it is only through the reconciliation of the two, of the body and mind, that the traumas can be overcome. Once freed of their past condition as slaves and the physicality of it, they can now reclaim their own bodies and the traumas linked to them. Without the salvaging of the body, the mind will never work through the past, as Slattery says

> [t]o abandon the body is also to abandon one's history and one's biography. To retrieve one's own embodiment, bit by bit and piece by piece, and to stitch the parts back together is at the same time to reclaim the history of that embodiment, for incarnation always insists on a context – a history and a future. (212)

When Sethe returns to the clearing where these gatherings took place with her daughters, the experience is quite diverse. Instead of being able to praise her body, two invisible hands start choking her, almost to the point of killing her.

> Harder, harder, the fingers moved slowly around toward her windpipe, making little circles on the way. Sethe was actually more surprised than frightened to find that she was being strangled. Or so it seemed. In any case, Baby Suggs' fingers had a grip on her that would not let her breathe. Tumbling forward from her seat on the rock, she clawed at the hands that were not there. Her feet were thrashing by the time Denver got to her and then Beloved. (113)

The impossibility of narrating events too painful to describe makes the access to the joys of her own body unavailable to Sethe. Sethe exemplifies the disconnection between body and language due to her inability to recognize her body as her own, which bars her from working through her own past traumas. Hence, when unable to narrate her own story, the ghostly hands appear at the clearing and start to choke her, trying to make it impossible for her to use her voice.

Though he may have brought an end to the haunting of their house, the stagnation in which Sethe and Denver are trapped cannot be resolved by the violent exorcism performed by Paul D; it must be Sethe herself who is willing to accept her past. The experience of being blocked by past traumas, unable to move forward, was explored by Freud when in 1914 he wrote *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* – which could be seen as the seeds of further research into what is currently known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In his essay, Freud analyses how victims of traumas tend to block these memories from their conscious mind, and by such failures to remember, they impede the healing process as well. However, these recollections are not completely forgotten as Freud examines that "[w]hen the patient speaks of these 'forgotten' things, he rarely fails to add 'I've always known that really, I've just never thought about it.'" (1082). It then becomes the work of the psychoanalyst to help the patient overcome the gap between the repressed/forgotten and reality, between what seems to be haunting the kitchen of 124 Bluestone Road and the real teenager who waits at the entrance of Sethe's house when they come back from the carnival.

The act of remembering for Sethe cannot take place just through words but by way of the resurrection of her dead baby Beloved. Both the representation of the collective trauma of the former slaves that form the community and the individual representation of Sethe's dead baby, Beloved gives flesh to the story that later on will not

be re-told, as both Sethe and the community agree at the end of the novel that "[i]t was not a story to pass on" (323). Nevertheless, the physical arrival of Beloved breaks the silence that inhabits the town as "[s]ilence is its own language in *Beloved* as body becomes voice and voice becomes the signification of consciousness and of African Americans as speaking subjects" (Henderson 95). The only way to work through traumatic events – according to Freudian psychoanalysis – is through the linguistic expression of said circumstances. And it is by the telling of those experiences from which they have been bared as slaves, as they have been treated as only as bodies and thus "denied them the position of speaking subjects" (Wyatt 75). It is through story telling that the bond between Sethe and Beloved is created. Not only does the teenage girl ask for stories but she knows exactly the details that would push her mother to tell them – reminding her of the glass earrings she had to give away when she was imprisoned for killing her baby, recognizing certain scars on the girl's body, etc. It is this embodiment of the past that differs from the Freudian methodology as the body is linked to the psyche / spirit and connected to the traumatic past as well.

In all these recollections of the past, all the stories that Sethe tells to Beloved and Denver, there is one recurrent element missing: the story of how Sethe killed her baby and attempted to kill the rest of her children. This missing story, this forgotten but known fact – or this "quiet as it's kept"[6] secret – is not narrated by Sethe until the end. The reason behind such dismissal of the particular story lies in Sethe's perception of a lack of necessity, as she affirms "I don't have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain. She [Beloved] understands it all" (216). And it is, in fact, because of Sethe's

[6] "Quiet as is kept" becomes a refrain in Toni Morrison's novels, appearing in most of them. It is also the inspiration for the title of the book *Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in Toni Morrison's Work* (2000) by J. Brooks Bouson.

disregard for verbally expressing this particular story that the ghost of her "crawling already?" baby, as she is referred to at the beginning of the novel, must incarnate.

Even though Beloved first appears in the novel as a teenager waiting at the doorstep of 124 Bluestone Road, Denver consciously recognizes her as the dead baby that was haunting the house until not long before. Nevertheless, it is unconsciously or physically that Sethe identifies the teenager as her dead daughter considering that the first reaction she has when she sees her is reminiscent of her water breaking.

> She never made the outhouse. Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. (Morrison, *Beloved* 61)

The arrival of the ghost is a return to the past, re-starting the cycle of traumatic repetition. Much like in the Freudian theory of Fort-Da[7], the coming of Beloved opens a new traumatic cycle, forcing Sethe to relive the past she has repressed and also forcing Denver, Beloved's sister, to bear witness to it. Upon the beginning of this phase, Beloved locks the women in the house, stopping time and creating a space in which the traumatic process can fully develop. As Melanie R. Anderson affirms "[g]hosts do not inhabit one state of being or another, life or death; they inhabit the space between and serve as conduit of knowledge from one to the other. Specters are the perfect vehicles for emphasizing the multiplicitous experiences that lie beneath master narratives" (11).

The exploration of the trauma for the two original inhabitants of 124 Bluestone, Sethe and Denver, is radically different. While for Sethe it is an act of reconnaissance of her own psychological demons, for Denver it is the confrontation with the reality that

[7] Theory explored in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922) in which Freud analyses how the repetitive motions of his grandchild through his game of throwing a ball against a wall just to catch it again, just to rerun the same motion, can serve as a coping mechanism for a feeling of abandonment.

was left unspoken in the house. Even though Denver has not gone through the experience of slavery and cannot remember the actions of her mother, as she was only a baby when her sister was murdered, it is through the unspoken that she becomes a trauma victim – more specifically what could be called a "second generation trauma victim" or a "legacy of trauma" as Laurie Vickroy refers to sufferers like Denver. In her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002) Laurie Vickroy explores how traumatic experiences can be inherited and passed on from one generation to the next. Even though the repetitive actions of the first generation cannot be fully grasped by the second generation, as they lack in some cases the knowledge of the initial experience that originated such behavior, they are left with the aftermath of the painful event. As she exposes "[a]s the psychological consequences of oppression are passed on to children, legacies of trauma become occasions for repetitions of domination" (37).

This behavior can be observed in Denver. Unable to fully access the originating experience due to the iher mother's inability to verbalize it, she is incapable of understanding her mother's and the community's behavior towards Sethe and Denver. She is, therefore, accompanied by a ghost / trauma that she cannot fully understand or work through. However, she finds comfort in the trauma of her mother and the community, as she welcomes the presence in the house as a play companion and acknowledges that "[n]one of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but *knowing* the things behind things… None could appreciate the safety of ghost company" (45). The only instance in which she can approach the past is when she attends school and a peer shares Sethe's past with her. This instance will make Denver go mute for a whole year, unable to speak what she deems the evils of her mother.

> Denver, too, refuses to participate in the symbolic order of language when she spends two years deaf and mute rather than to learn the truth of her sister's death, but when her

> family's situation makes it necessary, Denver chooses to enter the community. (Wallace 272)

However, when the influence of Beloved grows on Sethe and completely isolates mother and daughter from Denver, she is forced to confront the trauma that was previously so familiar to her. Trapped in her mother's past, it is only through exiting the house that Denver can break the cycle. Rejecting the constant loop of narration of the past and re-experience of past traumas without acknowledging them, Denver decides to physically escape the oppressive space that by this point in the novel her sister and mother have created and to claim her position in the outside community. Through this act, she deals with the trauma, mourning the past and accepting it, and she is able to move on. According to Dominick LaCapra, this movement from melancholia to mourning creates the capital difference between compulsive repetition and working through, and could be particularly challenging for second generation trauma victims as they cannot access the initial trauma to its full extent because they have not suffered it themselves. Therefore, the decision to leave the past behind in Denver's case is particularly important.

> She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help … Where the words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again. (*Beloved* 286–287)

Therefore, it is not just through narration, but through physical actions, that the characters in the novel confront their traumas. In opposition to what Freud advocated for in his essays on trauma victims, i.e. verbal elaboration of their past traumas, Morrison favors breaking through by way of movement when language is not enough. Beloved

feeds off the stories that her mother tells her of the past, getting bigger and bigger, while Sethe is consumed, both physically by getting smaller and psychologically as she is unable to do anything other than answer Beloved's requests. While the past traumas – personified in Beloved – are enlarged through the ceaseless retelling of these events, the present life of the individual is diminished, as Sethe is unable to exit the situation by herself.

The only option Sethe has to exit her situation is by stepping out of the house, much like Denver had done before. While for the latter such an escape from the past trauma was done through the acceptance of the community, for the former this will not suffice. Having been a pariah for so long, not even the support of the women that rejected Sethe at first will be enough. Even though they have all gone through similar experiences in their past, this will not suffice, as the trauma is deeply rooted in Sethe's unconscious mind. Only through the traumatic – and physical – repetition of the same event will she be able to move on. This re-enactment happens when Mr. Bodwin, a white abolitionist that had helped Sethe when she committed the original murder, comes after many years to their doorstep.

> Guiding the mare, slowing down, his black hat wide-brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little hummingbirds stick needle beaks right through her head cloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand. (308)

Even though the event does not have the same characters or intentions, some of the elements – in particular, the sound of wings – trigger the Sethe's memory. Only after this re-creation and acknowledgement of her past actions – and through the understanding of them– can Sethe move on and can the ghost finally be exorcised. It is

not only through the retelling of the story or of facts too arduous to tell that the person can move on, but also through the understanding of his or her places in time. Being able to locate the traumatic events in a time different than the present – recognizing the differences between the original instance and the current one – helps Sethe recognize the stagnation she was trapped in and she will finally be able to move away from it.

Like Morrison says "[i]t was not a story to pass on" (323) but nevertheless it is a story not to forget. Even though the communal past should be overcome, it has to be acknowledged and remembered. If not, these conditions will be luring from the margins, influencing the current lives of the individuals without their being able to tell if the blur in the picture, as in Holbein's painting, is just a deliberate mistake of the painter or something more important looming on the sides.

1.3. Conclusion

The conceptualization of the body has changed throughout the history of Western thought. From a paradigm that considered it the vilest part of the individual while the mind was the most virtuous part, as some Greek philosophers and Christian theologists regarded it, to the paradigm that deems it a necessary element of the healthy development of the person as a whole, as twentieth century thinkers commonly understood it, the relationship between body and mind has been a problematic one. Through finally giving importance to corporeal dimension of men and women, Western phillosophers have separated the classical notions that linked the body to basic functions of the human experience – mostly connected with biological or animal features such as mindless procreation, which was itself linked with sin, for the Christian thinkers – and identified it with the creation of the personality of the individual. The connection of the two aspects of the individual is of vital importance when talking about the African American individual as the slave masters considered them mostly livestock, disregarding the mind of the individual and therefore his or her humanity.

The validation of the body is not only a fundamental part of the individual important from the moral point of view but also from a developmental one. By going beyond a disregard of previous notions that linked everything to the animal aspect of the human experience as evil or sinful, the ties between the perception of the individual by the community and the formation of the self could be united. Through the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* this part explored the correlations between the vision of the community and the creation of the identity of the individual, the link between identity and the

physical appearance. Because of her physical deformities, Pauline was not considered a member of the community – at the beginning by her own family and later by the community in Lorrain as a whole. She was overlooked and through this separation from the community forced to accept negative racial stereotypes such as the ones depicted in Hollywood movies. These stereotypes are closely related to the notion of the African American woman as naïve, servile and not menacing, always procuring and protecting the white master. These same stigmas were passed on to her daughter Pecola, what made her more susceptible to accepting her role as the scapegoat of her community, as the recognition that she would need from the other in order to create her own identity was broken from the moment she was born and considered ugly by her own mother. The concepts of beauty and ugliness – both closely related to the superficial and physical – that her mother passes on to her prove to be fatal at the end, having her wish for an imposible bodily feature (blue eyes) in order to be accepted into the larger community and maddening her due to the impossibility of obtaining them.

At the same time, the body proves to be the vessel in which past traumas are contained. These traumas are reflected in the physical wounds the body has suffered, creating a link between corporeal and psychological trauma. Because of their indelibility, scars act as constant reminders of a past that the individual cannot forget but that he or she sometimes tries to repress. This case is clearly presented in *Beloved* through the character of Sethe, who has suffered the abuse of slavery on her own skin and motivated her to assassinate her daughter, but who cannot verbalize and therefore work through the experience. However, due to the tree-like scar she has on her back as well as the ghostly presence that populates her house she cannot escape it either. This same trauma is passed on to her daughter Denver though in the latter case her daughter does not know the root of her behavior.

By the psychological trauma taking fleshly presence, these past experiences force themselves to be acknowledged by the victims. Even if exterior entities – like, in the case of *Beloved,* Paul D – try to force the victim to react and elaborate the past experience in order for them to move on, it must be the victim himself or herself who is willing to recognize his or her condition. Therefore, even if the ghost is exorcised from the house, she must take physical form for Sethe to fully acknowledge the experience. Furthermore, by accepting her actions, she is once again accepted in the community that previously rejected her.

PART TWO: THE HOUSE

The house, a place of dwelling, is one of the most fundamental needs of human life. This is even evidenced by the fact that housing embodies one of the basic human rights according to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, appearing in several of its articles[8], and in several constitutions around the world. It functions as a safe haven for the individual amongst his or her family – whether biological or adoptive – constituting a space where he or she will develop both physically and psychologically. However, the perceived safety of this space can prove unreliable as it is also the space where some personal traumas can and will occur, transforming this paradise into a hell. Books such as *At Home* (1999) by Irene Cieraad, *Burnin' Down the House* (2005) by Valerie Sweeney Prince, or *Race, Trauma, and Home in the*

[8] Reference to the house or housing appears on articles 12, 17 and more explicitly in article 25, which reads "[e]veryone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" ("The Universal Declaration of Human Rights").

Novels of Toni Morrison (2010) by Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber reflect on the fragility of the domestic bliss and the traumatic sphere.

This dual nature of the house, of both salvation and damnation, has not only been addressed as an sociological and psychological issue, but it has also been made into a paradigm in literature. Examples of this troublesome relationship can be found in works within the gothic and romantic literature tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these two movements there are works populated with castles, mansions, and houses where mysterious and gruesome presences hid in the alcoves or were locked away in the attic, creating a sense of familiarity yet uneasiness within the reader. As such, it is not strange that when Sigmund Freud composed his work *The Uncanny* (1919) to describe what can be unsettling for the human psyche, he turned to both literature and the use of this nature of the house to delineate his theory. Freud took the term *unheimlich* from German language in order to describe something that was familiar to the individual yet unsettling, something that even though it belonged to the house – *heimlich* – had a sense of otherness. These uncanny presences can be better observed when reading *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), *Jane Eyre* (1847), with its now renown "madwoman in the attic," thanks to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 1979 seminal feminist book of the same title, or *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), to name but a few. In all of these classical novels, the main characters have to fight an unknown yet known presence that roams the places where they live – be that living temporary or permanent.

This same theme is also evident in African American literature. After all, it is within the black experience in the United States that one finds numerous examples of unsettling experiences within the domestic space, such as when slaves had to suffer the constant threat of the white community, be that the threat of physical punishment, psychological injuries or sexual abuse. This perturbed experience can be found already in

slave narratives and was later on passed onto other types of literary. The house is a recurrent space where the lives of the characters develop in African American literature, be that as a negative or a positive space for the individual, as works like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Native Son* (1940) or *The Color Purple* (1982) demonstrate.

In keeping with this, the house constitutes one of the core elements in Toni Morrison's works. Serving as both a goal and a starting point for the individual, the conversion of the familiar house into a home, the dichotomy between the protective and the harmful nature of the space, and the familiar/unfamiliar dynamics established within those four walls compose the context in which the author sets her characters. Morrison stated as much in a 1997 article entitled "Home"

> I believe, however, that my own writerly excursion and my use of a house/home antagonism are related to the topics addressed at this conference because so much of what seems to lie about in discourses on race concerns legitimacy, authenticity, community, belonging. In no small way, these discourses are about home: and intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; forced and displaced labor in the destruction of home; dislocation of and alienation within the ancestral home; creative responses to exile, the devastations, pleasures, and imperatives of homelessness as it is manifested in discussions on feminism, globalism, the diaspora, migrations, hybridity, contingency, interventions, assimilations, exclusions. (5)

This section will analyze the importance of the house/home dynamic in Morrison's work, selecting for such endeavors her previous to last novel to date, *Home* (2012) and her 1992 novel *Jazz*. In these two books, the relationship that the characters and the author have with the domestic space is illustrated, as well as its traumatic nature, with the position of this locus within a larger community or city. It is in creating these

links between community, house, and the individual the key to the transition from a house to a home lies.

2.1. The long way home. The return from the urban to the rural in *Home*

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset. (23)
Langston Hughes. *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*

In the 1939 Hollywood revision of the now American classic *The Wizard of Oz,* director Victor Fleming explored the theme of the long way home and the return to to such idyllic place – as Dorothy Gale, the main character in both the book and the movie, would say "there is no place like home." Mixing both black and white imagery to portray Kansas during the recession era and the vibrant and colorful Oz, Fleming wanted to convey the idea that in order for things to change, one must go through a series of challenges and acquaintances before the individual can realize that what he or she initially desired was always within his or her reach. In the case of the young orphan girl from Kansas, she must perform a series of feats, accompanied by her differently abled cohort, to comprehend that the power to go home was always with her. As represented by the ruby slippers that she took from the Wicked Witch of the East after she killed her landing in Oz– and while her sister, the Wicked Witch of the West pursues the girl in order to get this family heirloom back, – the power to transport Dorothy back home

and was on her feet all along. At the end of the journey, Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, exhorts Dorothy to click her heels three times and repeat the magic words "there is no place like home" to go back to Kansas, where her aunt Em and uncle Henry await in their farm and where she will hopefully live happily ever after.

But as it often happens when translating from literature to cinema, a few changes were introduced a few changes were introduced when the L. Frank Baum classic was made into a movie. Three major iconic elements differ between them. First, the ruby slippers that Judy Garland – Dorothy in the Hollywood version – stole from the Wicked Witch of the East were silver shoes in the original. Second, the green skin of the Wicked Witch of the West did not exist in Baum's story. In fact, the only physical characteristics that described the Witch were that she was blind in one eye and terribly ugly. Additionally, while Dorothy and her companions in the cinematographic version are aided by Glinda, the Good Witch of the North throughout their adventure, this character is actually divided in the children's book. Although the Good Witch of the North – who has no other name but this title, much like the wicked witches – initially helps the little girl from Kansas, her powers are not enough to send her back home. It is Glinda, the Good Witch from the South in the book, who is finally able to help her get back to her uncle and aunt.

While the first two changes – the color of the shoes and of the villain – could be understood as a way to portray the cinematographic advances made with Technicolor at that point in cinematographic history, the third one could be understood as a geopolitical statement. With the end of the United States Civil War not even one hundred years before, Hollywood studios were possibly not inclined to indicate that the solution for an innocent girl's problems came from the South. While Dorothy, the simpleton naïve farm girl, could belong to the rural Kansas, the same cannot be said

about an all-powerful witch. In this way the cinematic industry perpetuated the paradigm of the wealthy and "good" industrial North versus the "evil" rural South[9].

Much like Dorothy, Frank Money, the main character in Toni Morrison's *Home*, must find a way to go back home. In fact, the connection between these two works can be found on Justine Baillie's *Toni Morrison and the Literary Tradition* (2013), quoted later in the chapter. Like Dorothy, Frank will have to overcome a series of quests in order to arrive to his final destination, to his childhood dwelling. However, while the little girl's road trip will have her kill the evil witch in order to go back home, the road will be different fro Frank. The killing in his story is set before the novel, in the context of the Korean War, and he will have to work through the consequences that this war had on him in order to answer the question "[w]hat does it mean to be a man?" (McFarland 172). This chapter will analyze the trope of the journey, first briefly outside the American soil and then its evolution within the borders of the United States, and what *home* means for Morrison[10]. The focus in the analysis will be on how Morrison visualizes such theme in terms of the war survivor and the return back to the South, and on how coming back to the roots can actually be "a journey for redemption" (McFarland 172).

The trope of the journey has been a common one in literature from ancient times. For the Greeks, the literary theme of the journey back home or *nostoi*, repeats itself in *The Odyssey, Aeneid,* or *Jason and the Argonauts*, amongst others. In these epic poems, mythical demigods and heroes had to undergo such voyages in order to prove themselves worthy to the gods or to their relatives. The reasons behind such travels differed in nature: some had to demonstrate fitness to rule, some had to seek repentance

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[10] Both concepts of good and evil are used here in response to the fairy tale and early movie dichotomy, not indicating that such values are correct or that the analysis will take them into account further than as a cultural construct.

for past sins, while others had to prove worthiness to father a line that would lead to powerful cities or empires. Classic examples of this type of journey include Jason and the Argonauts and their quest for the Golden Fleece, where Jason returns after their voyage to take possession of the throne as the rightful heir of Iolcus; Aeneas and his escape from his homeland Troy, becoming Rome's forefather after a series of adventures and voyages according to Virgil's *Aeneid*, as Romulus and Remus are direct descendants of his according to the poet; or the adventures of Perseus who, after killing the Gorgon, accidentally killed his father, and became king of Tiryns, are classic examples of these heroic journeys.

Even if these stories are dated, the universality and currency of their narratives are ubiquitous. When talking about the classical canon and its implications on African American literature, Morrison asserted

> [a] large part of the satisfaction I have always received from reading Greek tragedy … is in its similarity to Afro-American communal structures (the function of song and chorus, the heroic struggle between the claims of community and individual hubris) and African religion and philosophy. In other words, that is part of the reason it has quality for me intellectually at home there … The point is, the form (Greek tragedy) makes available these varieties of provocative love because it is masterly or superior to all others. (*Unspeakable Things Unspoken / the Afro-American Presence in American Literature* 125)

Amongst the heroic journeys on the Greek pantheon that Morrison acknowledges as an influence, the most cellebrated could probably be the one undertaken by the king of Ithaca, Ulysses. Having to leave his wife Penelope and son Telemachus behind at his home in order to fight in the war against Troy, Ulysses is one of the key components in the Greeks' war against the Trojans, as he is the mastermind behind the Trojan horse stratagem, according to *The Iliad*, that lead the Hellenes their

victory. However, on his way back home he is cursed by Poseidon, the god of the Sea, and he has to wander for ten years, leaving his wife and son unattended and his throne at the mercy Penelope's suitors. Ulysses will have to come back to Ithaca in order to restore control and re-instate himself as the rightful king, after a series of adventures narrated by Homer in *The Odyssey*. Therefore, the quest for returning home in the case of Ulysses has two major components: the test of his virility and might against all odds through overcoming the divine obstacles, and the defense of his wife's virtue.

These Greek myths will be the origin for what is known as the epic poem. Serving as markers of national identity, poems such as *Beowulf* (between 975 and 1025) for English literature, *El Cantar del Mio Cid* (circa 1200) in Spain*, La chanson de Roland* (between 1060 and 1065) in France or even *Orlando Furioso* (1532) in Italy, to name but a few, the fictitious adventures of these heroes will forge on the readers the idea of nation – even if these nationalist notions will later be contested by authors such as Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote* (1605), which ridicules the *novela de caballerías* (cavalry books). The heroes in these novels – Beowulf, Cid, Roland or Rolando – will battle against evil, putting their honor to the service of country and king, in order to bring glory to their nation. In their adventures, their notions of right and wrong will be challenged, their love for their king tested – sometimes to the detriment of their own family – and their sanity taken away just so they can achieve higher glory not for themselves but for their lands.

Subsequently, the authors of fairy tales use this same structure of the hero's quest and apply it to their narrations. Writers like Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm or Charles Perrault continued writing stories in which the main character had to go from one place to another overcoming a series of trials in order to obtain a magical object or reward. These tests usually had a moral lesson within them that the main character had to learn in order to fulfill their destiny – be that to bring riches to their family, learning not to

trust strangers, or confiding that good actions will have a reward. The main characters were looking to go back to the idyllic place where they belonged, longing for a familiar site, most commonly linked to childhood bliss. As Robert Tally puts it "[t]his pastoral ideal extends all the way back to Eden, where each occasion for nostalgic longing is but another way to bemoan the present status quo" (87).

Much like classical myths, fairy tales have been able to translate their moral lessons into various cultures and across continents, as in the case of Baum's famous series of short stories on Oz. With the aid of cinematography, the values that were once centered on what the Western civilization considered right or wrong were instantly available for the masses, invading other cultures through the cinema or television without taking into consideration that such imposition could make the principles of the conquered culture stagger. Much like the Wizard in imposing his laws upon the good people of Oz when he was transported from one world to the other, the enforcement of certain beliefs constitutes a menace to the value or independence of other cultures or even to those that serve as a minority subculture within a larger culture such as African American, Native American, or Asian American cultures, as in the case of the United States. According to Morrison, "[w]henever characters are cloaked in Western fable, they are in deep trouble; but the African myth is also contaminated"(*Unspeakable Things Unspoken / the Afro-American Presence in American Literature* 157–158). Additionally, she continues

> I am made melancholy when I consider that the act of defending the Eurocentric Western posture in literature as not only "universal" but also "race-free" may have resulted in lobotomizing that literature, and in diminishing both the art and the artist. Like the surgical removal of legs so that the body can remain enthroned, immobile, static house arrest, so to speak. It may be, of course, that contemporary writers deliberately exclude from their conscious writerly world the subjective appraisal of groups perceived as

> "other," and white male writers frequently abjure and deny the excitement of framing or locating their literature in the political world. (138)

Through the appropriation of themes and tropes that were once common to other literary traditions, Morrison is trying to call attention to the African American persona within the literary canon. As she explains at length in her book *Playing in the Dark* (1992), the black presence in the American literary canon has been almost non-existent unless it was to bring "a touch of verisimilitude or to supply a needed moral gesture" (15). As a result, by seizing the road home as a theme and the structure of the book as a descendant of the Greek myth and the fairy tale in her book *Home*, as Justine Baillie points out (195), the author is sheding light onto the different meaning that journey and home might have for the black community, making "the other" or, as Du Bois puts it, the *tertium quid*[11], the center of the literary discourse. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. would affirm "[w]hereas black writers most certainly revise texts in the Western tradition, they often seek to do so 'authentically,' with a black difference, a compelling sense of difference based on the black vernacular" (xxii).

The journey for the African American individual has a distinctive significance. After all, their story is one of diaspora, being forced first to move from Africa to American soil, then escaping from the South to the North of the United States in what is known as the Great Migration (circa 1910 to 1930) – a concept that will be explored further in the next chapter of this dissertation – and subsequently, as some intellectuals such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Morrison are advocating for, returning to the South in search of their ancestors[12]. Through this acknowledgement of their roots, their mission

[11] Du Bois uses this term when taking about the African American individual as in between human and cattle for the white society in his work *The Souls of the Black Folk* (1903).

[12] This return to the South must not be understood as a physical one nor are they instigating a migratory movement, but only the recovery of the communal past that is connected to the Southern states of the United States – even if the past is linked to slavery and violence. This is portrayed in Henry Louis Gates

is to pay homage to past generations in order for future ones to understand their history and to rediscover parts of their culture that would have been otherwise forgotten.

Despite the many migratory movements in African American history, some cultural elements have been preserved. Even in the case of the violent Middle Passage, when individuals where taken from their homes in Africa in order to be transported and in another continent, after being forced to leave behind all their possessions, they were able to carry on with them some of their traditions. Religious and mythological components were adapted to the new land they inhabited and they preserved them – though most of the times hidden from their Christian masters who would perceive such practices as witchcraft. Within the different myths and religious practices that Gates analyses in his book *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), one is of particular importance for this study: the god figure of Esu. A messenger of the gods – and also linked to interpretation and rhetoric, - a trickster and a deity of generation and fecundity, Esu is also the protector of the roads and crossroads. Relatable to the Greek Hermes, as both share most of the same duties, Esu's role as patron of travellers and its worship amongst African slaves arriving to the New World directly ascribes to the Western literary trope of the journey, making what could be understood as an occidental literary tradition also an African and African American one.

Much like Esu, Frank Money in Morrison's work is also a master of rhetoric and a trickster of sorts. The shift of the narrative voice from first person to omniscient – something common in other works by Morrison – is used in *Home* to offer Frank a way to directly communicate with the reader. Conscious of the presence of the reader, as he directly interacts with him or her from the beginning of the novel, he uses this rhetoric in

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latest television series *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates Jr.* (2012) or Toni Morrison's essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984).

order to hide details he is not ready to disclose. This differs from other novels by Morrison, considering how in most of them, the first pages of the novel inform the reader of the disruptive event that will be described in more detail at the conclusion of the novel – Pecola's rape in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Dorcas' murder in *Jazz* (1992), or the murder of the women in the Convent in *Paradise* (1997). Through the journey back to Lotus, Frank Money will work through the different effects that the Korean War has had on him, what was called at the end of World War I "shell shock[13]" and was later on included in the definition of the more general affliction of post-traumatic stress disorder – PTSD – in its explaination by the DSM-IV[14] in 1994.

In *Home* Morrison narrates the story of the Money siblings, Frank and Cee – short for Ycidra – as they grow in Lotus, Georgia. They are both raised in the house of their step-grandmother, Lenore, where they live with their parents who struggle to provide for them. In their absence Lenore will physically chastise them – to the point of abuse in the case of Cee. As they grow up, Frank leaves for the Korean War, while Cee falls in love with a young man from Atlanta who subsequently breaks her heart as he leaves her. Abandoned by both her brother and her lover, Cee turns to domestic work in the household of a renowned doctor that will use her as a guinea pig for his experiments. It is at this point that Frank, already back from war, must come back to the South in order to save his sister – and on the way home elaborate and analyze the traumatic experience of war.

[13] Examples of shell shock and PTSD in literature are analyzed as far back as Freud's "traumatic neurosis" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922), in which he used the classic *Orlando Furioso* to analyze this neurosis, and go all the way to Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and her explanation of PTSD in modern works of literature.

[14] The DSM (Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) is the reference book on mental afflictions published by the American Psychiatric Association. Even though defining some mental illnesses can prove to be problematic, it is nevertheless useful in this case and for this analysis.

Unlike Morrison's novel and the other Western traditions mentioned before, the journey within the African American literary tradition had a different role. Even if some authors such as William and Ellen Craft or Harriet Jacobs describe in depth the paths and perils they had to follow and endure in order to reach their freedom, the importance of these was secondary. The main concern for the slave narratives was the escape from the plantations and the arrival to a better place in the North – be that the North of the United States, Canada, or even the United Kingdom. As a matter of fact, some of these slave narratives were mainly concerned with the struggle of their life inside the plantation and after their narration of the terrible conditions they had to endure they skipped directly to their lives as free citizens, fearing that the description of their escape would give clues to the plantation owners as to where to go to find escapees or that the individuals who have helped them could be punished and that they would be returned to the slave owners, as can be seen in Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

> *It is not necessary to state how he made his escape*. Suffice to say, he was on his way to New York when a violent storm overtook the vessel. The captain said he must put into the nearest port. This alarmed Benjamin, who was aware that he would be advertised in every port near his own town. His embarrassment was noticed by the captain. To port they went. There the advertisement met the captain's eye. Benjamin so exactly answered its description that the captain laid hold on him, and bound him in chains. The storm passed, and they proceeded to New York. Before reaching that port Benjamin managed to get off his chains and throw them overboard. He escaped from the vessel, but was pursued, captured, and carried back to his master. (463, italics mine)

Due to laws such as Fugitive Slave Act (1850), former slaves could not feel safe even when they have reached their destination, as explained through the analysis of *Beloved* in the previous chapter. This Act allowed bounty hunters to chase escaped slaves to bring them back to their previous plantations. Therefore, the real destination for the

former slaves was to find a home that could function both as a physical safe haven and as a psychological one. In fact, even if they had found a home, the sensation of being constantly watched and the possibility of being sent back into slavery made them unable to rest completely at ease. Frederick Douglass relates his escape from the bounds of slavery in *My Scape from Slavery* (1838) and he describes how even after years of being a free man in the North, he had been unable to narrate the journey from slavery to freedom. As he declares "I might become a husband, a father, an aged man, but through all, from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave, I had felt myself doomed" (230).

With the arrival of modern machinery to the plantations in the South and the rise of violent organized racist groups at the beginning of the twentieth century, African American individuals searched for job opportunities up North. As Morrison analyses in *Jazz* (1992), the arrival to the city had different consequences for black individuals, as they had to get to know the rules that governed the urban landscape. Finding a job and a house would prove to be a difficult task as some of the racism and dire conditions they thought they left behind subsequently followed them.

The same can be said about Frank Money in *Home* and the consequences that leaving his roots behind have on him. Living at his step-grandmother's house with his parents and sister, the conditions of his upbringing were particularly challenging. Lenore – Frank's step-grandmother – proved to be an arrogant woman, incapable of taking care of Frank and his little sister Cee when their parents left for work every morning, blaming everything on the little girl.

> The girl was hopeless and had to be corrected every minute. The circumstances of her birth did not bode well. There was probably a medical word for her awkwardness, for a memory so short even a switching could not help her remember to close the chicken coop at night, or not to spill food on her clothes every single day. … Only the hatred in the eyes

> of her brother kept Lenore from slapping her. He was always protecting her, soothing her as though she were his pet kitten. (88)

What promised to be a warm environment, the proverbial "roof over their heads," proved to be a nightmare. The constant humiliation that Cee suffered at the hands of Lenore and the poverty that was a constant in the community made the siblings long for an escape to a better place, leaving the house in which they grew up behind as it proved not to be a home. Fostering this escape, Frank joined two of his closed friends and the army, being sent to Korea, while Cee fell fast in love with Prince, a young man from Atlanta whom she married at the age of fourteen. In both cases, the attempt to break away from the past will prove unsuccessful, as they are unable to survive without acknowledging their traumatic past.

Literary criticism in the twentieth century has taken the space itself, be that domestic or otherwise, as an object of analysis, especially in recent years. As Robert T. Tally Jr. indicates in his book *Spatiality*

> Over the past few decades, spatiality has become a key concept for literary and cultural studies. Whereas the nineteenth century appeared to have been dominated by discourses of time, history, and teleological development […] space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivalling if not overtaking time in the significance it was accorded by critics and theorists, who were then more likely to address spatiotemporality or allow space to have a more equal footing with time in their analyses. The "spatial turn," as it has been called, was aided by a new aesthetic sensibility that came to be understood as postmodernism. (3)

The distinction between house and home becomes a regular trope of Morrison's work. Instances of such a difference can be seen in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) when the Breedlove house and the McTeer home are descrived, in *Song of Solomon* (1977) between the Dead household and Pilate's home, Sethe and Denver's possessed house in

Beloved (1987), or in *A Mercy* (2008) between the Vaarks cabin that serves as a home to the slaves and masters and the grand house the masters build at the end. While the house is the physical space – the walls, the roof, the floor – in which the individual can live, the home is where the individual is able to grow and fulfill their intellectual and emotional potential. Sally Bayley relates this paradigm to Thoreau's description of his house at Walden Pond through "the conversion of space into place is almost always an aesthetic project; an order of creation incurred by the sequence of objects to subjects: what goes where" (16).

However, even if the presence of familiar objects can transform the space into a place, or a house into a home, it could be argued that more than the aesthetic elements it is the experiences lived in those spots that can mutate the perception of the individual. Lenore's house in *Home* is filled with objects that are familiar to the space and the reader such as chairs, tables, and beds. Additionally, according to the novel, her late husband was a wealthy entrepreneur – assassinated due to the envy of the white community – so it can be assumed that the commodities that Bayley refers to are present. Nevertheless, the negative memories that fill the space make it impossible for the Money children to refer to it as home as they grow up. The objects that fill the space need to be not only present but also lived, as Morrison would have described earlier in *The Bluest Eye*, "[t]he furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it" (25). As she affirms in her essay "Home"

> I believe, however, that my own writerly excursion and my use of a house/home antagonism are related … because so much of what seems to lie about in discourses on race concerns legitimacy, authenticity, community, belonging. In no small way, these discourses are about home: and intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; forced and displaced labor in the destruction of home; dislocation of and alienation within the ancestral home; creative responses to exile, the devastations,

> pleasures, and imperatives of homelessness as it is manifested in discussions on feminism, globalism, the diaspora, migrations, hybridity, contingency, interventions, assimilations, exclusions. (5)

Therefore, the impossibility for the space to become a place for the Money children pushes them to escape as soon as they could. However, the lack of understanding of their own roots will send them on a dangerous and traumatic path. Much like Ulysses and Dorothy, they will have to undergo a number of perils to fully grasp where they come from and where they are going as individuals, and ultimately return to the traumatic space to make it anew and take possession of it as their own.

When Frank joins the army and is deployed to Korea, he leaves behind not only his family – Cee more specifically – and his house, but also his identity. In order to psychologically survive the war, he disassociates his psyche from his actions. Therefore, many of the memories that he describes at the beginning of the book prove to be not the complete truth, which serves as one of the most common elements of trauma narratives. As Laurie Vickroy points out "[t]rauma narratives acknowledge ambivalence and doubts about successful retelling, but they also attempt to provide ways for traumatic experience to be re-created" (11). The death of his friends in the war and the death of a little Korean girl at the hands of a fellow soldier mark the initial retelling of Frank's experiences as a soldier. Unable to go back to his house in the South and confront the parents of his dead friends, he decides to stay in the North and writes his sister a postcard that said "I am back safe. See you all soon" (15). Instead of going back, he decides to stay with Lily, a seamstress, who is ignorant about his past and with whom he does not need to confront his traumatic childhood, and most importantly, his traumatic past in the war. Much like Ulysses at the beginning of *The Odyssey*, where the hero is trapped under the spell of the

witch Circe, Frank stays with Lily as a way to avoid the long way back home, enjoying the pleasures that being away offers.

However, concluding that the feminine influence on Ulysses and Frank is what keeps them from returning to their homeland is not only problematic, but also a fallacy. Both men had someone to go back to, Penelope in the case of Ulysses and Cee in the case of Frank; however the protagonists decided initially to stay behind. This decision must not be understood as a matter of seduction of the temptresses, Circe and Lily respectively, but rather as an act of incapability on the part of the protagonists of confronting the harsh reality of their actions during their respective wars. Both war veterans often endure deep psychological trauma as they lost friends and killed enemies – and sometimes innocents – in combat and may not be ready to confront these issues. Hence, the possibility of staying behind and taking profit of the opportunity to evade such traumas that these women provide is well received, as the former soldiers may want to avoid the inevitability of facing their families and their actions in the field.

Both men are forced to go back to their origins when a threat menaces their families. For Ulysses, such danger comes in the shape of the suitors of his wife and throne. As he has been away for more than ten years, with no way of finding him, men start to court the beautiful Penelope. While the queen of Ithaca dismisses them with her ingenious tricks – most significantly, her weaving a burial shroud during the day but undoing during the night. After keeping the suitors at bay for more than twenty years, Ulysses must come back and kill them in order to reclaim both throne and wife.

For Frank, his return home has a different meaning – and it is here where both myth and novel diverge. Whereas in the myth Ulysses goes back to Ithaca as a hero of the Trojan War, recognized as such by peers and family, Frank's return to Lotus will be an "unheroic" journey of self discovery and acceptance of the traumatic events that

happened during the war. In contrast with Ulysses, Frank goes back home without the recognition of society, as he has to live off what charitable strangers give him during the journey. While Homer's book dealt with the glory of the warrior and overcoming of difficulties as to restore order, Morrison's story will handle the reality of the soldier after a violent event such as the Korean war. Through a realistic approach to the truth of coming back from war, Morrison tries to depict the difficulties veterans encounter when coming back from the battlefield such as silence, denial, or dissociation. Futhermore, veterans from recent United States wars such as Vietnam or Korea were often not regarded as "heroes" in the way that veterans from World War II were, making it more problematic for them to be part of civil society. One of the difficulties Frank encounters when facing the possibility of coming back to Lotus resides in the way he left, as he enlisted as a way to escape his home with his best friends, Mike and Stuff. They made a pledge to return back together to their town but Mike and Stuff were killed in combat, which pushed Frank into a combat frenzy.

> Frank had not been brave before. He had simply done what he was told and what was necessary. He even felt nervous after a kill. Now he was reckless, lunatic, firing, dodging the scattered parts of men. … he was brave, whatever that meant. There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him. The copper smell of blood no longer sickened him; it gave him appetite. (98)

Due to these events, Frank admits he is unable to go back to Lotus at first. Returning to his hometown without his friends and having to confront their parents – and by extent, their loss and his actions during war – is at first a struggle he is not able to face. In fact, it is only because of the danger his sister is in that he will accept going back to Lotus and confronting his past.

Throughout his journey, Frank's psychological barriers, the protections he had placed between himself and the events he had to live in Korea, will shatter. With the aid of alcohol and later with the distraction that Lily will represent, he had been able to elude working through the traumatic events that took place during the war. In doing so, he shows one of the most common criteria established by the DSM-5 (2013) to identify post-traumatic stress disorder, avoidance of "[t]rauma-related external reminders (e.g., people, places, conversations, activities, objects, or situations)" ("DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD - PTSD"). Evading familiar landscapes and actions by staying up North, he does not have to face the reality of his dead friends nor the fact that he has killed both soldiers and civilians during the conflict. However, in doing so, he is unable to function as a normal part of society as he is not capable of keeping a job or having a healthy relationship with friends or his girlfriend.

The significance of the journey on his way to recovery is represented through the scene with the Korean girl. As previously mentioned, Frank proves to be an unreliable narrator, hiding key elements of scenes. However, his motives for disguising the truth are radically different from those of one of the narrators in the next novel in this dissertation *Jazz*. While the narrative voice in *Jazz* has oral speech characteristics, and describes facts that are unknown to the other narrator, Frank protects these details as he is not able to confront them initially. The first time he narrates his encounter with a little Korean girl who reminds him of Cee, he describes how her hand first lands on a rotting orange and then on the crotch of the relief guard while he witnesses the scene.

> As he approaches her she raises up and in what looks like a hurried, even automatic gesture she says something in Korean. Sounds like "Yum-yum."
>
> She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? As soon as I look away from her hand to her face, see the two missing teeth, the fall of black

> hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange …Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill. (95-96)

Even though the story starts with him being the guard, the subject changes as the description goes on. When the child dies, Frank is a witness to someone else's actions, a peer who shoots her out of disgust for sexual actions a girl should not perform. However, when he rescues his sister and takes her to Lotus to heal, he is able to finally confront the truth and share it with the reader as he says *"*I shot the Korean girl in her face*"* (133). After the journey back to the familiar space of Lotus, he is finally able to face his past and work through it in order not to repeat his actions with his sister, Cee.

As Cee is not Frank's wife – ergo she cannot symbolize the chastity and fidelity to the marriage that Homer wanted to convey with the character of Penelope – her path is a darker one. Being left behind by her brother, who had protected her all her life, she was left to be looked after by Lenore who would constantly humiliate her, and because of it she must find a way out of Lotus. Due to this situation "she fell for what Lenore called the first thing she saw wearing belted trousers instead of overalls" (Morrison, *Home* 47). And that "thing" was Prince, a young man who was sent from Atlanta to her aunt in Lotus. At the age of fourteen, she married this boy and took Lenore's car with him to his hometown, where he would eventually abandon her. After the betrayal by all the men in her life, she is left defenseless in a city where she does not belong.

> If Frank were there he would once more touch the top of her head with four fingers, or stroke her nape with his thumb. Don't cry, said the fingers; the welts will disappear. Don't cry; Mama is tired; she didn't mean it. Don't cry, don't cry girl; I'm right here. But he wasn't there or anywhere near. In the photograph he'd sent home, a smiling warrior in a

> uniform, holding a rifle, he looked as though he belonged to something else, something beyond and unlike Georgia. (53)

Left to her own devices – and, unlike Penelope, with no suitors to harass her or shroud to weave as she is unable to sew – she falls pray to Doctor Beau. It is here that the ultimate quest appears for both Frank and Cee in the form of this Southern medical practitioner who conducts experiments in the privacy of his home office. While at first the experiments seem charitable, as he is helping "many more poor people—women and girls, especially … Far more than the well-to-do ones from the neighborhood or from Atlanta proper" (64), Cee will late experience the effects of such experiments when she becomes a test subject for him. It is at this moment that Sarah, the other servant at the household, will write to Frank, worrying about the well being of the naïve girl.

The ostentatiousness of the house and her lack of education misguide Cee as to the real intentions of the "good doctor." When she first comes to serve at the Beau household, Cee is astonished by the grandeur of the house, the beautiful objects that populate it and the cleanliness of it. As in the case of Lenore's house where she grew up, the house is filled with objects that are familiar to her, even if the memories linked to them are of the abuse she suffered by the hands of her step-grandmother. Due to this uncanny resemblance between the two households, she is unable to foresee the outcome of being subject to such experiments. Furthermore, the dynamics established at the house mirror her past at Lenore's house, as the women who share the house with her leave her to her own devices. While growing up, she is left unprotected by a community of women, suffering the vexation of her step-grandmother while her mother was at work and only with the aid of her brother. And later, instead of creating a community of women to protect against a common enemy, both Mrs. Beau and Sarah hide, the former

being a Southern modern carbon copy of Mrs. Rochester from *Jane Eyre* (1847) as she is locked away watching television in a laudanum haze while the second one nurses her.

At the same time, illiteracy is shown as a shortcoming, as being literate could have protected Cee. Despite her being able to read and write, she is not permitted to attend school as a child – she is only allowed to go to church-school – and the only books that are at the Money's household are "Aesop's *Fables* and a book of Bible passages for young people" (*Home* 47). In fact, Cee blames her running away with Prince on this prohibition to access any further education as "[i]f she hadn't been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do, she would have known better" (47). Likewise, this education could have alerted her as to the type of research Dr. Beau was conducting in his home laboratory.

> One day, a couple of weeks into the job, Cee entered Dr. Beau's office a half hour before he arrived. She was always in awe of the crowded bookshelves. Now she examined the medical books closely, running her finger over some of the titles: *Out of the Night*. Must be a mystery, she thought. Then *The Passing of the Great Race*, and next to it, *Heredity, Race and Society*.
>
> How small, how useless was her schooling, she thought, and promised herself she would find time to read about and understand "eugenics." (65)

Her lack of education prevents her from escaping when she discovers such books. All three books, in one way or another, deal with the superiority or inferiority of a race, as is pointed out by Cee's wanting to understand the term "eugenics." *From Out of the Night* (1938) by German communist and Gestapo agent Jan Valtin, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) by American geneticist Madison Grant, and *Heredity, Race and Society* (1946) by geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, all three books share views that influenced Hitler's ideas on the superiority of one race over another. Hence, the experiments

conducted by Dr. Beau – which are not described specifically in Morrison's book – are hinted to deal with the supposed biological and behavioral inequality between the white and the black populations of Atlanta[15]. Furthermore, when Frank finally rescues Cee from the experiments that are being carried out on her and he takes her to Lotus to be healed by Miss Ethel, she confirms that Cee will not be able to get pregnant ever again, as Doctor Beau carried out experiments on her genitalia.

When Frank finally rescues Cee, both Money siblings need to heal from their respective traumas, physical in the case of Cee and psychological in the case of Frank. In order to do so, they return to the origin of their distress, their childhood town of Lotus, Georgia.

> Lotus, Georgia, is the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield. At least on the field there is a goal, excitement, daring, and some chance of winning along with many chances of losing. Death is a sure thing but life is just as certain. Problem is you can't know in advance.
>
> In Lotus you did know in advance since there was no future, just long stretches of killing time. There was no goal other than breathing, nothing to win and, save for somebody else's quiet death, nothing to survive or worth surviving for. (83)

Lotus represents their past at Lenore's house for Cee and the lack of opportunities for Frank. The constant belittlement of Cee by her step-grandmother and to prove his manhood by defending his sister for Frank, going away from the house seemed to be the only option at the time. However, having nowhere else to turn to when

[15] Experiments being carried out on the black population of the South were not a fictitious event. One of these cases is the syphilis experiment carried out in by the Tuskegee Institute between 1932 and 1972, in which scientists studied the progression of the disease without procuring the cure to the African American men from Macon, Georgia, who did not know they had the malady even after the discovery of penicillin. The men thought they had "bad blood" and thought they were receiving free health care and insurance ("The Tuskegee Timeline").

his sister is in peril, Frank has to resort to the only familiar place he knows. Instead of returning to their childhood house, he decides to turn to Miss Ethel, the community's pariah, for help. It is there, surrounded by a community of women, that Cee is healed. This is a common theme for Morrison, with examples such as the exorcism performed by the community of women at the end of *Beloved* or the women in the Convent in *Paradise*. Any time that Frank tries to enter the house where she is being brought back to health, he is dismissed.

Rejected by the community of women and without a male community to support him or a job, Frank decides to go to his parents' house, which had been empty since the death of his father. It is finally on this blank canvas that both Money siblings will be able to create a home from this house, turning this space into a place. When Frank enters his parents' house, it is a familiar space where he had developed as a man and is filled with memories of the abuse his sister had to suffer by the hands of their step-grandmother Lenore. By virtue of coming back and being forced to confront their own past, they are able to re-build themselves through the creation of a home, as the novel concludes

> I stood there a long while, staring at that tree.
>
> It looked so strong
>
> So beautiful.
>
> Hurt right down the middle
>
> But alive and well.
>
> Cee touched my shoulder
>
> Lightly.

Frank?

Yes?

Come on, brother. Let's go home. (147)

However, before they can completely come back home, they have to acknowledge the initial trauma of the book: the burial of an unknown individual. At the beginning of the book Morrison describes a memory of Frank and Cee when they were children. Having escaped from their house at night, they enter a field with horses in which a man is being buried. Terrified, they encounter the operation in the dark. However, when they come back, Frank feels the need to give the man a proper burial so Cee and him go back to the field to dug up the bones and wrap them up in a quilt Cee has made and take the remains to a near by stream. This second burial – which also reminds the reader of the burial of Pilate's sack of bones in *Song of Solomon* (1977) – gives the siblings the closure they both need. As Kathleen Brogan affirms "[t]he rites of final burial also mark the restoration of the social order of the living, which has been temporarily disrupted by the death of one of its members" (66).

After walking an ardous path, both Frank and Cee are able to go back to where they finally belong. No longer afraid of the pain inflicted on them on a daily basis when they were children, and accepting the harsh realities of their experiences as adults during the war and as a servant respectively, they can finally elaborate these events and construct a future with common ground as equals. Finding their goal in the unfamiliar familiarity of their house and creating a home from it, they are able to discover what Dorothy found and what Ulysses knew: "There is no place like home."

2.2. This house is not a home: scenes of domestic trauma and urban landscapes in *Jazz*

Sometimes I wonder about that night.
One does not always walk in light.
My light is darkness
and in my darkness moves, forever,
the dream or the hope or the fear of sight.(50)
James Baldwin. *Christmas Carol*

On August 28th, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr, gave his most memorable speech, one that is quoted time and again throughout the world. "I have a dream," he said, and all his dreams encapsulated the ways in which the citizens of the United States could be equal and live up to the guidelines set by their ancestors in the Declaration of Independence, written almost two hundred years before his address – even though Martin Luther King Jr.'s ancestors were not considered citizens at that time. The notion of that dream, even though it was an efficient and real image at a time in which races and communities were not equal in the American soil, was not casual. The American Dream[16], the constant directive in the American imaginary, was looming on the back of the great man's mind. The land of equal opportunity, of prosperity, where one could forge his or her own destiny, has been a constant ideal on the minds of all the people who started to populate that soil, understanding that everybody who inhabited that

[16] The term "American Dream," as it is commonly understood, was first introduced by the historian James Truslow Adams (1878-1949) on his treaty *The Epic of America* (1931).

country would follow – and would be able to achieve – this same goal. However, Reverend King knew this was not the case.

The New Jerusalem, the Frontier, the American Dream, among others, are common myths of the United States[17]. One after another, they have replaced previous notion as times have changed – after all, the New Jerusalem Puritan myth[18] changed when individuals from multiple faiths established themselves in America, there was no more 'frontier' when the entire West was discovered and conquered by 1912, and so on. Even as these notions have evolved and continue to do so, there is one common thing that has joined them: space. All these ideals have dealt with the construction of the new city of enlightenment where a new community will rise holier than the previous, the conquest of territory where riches could be achieved, the house with the white picket fence within the desired community... Like Sally Bayley puts it "America had come to know itself as a nation of voracious territorial consumption in which endless swathes of land bred limitless hope and possibility" (5). As the myths evolved so did the scenery: from the desired mountain top to the western side of the continent, from the rural paradise to the urban metropolis, the dreamers of the country moved, migrating from one side to the other in search of opportunity.

One of the last significant transitions occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, as men were substituted by machinery in agricultural labor, and they searched for a better and more comfortable future in the big city. During World War I, the younger African American generation escaped the violence that was brewing in the

[17] The evolution of this terminology is explored in Sally Bayley's book *Home on the Horizon: America's search for space, from Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan* (2010) or Samuel R. Lawrence *The American Dream: A Cultural History* (2012)

[18] This New Jerusalem refers to the book by the prophet Ezekiel in the Bible. In it, Ezekiel describes a vision of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its Temple. Puritans took this myth and transferred it to the discovery of the New World, where they aimed to achieve such goal.

South and arrived to big cities in the North, looking for a safe haven and work, in what is known as the "Great Migration." As Allon Schoener affirms

> These young people had lived on sharecropper and tenant farms of their parents, they had been subjected to the initiation of a score of Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan. But worst of all, they saw their parents, who were content to submit to the abuses of a Southern cast society. In order not to lose all hope, they fled the land in which they were born, and sought the "freedom" of the Northern cities. (9)

This dream, however, would turn into a nightmare for many, as the city proved to be a far wilder landscape than the unexplored terrains of the Wild West had been. But how did the dream of a better future really translate for the African American citizens? How did the relation between the citizen and the space they occupied change through the Great Migration? And finally, how did the rural household translate into the urban landscape? These are some of the questions that Toni Morrison tried to answer in her 1992 novel *Jazz*.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many individuals sought to escape the rural South and arrive to the urban North. At this point in history, unemployment was common in the South as the economy of these States was based on agriculture and the new technological advances made man labor scarce – and more so for the African American individual, as he or she was unable to obtain the proper education he or she needed to secure newly advanced positions created by this industrialization. In order to find work, there were people that advocated for more instruction for African American workers on the fields and on other manual works, including supporters such as Booker T. Washington and the foundation of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1881. The education the students received in this center was a practical one, as they learned concepts that they could directly apply to their work on the farms, procuring the

independence they longed for. Other intellectuals favored a more rounded education, like W. E. B. DuBois, who affirmed that "[i]f white people need colleges to furnish teachers, ministers, lawyers, and doctors, do black people need nothing of the sort?" (71).

This lack of work contributed to substantial poverty in the Southern states, which subsequently lead to the increase in violence towards the African American community. With the end of the Civil War fairly recent, feelings of racism and discrimination ran amuck, resulting in the creation of the Ku Klux Klan (1865), Jim Crow segregation laws (circa 1870), lynchings and riots (1866-1998)[19]. Even though legally African American individuals were finally free of their bondage after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, there was still a long way until authentic equality was achieved. Ida B. Wells, one of the first African American women journalists and activists, travelled the country reporting on these brutal attacks that were committed in the name of justice. Most of these lynchings were defended in court, in order to keep appearances, as punishments to right wrongs done by the individuals towards the white community. In her autobiography, Wells gives ample examples of them, reporting lynchings in Texas, South Carolina, or Tennessee, to name but a few. And in all of these events, she affirms that "[t]his is what opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and prosperity and thus keep the race terrorized and 'keep the nigger down.' I then began an investigation of every lynching I read about" (64).

Years later, when Dr. King gave his aforementioned speech, the segregation between white and black was still a reality as well as the lynchings, although the brutality,

[19] The first of these dates refers to the lynching of fifty black men in Memphis, Tennessee, and the last one the brutal lynching of Jasper Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas. However, due to the violent history of the history of the African American community in the United States, both of these dates are approximate.

commonality and spectacle of them were not[20]. As he said, one hundred years after slavery was abolished "the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity" (81).

The African American community hence left the South in what is known as the "Great Migration." They escaped from the violence and terrible work conditions they endured in the southern states and looked forward to the riches and commodities promised by the American Dream in cities like Chicago or New York. And it is in New York, more specifically in the neighborhood of Harlem, where many of them came together.

Harlem's nature from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries changed substantially. As is described in the book *Harlem on my Mind; Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968* (1969), in the second half of the nineteenth century, Harlem was considered a suburb of Manhattan, were the Jewish and the Italian communities lived. With the creation of the Lennox subway line, speculators started building on this area, assuming it would bloom once this link to the downtown area was completed. However, the individuals that lived there started moving south of the city as they generated more wealth, looking to live among the wealthier strata of the city. This pushed the real estate market to accept black immigrants into their newly built apartments, where the posters that said 'opened for Colored' started to populate the real estate agencies of the time. This offered many individuals the opportunity to start anew. As Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris says

[20] Even though lynchings have been rare after the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the last known lynching in United States soil took place in Jasper, Texas in 1998 when Shawn Allen Berry, Lawrence Russel Brewer and John William King murdered James Byrd Jr. In 2005 the United States Senate enacted a Federal anti-lynching law.

> [i]t reconstituted the complex journey of black migrants feeling Southern oppression against the peculiar backdrop of the Northern city, which in turn distills its own violence. … The City therefore became an acting site of reconstruction, of potential and actual articulation of some traumatic traces of the past. (221)

Reading this passage, the capitalization of the word "City" must be noted, as Paquet-Deyris respects it from Morrison's use in her novel. Morrison makes the city of New York not only the backdrop where the characters will live their lives, but a character of its own and, in a way, one of the narrators of the novel, as it will be seen later. New York was one of the cities where the African American community was able to finally express themselves through art, literature, and music, creating what was called the Harlem Renaissance and with it a new beginning for the African American community. As Paquet-Deyris notes "the City of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s is some sort of 'zero moment' in black history" (219). The Harlem Renaissance started a cultural era for the African American community that still resonates on our time. Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston or Jean Toomer, poets like Langston Hughes or photographers like James Van Der Zee[21], to name but a few, pushed the black culture forward.

Within the cultural spectrum that the Harlem Renaissance covered, a cultural phenomenon flourished: jazz. It was at this time that musicians such as Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, or Billie Holiday played and sang at the popular hotspots of the city. Jazz became a popular way of expressing the sorrows of the community through ordered improvisation, what was previously achieved through blues or spiritual songs. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. comments when talking about this genre of music "[f]ew musical traditions in this country have had more modern masters than has the African-American

[21] This last one published, with a foreword from Toni Morrison, *The Harlem Book of the Dead* (1987), a collection of his photographs of dead African Americans in which Morrison found the inspiration for her book *Jazz*.

tradition, from the blues to rhythm-and-blues, from soul to rap, from ragtime to jazz" (52).

But not all the people who came to the Big Apple were part of the cultural elite of the time. Though for many it meant education, including the individuals that were defined as the talented tenth, "the Black who came to the big cities to become lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and politicians" (Schoener et al. 9), most of the migrants were uneducated young people that fled their homes in order to find a better future. And it is the common people that Morrison is interested in, as Jill Matus analyzes

> *Jazz* is therefore a history of Harlem that is interested in the improvisation of lives out of a painful past rather than concerned to represent a glorious moment of cultural awakening. In accordance with Morrison's emphasis on daily life and ordinary people, public events are muted and backgrounded; they form a texture rather than dominate the plot. Characters in *Jazz* do not join Marcus Garvey's group, or participate in the NAACP, but many of them do indeed witness the parades and silent marches that took place in the streets of Harlem. (128)

The absence of real opportunities for the general population of the neighborhood is what inspired the creation of a larger community that supported one another. After all, as it has been examined before and will be analyzed in the fourth part of this dissertation, in Morrison's narrative it is mainly through the creation of a larger community that the individual will be able to move on past his or her traumas and flourish. The familiar South is frightening for the young boys and girls that escaped it while "'the City' … presents itself strangely in disguise, being illusive, seductive, beautiful, and frightening at the same time. It thus alludes to both the city of the mind, that for many African Americans translated into the Promise Land, but also to the material urban reality of poverty, oppression, and limited opportunities" (Eckhard 137).

It is then no coincidence that this City is not only the landscape of Morrison's novel but one of the narrators of the story. Much like any jazz improvisation, the City conducts the reader through the novel, giving clues at times and misleading at others. By way of using the omniscient first person narrator and then shifting to a third person narrator, Morrison tricks the reader into thinking that the message given by the City is true when sometimes it is not or not even she[22] knows the information she is feeding us – as is the case at the conclusion of the novel when she is surprised by the ending of Joe and Violet Trace, the main characters of the novel.

> So I missed it altogether. I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. (220)

It is by way of using oral characteristics such as onomatopoeia, colloquialisms, and an informal register among others in her speech, the narrator is able to relate to the reader. Furthermore, the hearsay quality of her speech, the sounds that populate the novel such as "Sth, I know that woman" (3) or the constant sucking of teeth, and the closeness with which she addresses the reader relate to the act of storytelling, central in Morrison's works, as she has supported in several of her essays like "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984), "Memory, Creation, and Writing" (1984) or her own acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in 1993. The presence of this oral narrator throughout the book relates to the current absence or decay of the oral / storytelling tradition among the African American community, what according to Morrison constitutes the core of the family interrelations. As Morrison herself disclosed in an

[22] The narrator in this novel is most commonly accepted by critics to be a woman; therefore she will be referred to as such from this point on.

interview with Nellie McKay, storytelling amongst her family as she was growing up was essential to her writings as an adult and this act was not a passive one but rather

> [t]he point was to tell the same story again and again. I can change it if I contribute to it when I tell it. I can emphasize special things. People who are listening comment on it and make it up, too, as it goes along. In the same way when a preacher delivers a sermon he really expects his congregation to listen, participate, approve, disapprove, and interject almost as much as he does. Eventually, I think, if the life of the novels is long, then the readers who wish to read my books will know that it is not I who do it, it is they who do. (434)

With this approach to storytelling in mind, it can be concluded that in *Jazz* it is through the narrator that the reader can implicate him or herself in the story. Notwithstanding, the narrator ends the novel begging for the reader to "make me, remake me" (229) so that her presence will prevail long after the ending of the act of reading. This ending is significant as the narrator in her previous novel *Beloved* (1987) urged the reader to forget the story as it was "not a story to pass on"(323). The narrator tells the reader, then, the story of Joe and Violet Trace, a middle-aged couple that lives in Harlem during the twenties, and how Joe killed his young lover, Dorcas, when she decided to leave him for a man of her own age. It is the interactions between the couple, both with each other and with relatives of the dead girl – who decided not to incriminate her killer as she was dying – that drives the narrative, exploring the past traumas of both Joe and Violet in order to heal them.

Joe and Violet Trace are representative of the population of Harlem of the time and of their relation to the space. They both come from Vesper County, Virginia, trying to leave their past behind and to create a new persona in the City.

> They weren't even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out the windows for first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back. (32)

These new personalities that they invented for themselves were appropriate for the new environment they were living in. Joe, a door-to-door salesman, knew the streets and was trusted by the women of the neighborhood. He was a master of the public sphere of the City where he could forget that he was also an outsider in his hometown where he lived with a hunter, as his mother abandoned him at birth. Violet, on the other hand, was locked away at home at the beginning of the novel, enclosed in the golden cage of their shared apartment. She only ventured out when Joe kills Dorcas and she decides to get out of the apartment in order to deal with her feelings of loss, trying to find a companion in grief in Dorcas' aunt Alice.

When Joe met Dorcas, a young girl from St. Louis who escaped the riots that killed her parents, he became instantly infatuated by the girl's beauty. It reminded him of simpler times back at the South, when he met Violet while he was sleeping on top of a tree. As she slept under a walnut tree, she heard someone falling, as Joe states "'[n]ever happened before,' said the man. 'I've been sleeping up there every night. This is the first time I fell out'" (103). Upon meeting Dorcas, Joe finally had found someone whom he did not need to control or tend; someone who he thought would not run away like all the different women in his life. That was why when she abandoned him for a younger man he decided to kill her.

Even if Joe has left the South where he was born, which was populated by his traumas – more specifically, the haunting image of his mother –, they still came along on

the train with him. As Michel Foucault affirms, the spaces we live in are not just the material things surrounding us as

> we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (23)

The relations created between space, time and the person are what fill the gaps between the buildings and blocks of the City. Furthermore, the landscapes of an individual's past will nevertheless populate the individual's present, much like Morrison described in *Beloved* when the main character, Sethe, talks about the plantation in which she was a slave "[w]here I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away"(43). The action of recalling a past and a place – what the author will designate as "rememory"[23] – is what makes the place (and ergo the memory) true. However, the relation between the individual and the place in this case goes deeper, as the change from the rural South to the urban North conveys a notorious change on the perception of the space they inhabit.

The dichotomy established by Morrison when she coined the concept of "rememory" is between what was present in the landscapes of the past and what is absent in the current ones and vice versa. As Philip Page relates

> [f]or [Morrison] what is absent is at least as important as what is present. Her role is not to reveal some already established reality but to 'fret the pieces and fragments of memory'

[23] The concept of "rememory" is coined by the author herself and used for the first time throughout *Beloved* to describe the remembrance of a memory. This memory, however, can be the own person's memory or someone else's, as the quote used was preceded by the following "[s]omeday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else." (Morrison 43) In this "rememory" both past and present collide for the individual, putting back together the pieces of what once was there but is not currently.

and to investigate 'the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it' (Washington 58)." (55)

According to Page in his essay "Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*" (1995), the term "rememory" was anteceded by Derrida's notion of "trace." For Page a trace "designates the play or oscillation between a present, a thing-as-it-is, and the absence, an other" (55). Furthermore, Page sees in the cracks and breaches that populate the City – and in which Violet usually sits – the presence of Derrida as well as for the critic "a crack or a breach is disruptive, but the disruption allows us to know the entities being separated and to re-focus on the gap itself" (59). It is in these cracks and in-between spaces that Joe and Violet's traumas are located. It would be possible to affirm that these spaces are filled with the traumas of the past, as Morrison demonstrates with this novel. Not only do her characters feel lost in this urban landscape but the ghosts of Joe and Violet's past traumas visit them within this new setting. It is then capital to follow the traces left behind by Joe in order to fill the voids of his story and understand his reaction towards Dorcas.

For Joe, absences are a constant in his life. Abandoned by his mother – who Morrison has several times connected with Beloved[24] – when he was a baby, he was brought up by Henry LesTroy, a local hunter, who taught him how to follow the traces of animals around the area. Therefore, for Joe, traces are both literal – the markings left behind by an animal or person – and also conceptual – as Derrida explains and as Morrison remakes. Henry LesTroy recreates the archetype of the frontiersman living off the land, so common in American imaginary. As Alonso Recarte puts it "the frontiersman/self-made man archetype represents the ultimate American hero; his deeds

[24] Morrison has made this connection in several interviews like her interview with Angels Carabi in 1993 or her interview with Elissa Chappell in 1992, both included in the volume *Toni Morrison. Conversations* (2008)

are the epic conquest of the wilderness, his most reliable tool is his instinct" (335). Joe will use the traits learnt from LesTroy, the American hero, in order to locate his mother on three different occasions when he was a young adult. Even though he is able to follow the traces left by her in nature – the broken sugar cane, the cave in which she inhabits with her lover, etc., - he is never able to see her, arriving to wherever she has been when she has already left.

> All in all, he [Joe Trace] made three solitary journeys to find her. In Vienna he had lived first with the fear of her, then the joke of her, finally the obsession, followed by rejection of her. Nobody told Joe she was his mother. Not outright; but Hunters Hunter looked right in his eyes one evening and said, 'She got reasons. Even if she crazy. Crazy people got reasons.' (175)

His past as a hunter will haunt Joe again in the City. When Dorcas abandons him, he "re-remembers" his past self and his past absences, trying to follow her traces in order to kill her. However, finding his prey in the wild and spotting it in the City turns out to be harder than he expected, as he is only able to locate her when she is at a party.

> His presence is only understood, only exists, in terms of the play between it and his absent parents, his absent past, and therefore his absent self. His conscious presence in the City only exists in terms of its play with, or memory of, his absent past in Vesper County. He loves Dorcas because she recalls for him that past; she for him is the trace of that past and the trace of himself. (Page 57)

Even though Joe was unable to locate his prey, his mother, in the wild, he does find Dorcas in the urban landscape, though the result is devastating for him. While he is incapable of obtaining the object of desire in the rural South through the impossibility of seeing his mother, her presence within the natural space makes her real. That is, it is in her absence that she is present, as Page continues, as "[s]he haunts the cane fields, where

a sense of her presence, a trace, is enough to generate terror and myth. When Joe attempts to find her, she (and Golden Gray) exists, not in presence, but in signs of their presence" (57). However, the death of Dorcas proves to be more devastating than his absent mother. By recreating his past as a hunter in his current persona, he is also repeating his prior traumas, transforming Dorcas into Wild. Despite the lack of traces left behind – as there is no broken sugar cane that Dorcas has stomped nor cave where she has left her dress – Joe is able to locate her and kill her.

Dorcas is then proven less resourceful than the memory she resembles in Joe's mind, which allows him to fulfill his work as hunter with unwanted results. As Elizabeth M. Cannon says "when Dorcas becomes the object of another man, Joe's act of shooting her is not just a revengeful one. He hopes to fix the image of her in his mind so that he can always have his object with him" (241). It is by achieving or what in Joe's mind would resemble "owning" the object that was previously absent that he realizes his mistake, that Dorcas will never be the free spirit that his mother represented but just a mirage his mind has created.

The cracks that populate Morrison's novel are used to differentiate two concepts that are diverse in nature but that have one common denominator. When analyzing these ruptures, the focus should not only be on the two parts that are created by the fissure but also on the object or instance that made them. While the physical crevices are all around the city of New York, according to the novel, the fragments in which they appear share another element: the presence of Violet in them. She is present – or alluded to – when the narrator talks about cracks, due to the "private cracks" (22) she has. Not only are the cracks physical ones in the surroundings of the urban dweller but also in the case of Violet, they are psychic ones as well.

Much like her husband, Violet was also abandoned by her mother when she was just a child. However, unlike Joe, the abandonment in her case is through suicide, as Rose Dear – Violet's mother – jumps into a well when Violet is still very young. From that point on, Violet lives with her aunt until she moves to the City with her new husband. This initial trauma will create a fissure on her psyche, a fracture that will grow deeper after the realization of her inability to bear children. While the matter is looked at as a minor "inconvenience" when the couple finds out, it will evolve into a feeling of "mother hunger" by the time the novel starts.

> Joe didn't want babies either so all those miscarriages—two in the field, only one in her bed—were more inconvenience than loss. And citylife would be so much better without them. Arriving at the train station back in 1906, the smiles they both smiled at the women with little children, strung like beads over suitcases, were touched with pity. They liked children. Loved them even. Especially Joe, who had a way with them. But neither wanted the trouble. Years later, however, when Violet was forty, she was already staring at infants, hesitating in front of toys displayed at Christmas. Quick to anger when a sharp word was flung at a child, or a woman's hold of a baby seemed awkward or careless. (107)

Both the feeling of abandonment and the craving to have children are minor crevices on Violet's mind but they will become a significant divide the moment Joe murders Dorcas. It is then that Violet, unable to deal with the feelings of rejection and jealousy – feelings that are remnant of her childhood trauma, – will split her personality into two different personas. On the one hand, Violet will suffer the aftermath of Joe's actions and will remain the passive recipient of his crimes. On the other hand, her new personality will disfigure the corpse of Dorcas at her funeral, earning her the name "Violent" by the community. In fact, it will be "Violent" who is prosecuted by her peers instead of her husband, like Marilyn Maxwell says, Dorcas' family does not press charges against Joe as there is a "prevalent feeling among the dead girl's family is that the police

would not even care that much about meting out justice for the murder of a black girl," (Maxwell 199). This allows Joe to go unpunished and keep on selling his products around the neighborhood as if nothing had happened while Violet's attack onto the corpse will make her a pariah.

The division of the personality into different individuals is a common trope in Morrison's characters used to explain the aftermath of a traumatic event. This tool has been used by the author most noticeably in the case of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) or Florens in *A Mercy* (2008). However, while in aforementioned works the reader bears witness to the evolution of the characters before the characters suffer the traumatic event, in the case of Violet the reader's experience is reverse. At the beginning of the book he or she gets to know the Violet/Violent dichotomy at the opening of the novel and it is not until the end that she frees herself from "*that*" Violet, as she refers to her other self.

Much like in the case of Pecola, the division into these two separate entities has to do with maternity and a misportrayal of her own self image. Firstly, when this crevice is opened in Violet's mind, her "mother hunger" comes through it. Though she has had miscarriages – and as the reader later learns, even an abortion in the City, – she creates an image of an ideal daughter that she projects both onto a doll she buys – and with whom she sleeps every night – and onto the dead Dorcas. It is in this transference of roles from Joe's lover to Violet's daughter that Bouson sees the Oedipal.

> In a self-conscious, if not parodic, invocation of psychoanalytic discourse, the narrative makes explicit the Oedipal dynamics of the rivalrous triangular relationship between Violet, Dorcas, and Joe in which Dorcas (the daughter) becomes the rival of Violet (the mother) for the affections of Joe (the father). (174)

This mother-daughter-father relationship recreates Violet's own past. While her mother and grandmother took care of her and her brothers, her father was an absent figure that only came back home to give presents to his kids and then leave. As Violet remembers "[p]erhaps he planned to find some way to get them all out; in the meantime he made fabulously dangerous and wonderful returns over the years, although the interims got longer and longer, and while the likelihood that he was still alive grew fainter, hope never did" (100). Even though he was an absent father, Violet's family always looked forward to his return and celebrated it as a joyous occasion, not judging him for not being always present. The same paradigm could be translated to Violet's situation as it is she who is judged by the community, much like her mother Rose Dear was judged when she committed suicide. Conversely, both Joe and Violet's father are left free and the daughters, Dorcas in this paradigm, and Violet and her sisters in Violet's past, suffer from the absence of the father but loved him regardless.

Secondly, Violet's self image has much to do with the idea of beauty explored earlier in Morrison's production in *The Bluest Eye*, the black female seen as not beautiful by the white society. Even if the artistic community created in Harlem at the beginning of the twentieth century was one that celebrated the fact of being black and beautiful, with models of such beauty in the jazz scene, the beauty products that salesmen such as Joe offered to women lightened the color of their skin. It should not be a surprise, then, that the beautiful baby that Violet imagines in her mind is a white one, with beautiful golden locks – an image that is connected to the story of her grandmother, True Belle, and Golden Gray, the child she cared for. It is because of the suicide of her mother that True Belle comes back to take care of the Violet and her sisters, even though she will always resent them for taking her away from her "golden boy."

> Somebody golden, like my [Violet's] own golden boy, who I never ever saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers? Help me God help me if that was it, because I knew him and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one made me crazy about him in the first place. (97)

The image of the "golden boy" is also connected to Dorcas, as her complexion was a lighter one. Hence, by attacking her corpse, Violet also "wants to strip Dorcas of identity, to sever her ties with Joe, to 'de-face' her, in other words. With Dorcas, Violet does not have to face the possibility that something is 'wrong' with her" (Lewis 279).

In order to re-create Dorcas' persona, Violet takes a picture of her and places it on their otherwise empty mantelpiece for closer study. This way, the constant reminder of Dorcas and the trauma that she portrays is placed at the center of the couple's life. Even though the characters populate the City and move around it – as it has been said, Joe Trace is a door-to-door salesman of cosmetics while Violet is an unlicensed hairdresser, – it is within the space of the houses, both the Traces' and Alice Manfred's, Dorcas' aunt, that the reader can approach these families' reality. However, the domestic sphere becomes problematic, as it is within these walls that the initial traumas were generated and also where they will be ultimately resolved once the characters have individually and communally worked through their pasts.

As mentioned in the introduction to this part, despite the fact that houses, the places in which an individual inhabits, are directly linked to the notion of the traumatic and the mysterious, they are also a safe haven in which the individual can abandon limitations established by society and be free. When Freud wrote *The Uncanny* (1919) he directly linked this feeling of uneasiness to the notion of home, as the original word in German is *unheimlich*, that is, contrary to home. He will define this concept further as

something that is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, a presence that, however common, menaces the status quo of the individual.

While Morrison's characters, as previously explained, wander the City, they must also find a resting place. After all, not having said place or "lacking a home, temporally or permanently, correlates with the loss or fragmentation of black subjectivity (and sometimes even with the loss or fragmentation of a unified body)" (Eckhard 151). According to Eckhard – and to Morrison, as she describes it in *The Bluest Eye* – the absence of said home directly reflects upon the individual's psyche, affecting him or her directly and making him or her lose their own identity. This feeling of uneasiness will continue until the person can finally establish in a location. However, the description of the Traces' apartment at the beginning of the novel feels like a confined space, somewhere with no light and in which the only creature that seems alive is the parrot that repeats "I love you" in an automatic way – and that Violet frees. It is also in the house where "*that*" Violet, Violent, roams, hiding away a knife in the birdcage so Violet cannot find it or remember what she did with it.

The murder and subsequent attack of Dorcas that sets the book in motion starts the healing of the inhabitants of the house and the creation of the Traces' *home* through the incorporation of Dorcas' portrait. When Violet borrows the portrait from Dorcas' aunt Alice and places it at the core of their house, the reaction to it varies for each spouse. When Joe stares at the portrait "the face stares at him without hope or regret and it is the absence of accusation that wakes him from his sleep hungry for her company" (11). However, when it is Violet who observes it "[t]he girl's face looks greedy, haughty and very lazy … An inward face – whatever it sees is its own self. You are there, it says, because I am looking at you" (12).

These descriptions of their feelings when looking at the photograph initiates a personalized process of mourning that will set each character on a different path, each linked directly with a beloved person of Dorcas. On the one hand, Joe must learn and accept the absences in his life, more specifically his mother, and be responsible for his own actions, a path that will lead him to Felice, Dorcas' best friend, and ultimately to the creation of a real couple with his wife ultimately. Felice will force Joe to confront the murder, as she is the only one that holds him responsible for his actions. On the other hand, Violet's path takes her to create a sense of self, of a female community and of home through her interactions with Dorcas' aunt, Alice.

Alice's views on the City directly clash against the initial assumptions of it that drove the Traces to Harlem from the South. While for them it is a City of opportunities, Alice does not trust the outside world, warning her niece of the dangers that it poses – and proving her right when she is murdered. However, it is she that opened initially the door to the Cleopatra beauty products salesman that will kill her niece and it is also she that opened the door to the woman that wanted to disfigure the corpse of her niece. Although Alice is initially hesitant to accept the company of Violet, it is through the interactions with her, and her persistence to know all about her niece that she is able to mourn her and move on. It is through the creation of a female community and the celebration of their own selves in the intimate space of Alice's apartment that Alice and Violet can start the process of healing.

Violet, unable to speak to her own husband, and Alice, unable to speak to her dead niece, find their own voice in each other's solace. It is through the creation of this two-members community that they can work through their own traumas and avoid constant repetition. Violet will finally understand the deeply-rooted traumas that haunt her husband even if far away from their natal South, and she will let go of Dorcas' ghost.

However, Alice's process differs from Violet's, as she is able not only to move on from the trauma of losing her niece, but also to move out of the City. Unable to live in a traumatic and unfriendly present, she prefers to go back to a well-known past, where the ghosts of recent past cannot bother her, abandoning her apartment and moving back to Springfield. Furthermore "Morrison sees two aspects of her subject formation process: First, women must recognize each other as subjects, and second, the new subjectivity must be cemented through action" (Cannon 243). Acknowledging these facts, Alice will be able to move away from the City that deceived her and her niece, leaving her past behind, onto a brighter future in a familiar space.

Equally so, Violet will be able to glue together the pieces of her own self as a result of her interaction with Alice. While initially Violet's intentions were misguided, as she wanted to become a carbon copy of the dead girl and the standards of beauty she stood for, to possess her identity in order to please her husband, she finally rejects this notion after learning more about Dorcas and how she was objectified by her husband and society as "Violet consciously rejects and kills her 'object me' when she comes to terms with Dorcas" (Cannon 242). Violet is able to create her own sense of self and through it, (re)construct her home and her partnership with Joe.

In the same fashion that Alice let Violet into her house in order for both women to cope with their past, Violet and Joe must let someone into their house for it to become a home. This is why Felice is invited into the Traces' home. Felice becomes the means by which Joe and Violet can finally exorcise the ghost of Dorcas, as with her help they will be able to work through their traumatic experience and rebuild their sense of coupledom. While Dorcas was an object of desire for men, following the aesthetics of a beautiful black girl according to the white dominant society, Felice is the antithesis of such paradigm. Even though she is beautiful, she does not comply with the rules set by

white society and she is able to celebrate her own individuality within the African American community – much like the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance advocated for.

The reactions to Felice, however, differ in accordance to what each individual needs in order to move on. For Violet, Felice will become the final step in her creation of a true self, as she will become a surrogate daughter to whom Violet can pass the wisdom she has learnt through her interactions with Alice.

> 'Now I want to be the woman my mother didn't stay around long enough to see. That one. The one she would have liked and the one I used to like before…. My grandmother fed me stories about a little blond child. He was a boy, but I thought of him as a girl sometimes, as a brother, sometimes as a boyfriend. He lived inside my mind. Quiet as a mole. But I didn't know it till I got here. The two of us. Had to get rid of it.'
>
> '… How did you get rid of her? '
>
> 'Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.'
>
> 'Who's left?'
>
> 'Me.' (208–209)

On the other hand, Felice is able to put an end to Joe's mourning and give him permission to forgive himself. This final stage of mourning starts when Violet removes the portrait of Dorcas from the mantelpiece, giving it back to Alice. It is in the absence of the presence that Joe's sobs at night become 'quieter,' like Eckhard points out (169). Nevertheless, as in the case of Violet, Felice must give him the final piece of the puzzle for him to completely move on.

> 'Dorcas let herself die. The bullet went in her shoulder, this way.' I pointed. 'She wouldn't let anybody move her; said she wanted to sleep and she would be all right. Said she'd go to

> the hospital in the morning. "Don't let them call nobody," she said. "No ambulance; no police, no nobody.'" (209)

By telling him that Dorcas did not ask for help and "let herself die," Felice is giving Joe the possibility of forgiving himself. Even if the actions he committed were unforgivable, Dorcas at the end of her life gave him permission to start working on a new relationship with his wife, one dominated by respect to one another as equals. Through the self, reciprocal forgiveness, and the recognition of their own traumas, Joe and Violet can finally reinforce their relationship. In doing so, the place in which they dwell can finally become a home.

In conclusion, the notions of the 'American Dream' and 'New Jerusalem', both referring to the white-picket-fence home and the city, respectively, are nothing but fallacies that can be damaging for the individual. Though building such idyllic space in Harlem could present itself as the perfect landscape for the African American individual to flourish, it cannot be so unless the past in the rural South is fully acknowledged in the individual's memory. That is, the individual cannot (re)create a home in Harlem unless he or she is able to articulate the presences and absences of his or her past in this new landscape that the City gives. It is only when this happens that they individual can move on with his or her life and create a home out of a house.

2.3. Conclusion

The discovery and conquest of new lands has been one of the common tropes in universal, and more specifically, American literature. Journeys to find a place to build a home have been a constant within the American imaginary, from the Puritans in search of a new Holy Land, to the pioneers looking to conquer new horizons, to the frontier men looking for gold. However, when this paradigm is adopted by the African American community, a level of trauma must be taken into account due to their history in the United States. Not only that, but the arrival to a home after these travels was not accessible to them. The house in which the African American individual dwelled in the past was not a refuge and familiar place, but rather a place of torture.

For Morrison, the journey of the characters analyzed in *Home* and *Jazz* is not only a journey of self-discovery but also the journey that helps the individual to overcome past traumas. Even though travelling in other literary traditions has been seen as just a means to describe different vignettes of bucolic landscapes or to narrate adventures occurring in such instances, the journey home is, for the Nobel laureate, a therapeutic one. If such therapy does not take place en route, its consequences will show later on in the domestic space. In the case of Frank Money in *Home*, such therapy takes place through the obstacles he meets along the way. In his pilgrimage back to his childhood residence, Frank works through the consequences of that the war has had. For the characters in *Jazz* the process of healing upon arrival to a new or familiar location – their migration from the South to the City – does not take place and as such, the past

comes back to repeat itself, not as a mechanical repetition but as a mimesis of past behaviors within the new urban landscape.

However, the journey is not an aimless one. Both in *Home* and *Jazz*, the characters move through the United States geography with a clear destination in mind: home. Even if such goal should be a definite one, the lines between the domestic and the traumatic are blurred in Morrison's work. Although the physicality space of the house is clear, the characters must create a home that was otherwise non-existent after they have worked through their individual traumas. In doing so, they differentiate the concepts of space and place, absence and presence, and finally of house and home. In the first pairing, space is linked to the topological aspects, place is linked to the personal and human elements of the paradigm. While the geographical space is there as a constant physical entity, it is not until it is converted into a place that the individual is able to capture it in his or her memory, adding emotional significance to it. In doing so, it becomes familiar to the person and as such, part of Morrison's coined concept of "rememory." Even if the space changes throughout the years, the place will be a perpetual reminder of what occurred in that landscape. It is through the transformation of one onto the other that Frank and Cee and Joe and Violet can change their vision of their dwellings, becoming familiar not only with one another but also with the area they inhabit. In doing so, they call upon the importance of the creation of a community – be that a large community or a community of two as will be further explored later on this dissertation – in the conversion of both space and partner.

Secondly, the division between absence and presence proves to be central in the formation of the domestic. Through these psychological elements, Morrison channels the past of the characters, as absence is directly linked to the melancholia and longing that they have towards a non-real presence, a longing that becomes toxic for the couples

as they are unable to value the presence of each other and other people in their current situations. In doing so, they perpetuate past behaviors until they are able to resolve and heal such situations.

Finally, though the house is linked to the physical aspect of the dwelling, the structural component of it, the home itself, is connected with the memories that are connected to it, constituting the psychological aspect. This difference has proved essential when talking about these novels. In the case of Frank and Cee, even if they had a house, the sense of home was taken away from them due to the painful memories binded to it. It is in reuniting and after their individual journeys have been made that they can create a home. As for the Traces, the same model can be applied, as the dark images joined to their upbringing come back to haunt them in their new house. They are only able to create a home once they have worked through their personal traumas in order to build a home as a couple.

PART THREE: THE MIND

Communicating ideas is one of the most defining traits of the human experience. While the mind composes only half of the mind / body dichotomy, expressing one's ideas and thoughts in both verbal and written manner has been traditionally deemed as a critical component of what makes humanity unique. Even though people are able to use their mind for problem solving, for transcending their own reality, or recalling mistakes of the past in order not to repeat them, all these mental tasks would be hollow without the possibility of communicating them to others. In fact, it is through speech that the traumas expressed in the body are dealt with. While these traumas reside in the mind of the victim, it is through speech that said victim can further elaborate them, as was previously analyzed. Therefore both mind and voice are intertwined in some of the most basic human attributes – what to some traditional critics, philosophers, and scientist would describe as what distinguishes us from the rest of the animals. Through speech, humans can disseminate their knowledge, add their own

ideas to the communal ones, or advertise dangers to those who will follow their footsteps.

In order to broadcast ideas to a wider audience, to spread the knowledge of other cultures to far away places, the figure of the storyteller was born. Storytellers not only transmitted their own stories and entertained but also memorized other's stories. As Walter Benjamin would describe in his essay "The Storyteller. Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov," the storyteller became a teacher or sage, someone who could not only relate his or her life but also those of others and communicate such experiences for the public to learn, as most stories would enclose a moral or lesson that the listeners should internalize. This moralizing characteristic is what separates him from the historian, who would chronicle events without tainting them with lessons for the audience to extract.

However, before the modern era of multimedia, voices by themselves could only reach a small audience, and it is here that the written word was invented, to desiminate ideas far and wide. Print not only served as a way to convey ideas and transmit them to the farthest points of the world, but it also served as a way to leave these stories behind for posterity, taking away any mis-representation from the oral storyteller and giving the author of the stories complete control over them. Works of literature, such as novels, were then one of the ways to expose the readers to experiences that otherwise would be foreign to them, to disclose narratives, fictional or otherwise, from which they could learn. As Benjamin would affirm

> The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else's fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger's fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws

> the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about. (101)

Furthermore, novels and memoirs became of the utmost importance to denounce unfair situations suffered by a people or community. This is the case of the African American community, as with the slave narratives they denounced their situation and reached out to a larger community. Additionally, by writing their stories, slaves and former slaves wanted to make their humanity undeniable in a society that equaled them to farm animals, separating themselves from being only a means of labor or bodies. In fact, as it will be exposed in this part, many white cultivated men deemed such fact impossible and put African American individuals who published their memoirs on trial – as was the case of Phillis Weathley that will be analyzed later. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. would affirm "[h]ave there ever been more curious origins of a literary tradition, especially when we recall that the slave narrative arose as a response to, and refutation of, claims that blacks could not write?" (Herny Louis Gates, Jr. 3).

Through her writings, Toni Morrison tries to expose the reader to the different times of the African American experience in the Americas. Her works, defined by herself as *literary archeology* (Morrison, "The Site of Memory" 112), draw from experiences of the past to, through her works, reveal historical evils and misrepresentations to the modern day reader. In order to do so, Morrison nourishes her fiction from diverse sources. First, her own experiences and literary explorations, as it was because she was working as an editor that she drew the idea for *Beloved* (1987), from her love of music and work that she started *Jazz* (1992) and finally it is from her avid reading that *Desdemona* (2012) came to being. In this theatrical play – the second one she wrote after *Dreaming Emmett* (1986) – she takes Shakespeare's canonical work *Othello* (1604) and analyzes the voices in it, letting

othewise marginal characters express their own ideas and experiences, which will be further researched in this section.

Secondly, she takes inspiration from key moments in African American history. Through retelling the traumatic events that this community has had to endure, she exposes developments that would be otherwise ignored and forces the reader to face the terrible experiences these individuals had to endure. One such work is *A Mercy* (2012) where she focuses on the beginnings of the slave trade system on American soil and how it affected slaves. One of the main concerns of this work is how through the written word and the retelling of traumatic experiences by writing can the individual heal and the key role such writing can have on the persons' psychological development.

Therefore, through these works, Morrison is giving voice to otherwise societally disenfranchised individuals, breaking the violence that silence brings with it and expressing the individual's minds and ideas. In her experience as an author, language "[b]e it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction" ("The Nobel Lecture in Literature" 203).

3.1. "I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose": Voicing trauma after death in *Desdemona*

DUKE

Then let thy love be younger than thyself,

Or thy affection cannot hold the bent:

For women are as roses, whose fair flower,

Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour.

VIOLA

And so they are: alas, that they are so;

To die, even when they to perfection grow! (2.4. 35-40)

William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*

In myths, stories transform and evolve with each storyteller. Details change, main elements are transformed, love interests are ignored, and only glimpses of the original arrive to the modern day listener or reader who will further alter the story as well, as the echoes of the core narration resonate. One such myth is that of the nymph Echo, with a myriad of variants. In the most popular version of her myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.), she was a woods nymph who was a brilliant storyteller. Zeus, knowing this fact, would ask her to entertain his wife Hera while he would have his affairs with the rest of the nymphs. The queen of the gods was so captivated by the stories that she did not pay attention to her husband until one day she saw through the ruse and condemned the nymph to lose her talent and just repeat the words uttered by those around her.

Cursed by the gods, Echo fell in love with a young man by the name of Narcissus. Unable to express her feelings directly, she borrowed words from him to hopefully transmit her feelings, repeating the ending of each of his sentences. However, her words got misunderstood, which led the boy to focus on his image and fall in love with himself, which would drive him to his death, as was previously described in this dissertation. Inconsolable, Echo cried endlessly and according to the myth, only her voice remains, a voice that repeats constantly whatever someone else says in gorges or valleys.

Through the infatuation of Echo with Narcissus, both mind – through the voice – and body are connected. Moreover, both of these elements present in humanity are linked through the traumatic experience of not being able to communicate one's feelings and ideas to someone else. Through this isolation, Echo represents a victim of a trauma. Due to her punishment she is unable to verbalize her feelings to someone else, condemning her to being isolated in her madness – something that will also be analyzed when talking about the importance of the community in the next section of this dissertation. As Vickroy affirms "[t]rauma often involves a radical sense of disconnection and isolation as bonds are broken and relationships and personal safety are put into question" (23).

Revision, retelling, and reuse of stories, tropes, and characters of other canons or within other authors' literary traditions has been a common denominator throughout literary history. Mythology inaugurated the custom of recreating myths in other settings and with other characters that poets, novelists, painters, and playwrights have continued in their works. Various stories of the genesis of the world can be found in each culture, such as the ones reccounted in the Bible in chapters one and two of the Genesis as

theogonies can be found in authors such as Hesiod in his book *Theogony* or Plato in his work *Republic* with divergent narrations.

Later on, not only was Greek mythology drawn upon and transformed, but also the settings in which they took place were borrowed. This way Hellenistic landscapes like Arcadia was common amongst Italian poets and playwrights with examples such as Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1573) and then taken by the British poets like Alexander Pope's *Pastorals* (1709) in order to describe a locus amoenus with young satyrs and nymphs, a pagan Garden of Eden. In the same manner, the Romantic poets adopted folk tales and figures, with poems such as *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by John Keats. This tradition has continued and currently the incorporation of canonical works within the popular mythos is in vogue with works such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) by Jane Austen and Sethe Graham-Smith, intertwining Austen's work with modern day zombies, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999) by Allan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, a comic book that uses characters from classic gothic and science fiction novels and sets them as superheroes of sorts, or the different cinematographic and television renditions of Arthur Conan Doyle's character Sherlock Holmes, to name but a few.

One such revisionist is also one of the most recognized authors within the world literature canon: William Shakespeare. In his plays, he re-enacted myths and stories from other sources such as historical chronicles, myths from Roman authors or folk tales in order to create his masterpieces. However, even if Shakespeare drank from different sources and traditions in order to create his plays and poems, this does not diminish his

originality and skill, as his plays are perhaps the most widely performed, and have kept up-to-date with current Western[25] issues.

Nevertheless, as was previously stated, some of the renderings of these past fictions left behind elements of the original narrative or embellished others in order for their plot to evolve. In some of the myths, these components were characters that had too much importance on the previous myths and that could be omitted for protagonists or antagonists to take center stage. This can be seen in some of Shakespeare's revisions, where often female characters were used as vehicles in the master narrative, just echoes of the masculine characters' inner thoughts and passions, which they had to endure without being able to express their own. In the same fashion, women were not able to write their own literary creations until much later, which made Virginia Woolf wonder in her seminal work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) what would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister with the same amount of talent as her brother. As she says "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be a swamp and jungle" (41).

It should not be surprising, then, that after the Women's Rights movement and the rise of feminism and its several waves in the twentieth century, women playwrights and novelists have decided to tackle the lack of voice of female characters within the Western canon. To do so, they have retold previous stories, focusing on previously ignored or undeveloped female characters, such as the adaptations of the character of Desdemona that will be explored in this chapter. With their adaptations, they have added their own variations and developed underexposed and underrepresented characters of

[25] It would be dangerous in this instance, however, to affirm that Shakespeare plays have universal themes or tropes as Laura Bohannan proved in her essay "Shakespeare in the Bush" (1966) how this statement can be wrong when translating his plays onto a different culture.

previous traditions. This is the case of Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* (2011), in which she tackles Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604) and gives voice to the female main character after her death in the final scene of the original play, giving it continuation in the afterlife. This chapter will focus on this act of giving a voice to Desdemona, and the representation of her trauma. This translation, addition, and unveiling of characters and backstory of previous characters considered to be minor, and its impact will be examined. Moreover, this part will consider matters such as the question of Othello's skin color – one of the main elements in Shakespeare's play – and how Morrison and other playwrights have tackled it.

According to *The New York Times*, at the turn of the twenty first century, Morrison got into a heated discussion with director Peter Sellars about the importance of *Othello*. While the opera and theater director defended it was a "terrible play that made no sense and had outlived its usefulness" (Sciolino), Morrison argued that he was "dead wrong" (Sciolino). This conversation, Sciolino continues in her article, lead to a pact. Sellars would stage *Othello*, which he did in 2009, and Morrison "would find a way to talk back to Shakespeare" (Sciolino). While for the director, Shakespeare's work on the dangers of jealousy had no value to the current day audience, the Nobel winner saw between the lines another story, one of women that were trapped in a patriarchal racist society that did not fully accept the color of Othello, even if he was one of the most valuable soldiers in its army. Morrison's *Desdemona* is composed of vignettes in which the title character confronts different persons in the afterlife, from her confident Emilia, to her lover Othello, passing through her childhood maid Barbary. All these scenes are also populated with music, much like Shakespeare's plays were at their inception.

Othello's skin color is one of the main elements in Shakespeare's play, repeated throughout the text in several occasions. Even though this element was carried on from

the original story by Roman author Cinthio, Shakespeare changed the elements that surrounded the character. As G. K. Hunter explains, the introduction in the title of the main character's racial origin, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, probably predisposed the Elizabethan audience to "an expectation of pagan deviltry set against white Christian civilization – excessive civilization perhaps in Venice, but civilization at least 'like us'" (254). In fact, black characters often symbolized demons in morality plays, tempting the protagonist to lead astray, and playing opposite to the white angels.

> Certainly the drama of the Middle Ages seems to have used black figures to represent the evil of this world and the next. Creizenach describes the European diffusion of the black faces. The surviving accounts of the Coventry cycle[26] (which some think Shakespeare may have seen – and which he could have seen) retain the distinctions between 'white (or saved) souls' and 'black (or damned) souls.' (251)

Maintaining Othello's color true to the story was one of the unique features of the play[27]. The connotations of such color – its link to witchcraft and evil – are a narrative instrument particularly in the first act of the play, when Desdemona's father, Brabantio, finds out about their marriage, accusing Othello of putting a spell on his daughter

BRABANTIO. My daughter! O, my daughter!

ALL. Dead?

BRABANTIO. Ay, to me.

She is abused, stol'n from me and corrupted

[26] According to Hunter, the Coventry Cycle was a cycle of morality plays popular in England in the Middles Ages and that went on to Shakespeare's era.

[27] Other books on the matter of the use of race on Shakespeare's work for further reference include *Shakespeare and Race* (2000) edited by Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells or *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (2000) by Imtias Habib.

By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;

For nature so preposterously to err,

Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,

Sans witchcraft could not. (1.3.59-64)

While Cinthio's Othello was "a passionate and bloody lover" (249), Shakespeare doted the character of manners, eloquence, and a "Christian baptism" (249). Hunter continues that in changing these features from the original character, Shakespeare created "a daring theatrical novelty – a black hero for a white community – a novelty which remains too daring for many recent theatrical audiences" (249). This new feature that Shakespeare gave to his Othello opportunity to defend himself verbally from the attacks of his father-in-law and others, as even though he recognizes "I do confess the vices of my blood" (1.3.123), he also acknowledges that Desdemona's love is not because of any charm but rather

OTHELLO She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,

And I loved her that she did pity them.

This only is the witchcraft I have used. (1.3.166-167)

Only through his speech is Othello able to break the racial barriers and convey his personality. In fact, much of the criticism about the play has centered on the impossibility to perform it because of the color of the skin of both lovers, as Coleridge would brand the relationship between "this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro" as something "monstrous" (231), accentuating that Desdemona's act of love was possible because, as Charles Lamb would agree, "[s]he sees Othello's color in

his mind" (221). It is this quality that Desdemona has while the rest of the audience does not that would prompt Lamb to continue saying

> But upon the stage, when the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses, I appeal to everyone that has seen Othello played whether he did not, on the contrary, sink Othello's mind in his color; and whether he did not find something extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and Desdemona; and whether the actual sight of the thing did not over-weigh all that beautiful compromise which we make in reading. And the reason it should do so is obvious, because there is just so much reality presented to our senses as to give a perception of disagreement, with not enough belief in the internal motives – all that which is unseen – to overpower and reconcile the first and obvious prejudices. (221)

Through his speech, Othello conveys all the characteristics that until that point had been linked to "Christian" – in other words, white – characters. It is the translation of such set of characteristics onto a "savage" that is perceived as improper by critics before the twentieth century and why they encouraged audience members to read it instead of performing it on the stage[28]. The evolution of the play took it from "the dominant nineteenth-century tradition sought to domesticate the play by removing the embarrassment of savagery, the most common twentieth-century strategy has been to anthropologize it as the study of an assimilated savage who relapses into primitivism under stress" (Neill 312).

However, by focusing on color prejudice and the barriers that Othello had to overcome – within and outside of the play, – the other important component in this love affair has been overlooked: Desdemona. As Sarah Ruhl would affirm "[t]he tragic

[28] This case links to the bigger debate of whether plays are meant to be read or meant to be put on stage, debate that has been the center of schools of thought and playwrights such as Eugene O'Neil through the twentieth century. However, this chapter will not focus on this matter and will analyze the plays as both.

perspective privileges one person over the continuity of the system, whereas comedies (which often end in marriage) use linguistic structures that describe life in general persisting after the play is over" (Ruhl). Usually these plays, Ruhl continues, lionize the main character by putting his or her name as the title of the play to the detriment of the rest of the cast. Therefore, while most of the classic criticism has been focused around Othello and his counterpart, the villain Iago, Desdemona has been disregarded and only mentioned to polarize the racial discussion. However, Desdemona's election of Othello as her husband, rejecting what the people of Venice and her own father would say, her decision to follow Othello into the battleground in Cyprus and later voicing her opinions about Cassio, despite her husband's disapproval of the same, makes her unique. Yet these opinions are ignored in the greater plot of the play. As Peter Sellars would say on the "Foreword" of Morrison's play how

> Desdemona was Shakespeare's ideal creation – like Dante's Beatrice, a vision of perfection, a woman offering love and forgiveness in the face of hatred, mistrust, and murderous lies. In Shakespeare's late tragedies, the ideal woman – Desdemona, Virgilia, Cordelia – was mostly silent. (9)

As such, Desdemona's initial tendencies to rebel against the ideal role that has been given to her will later be punished by death. Therefore, both Desdemona and Othello are problematic both on stage for the audience and in the text of the play for the rest of the characters, as the performativity of their social construct features is not properly fulfilled. On the one hand, Othello is not the incarnation of all non-Christian evil but rather a powerfully ally to the Christian cause. On the other hand, Desdemona does not comply with traditional woman roles, but rebels against them, following her own ideas. Both gender and race are then both social constructs, much like Judith Butler would declare

> no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis. (xvii)

Therefore, Desdemona voicing her own ideas is not enough in the patriarchal society that Shakespeare portrays. While male characters such as Iago or Othello can defend their honor and virtue by use of their words and their remarks will be deemed as truthful, in the case of the women in the play, their voices are not enough. Through his words, Othello can prove he is not the "black devil" some put him to be, but rather a useful member of society in their fight against the non-Christians. Women, however, cannot defend their character in this manner, as this would be outside of the role society has given them, and have to materialize alternative proof of their virtue. It is here that the handkerchief is needed.

While it could be considered a menial token to the outside world and this item has been thoroughly analyzed as such, the handkerchief plays a key role within the setting of *Othello*. In Shakespeare's play, Iago mischievously places a handkerchief that Othello gave Desdemona as a token of his love in Cassio's room. In doing so, Iago will prove that Desdemona and Cassio are having a love affair to Othello. While Desdemona will repeatedly prove her love to the Moor on several occassions and even suffer gender violence at his hands when he strikes her in the first scene of the fourth act for voicing her opinion. In this impossibility of handing back the piece of cloth, Othello will find the excuse to suffocate Desdemona, to muffle her voice forever.

Through her play, Morrison is giving back what Othello effectively stripped away from Desdemona: her voice. In fact, as Sellars would enthusiastically exclaim in one

of his interviews about the play "'[f]inally, it is the women who are speaking … Desdemona is no longer perfect. She is allowed to be human"'(Sciolino). Morrison is trying, as was stated before, to "talk back to Shakespeare" (Sciolino) and turning the audience's attention towards the women in the play that were once ignored or deemed too unimportant to even make an appearance on stage. Desdemona, Emilia, and Othello – the only male voice in the play, who answers for the actions he committed on Shakespeare's *Othello* – will be joined by characters who are mentioned in the plays antecessor but not developed such as Desdemona's mother, Othello's mother, and Desdemona's mother's maid, Barbary.

In Shakespeare's play, Desdemona talks about Barbary when she is preparing her bed and waiting for Othello at the end of act four, what would later on be her death bed. She melancholically remembers how her mother's maid use to sing a song about her lost love

DESDEMONA. My mother had a maid call'd Barbary;
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad
And did forsake her. She had a song of "willow";
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song tonight
Will not go from my mind; I have much to do
But to go hang my head all at one side
And sing it like poor Barbary. (4.3.26-32)

Even if at first glance this memory of the old maid could seem innocuous, it is of the outmost importance for Morrison's later work. As Sellars reminds the reader in

the "Foreword" to the play, at Shakespeare's time the name "Barbary" designated Africa, most specifically the north coast of Africa. In fact "[i]n 1600, a delegation of ambassadors from the Barbary court, Africans of high degree, splendidly dressed, arrived in London to negotiate with Queen Elizabeth" (7). Hence, by including this name, Shakespeare was making direct reference to the land where Othello was born and including another non-white or, as Morrison refers to it, "Africanist persona"(*Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 6)[29]. Barbary, played in the original cast by Malian singer, and composer of the play's songs, Rokia Traoré, is the cornerstone upon which Morrison wrote her play.

Like Shakespeare's play on color throughout *Othello*, overturning the theatric formulas of his time on the subject, Morrison's work has been to break the oversimplified assumptions around the Africanist persona in literature. Through the creation of not only one but two African characters, Othello and Barbary, Shakespeare was inaugurating a tradition that would be later carried on by other writers through introducing the exotic element in order to portray something other or something that needed to be silenced. This is exemplified by the need for Othello to be silenced by Iago, or Desdemona just making a passing comment on her mother's maid. However, Morrison explains that

> I [Morrison] am interested in … the strategies for maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it. How did the founding writers of young America engage, imagine, employ, and create an Africanist presence and persona? In what ways do these strategies explicate a vital part of American literature? How does excavating these pathways lead to fresh and more profound analyses of what they contain and how they contain it? (51)

[29] Morrison uses the term Africanist to describe "the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served" (*Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 6)

While Morrison is giving voice back to Desdemona and the other forgotten female characters of Shakespeare's play, she gives particular emphasis to Barbary – although she appears only in the ninth scene of ten. Barbary's scene is the only literal link between the original and the adaptation, as Morrison repeats Shakespeare's "Willow Song" in her play. However, the interaction between the maid and the lady differs in the afterlife. Desdemona affirms that Barbary was "[her] best friend" (*Desdemona* 45) while the truth is that she does not "even know [her] name," as Desdemona called her by her place of origin, not by her given name which is in fact Sa'ran, and she "was [her] slave" (45). According to Sa'ran they could never be best friends because of the class divide.

This same trope of class difference and supposed friendship is explored more thoroughly by Morrison when analyzing other works in literature such as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Because of the racial and class divide between Huck and Jim, the slave that accompanies him, theirs cannot be a true friendship. While for Huck, freedom is not seen as something important, it is of the outmost importance for Jim, whose status as slave makes him inferior in front of the law, as opposed to the teenager.

> Thus the fatal ending becomes the elaborate deferment of a necessary and necessarily unfree Africanist character's escape, because freedom has no meaning to Huck or to the text without the specter of enslavement, the anodyne to individualism; the yardstick of absolute power over the life of another; the signed, marked, informing, and mutating presence of a black slave. (*Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 56)

This same relationship between master/slave is translated in *Desdemona*. While for Desdemona, Barbary was her best friend growing up, the audience learns that this relationship was conditioned by Sa'ran's enslavement. The links established between the white and the Africanist persona through the mentioning of Desdemona's maid in Shakespeare's play, according to Morrison's analysis, only offered a mental connection

between Africa and England for the first audience of *Othello*, without linking it to the lack of freedom the maid had to endure. It is the use of color as a metaphor to signify the Other, much like the characters in Othello interacted with the Moor. Disregarding the racial divide and not acknowledging it is a fallacy, as Morrison would say that "[t]here is still much national solace in continuing dreams of democratic egalitarianism available by hiding class conflict, rage, and impotence in figurations of race." (64). Only after death can both characters own up their roles in slavery and interact in equal ground, examining their relationship, shifting from Shakespeare's "Willow song," a song about lost love and melancholy, to a new one of hope and love incorporated in *Desdemona*, "Someone leans near," a poem Morrison previously published in her collection of poems entitled *Five Poems* (2002).

In the same way death acts as equalizer between master and slave, it also balances genders. Even if other adaptations of *Othello* such as Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About A Handkerchief* (1996) gave voice to the female characters in the play, Morrison's approach by situating her play in the afterlife answers other questions. Vogel's play places Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca at the same time and location as Shakespeare's play was taking place, in between the scenes in *Othello*, giving these characters radically diverse personality traits. Desdemona, the fair maiden, becomes a sexually adventurous and adulterous wife; Emilia, Iago's wife, transforms into an Irish matron loyal to her dismissive husband; and finally Bianca, Cassio's love interest, turns into the madam of a brothel in Cyprus who helps Desdemona to explore her sexuality.

Vogel's play is centered on the relationship between the three female characters from the original play, disregarding the other thematic elements. Throughout the thirty vignettes that comprise the play, the dialogues between the women prove them to be non-conforming to the reality they were dealt, creating bonds of sisterhood in their

despair. Bianca wants to give up her life running the brothel in order to find a husband while Emilia looks at her relationship with Iago just as a way to prosper in society – "I'd like to rise a bit in the world, and women can only do that through their mates – no matter what class buggers they all are. I say to him each night, 'I long for the day you make me a lieutenant's widow!'"(187). Desdemona's unsuccessful marriage and sexual need to betray her husband are rooted on her misconceptions about race.

> DESDEMONA: I remember the first time I saw my husband and I caught a glimpse of his skin, and, oh, how I thrilled. I thought – aha! – a man of a different color. From another world and planet. I thought, if I marry this strange dark man, I can leave this narrow little Venice with its whispering piazzas behind – I can escape and see other worlds.
>
> (Pause)
>
> But under that exotic façade was a porcelain white Venetian.
>
> EMILIA: There's nothing wrong with Venice; I don't understand why madam's all fired up to catch Cyprus Syph and exotic claps. (193–194)

Therefore, Desdemona repeats the same racial misgivings that the original audience of the play had according to Vogel's adaptation. While the exterior appearance of Othello made her long for the exotic and strange – a longing that could be related to Morrison's Barbary, – he proved to break all stereotypes, being more equal than Other to the citizens of Venice. However, the difference lies upon Vogel's characters, as with their discourse they challenge the views on what is sexually proper and the role of the woman in society. The dichotomies between Bianca/Desdemona and Emilia/Desdemona are set to question the sexual behavior of women and the role they play in society, like Gruber affirms, as "[a]n unfaithful heroine/victim requires a new calibration of empathy"(6). By keeping the male characters outside of the action, Vogel makes us confront the social

masks that these women had to wear outside of their chambers, social masks that prevent them to reach their true desires. And this can only be achieved through the dialogue among them in the privacy of their homes. In there, they can operate outside of the social constructs and express themselves – although these opinions will not prevent their tragic endings.

Much like the domestic space in Vogel's play, Morrison's depiction of Desdemona's afterlife breaks the formal barriers established in life and gives voice to the characters' inner desires and traumas. Both of these spaces, the afterlife for Morrison and the kitchen for Vogel, act as safe havens in which women express their insecurities and traumatic experiences with a community of equals, as it is in these spaces that they can break the social codification that the outside world imposes both on their gender and also on their class – in both scenarios the racial and social status are disregarded and the women can talk to one another on an equal level. It is because of this private space that the women feel free to narrate their experiences and express their feelings, as traumatic events can be disruptive for the general community due to their tendency to break the preconceptions that the non-victims have of the world around them. As Kali Tal reveals

> [b]earing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression. (7)

However, even if Morrison and Vogel share the interest in finding spaces in which women can be free, there are differences between their plays. The element of Desdemona's passive acceptance of her death distinguishes Vogel's play from those of Shakespeare and Morrison. While Shakespeare's last scenes of the fourth act end with Desdemona and Emilia setting their final resting place and pleas for mercy from Othello

occupy just a few verses of act five, and Morrison's play is located in the aftermath of such tragedy, Vogel denounces the situation and tries to plot a escape route to such a terrible ending. Yet, because of the intricate connection between the original and *A Play About a Handkerchief* and the parallels between the relationship of the Moor, Iago, Desdemona, and Emilia, the naïve maid makes her mistress stay saying "I'm sure your husband loves you" (222), sealing their fates. And it is in the afterlife created by Morrison that they will re-encounter once more to deal with the issues left unfinished in their lifes.

Morrison deals with the questions that Shakespeare – and Vogel – left unanswered, with the traumas that were not shared with the audience through the play by setting her play in the afterlife. Even though most of the works by Morrison have to do with ghosts or haunting of some kind, she had never established one of her works entirely within the frame of the dead. In fact, ghosts are used in her novels to verbalize a past trauma – be that individual or communal – that has not been overcome by the living. When the traumatic event includes either a near death experience or someone dying, the living only suffer the aftermath of such loss, not the full impact of the event that can only be expressed by the dead person himself or herself. As Christiansë points out

> Called upon to account, survivors cannot and do not have the intimate knowledge possessed by those who do not survive a cataclysm, which is to say any event in which survival is at stake. Yet it is through their speech that the lost voice is invariably sought or represented. (28)

In the case of Morrison's adaptation of the tragedy, the main characters could not be set amongst the living as they all died at the end of Shakespeare's play – except Iago, whose fate is uncertain and who would, according to Morrison herself, perpetuate the white gaze on to the Moor as "he [Iago] was eating up the characters" (Leve). In the

original, most of the soliloquies of the play are recited by him, not letting the rest of the characters establish a dialogue amongst themselves, therefore stopping them from finding out the truth. In order to take distance from the events in Cyprus, Morrison sets her scene in the afterlife, a place where, as it has been described before, social, gender, and racial barriers can be annulled so as to give characters equal footing on their claims and past traumas. The importance of interracial marriage, the perpetuation of the stereotype of the angry black man and of the pure and virginal white woman victim, can be left behind for the living to obsess over. In the afterlife, the characters can focus on the traumas that each individual had to endure due to these hurtful stereotypes.

According to Ruhl's theories on tragedy and its titles, in Morrison's play the action centers on Desdemona's inner thoughts and reflections after the incidents in Cyprus. Yet Morrison does not take hers as the only point of view in the play, but rather makes Desdemona establish a dialogue with the other characters that will react to her misconceptions and give a backstory to lines of thought not entirely developed by Shakespeare in the original play. While three of the ten scenes are focused just around the internal dialogue and back story of the young Venetian girl, other two deal with the relationship between Desdemona and other women – Emilia and Sa'ran, - one scene has both lovers' mothers – Desdemona's and Othello's – discuss their views on them while four scenes analyze the relationship between Desdemona and Othello, giving them an opportunity to deepen their relationship as

> [b]elatedly, the couple attempts to articulate now what needed to be said then. Yet obstacles remain in play, and too often the new conversation veers back to a repetition of the old conversation. The question becomes to what extent "should have" is successfully translated into "honest talk." (Erickson 6)

This "honest talk" could never take place amongst the living according to the patriarchal world that Shakespeare lived in and within which Shakespeare's play takes place. Due to the racial and gender constraints set by the community in the original play, both Desdemona and Othello expressed themselves, but their voices were not heard by the other. Desdemona listened to Othello's stories of far away lands and cultures, tempted by the exotism but not seeing the man behind the stories. In fact, Othello will claim as much, adding that "you thought that was all there was to me – a useful myth, a fairy's tale cut to suit a princess' hunger for real life, not the dull existence of her home" (Morrison, *Desdemona* 51). However, because of the egalitarian nature of death, Desdemona can answer to those claims by expressing her grief when "you [Othello] believed a lie. You broke my hymen and thought I was unfaithful the next day? Me?" (51). Both lovers can finally be honest around their feelings and achieve mutual communication.

The purity of Desdemona's love is a leitmotif in the original play for which the handkerchief is a metaphor. While the handkerchief itself – one of the elements Shakespeare kept from Cinthio's story – has been deemed a useless or repetitive element, the connotations this item has and its link to both Desdemona's faithfulness and virtue are key to fully understand its significance in the play. After the marriage was celebrated, and both spouses had consummated such marriage, tradition ordered for the wife to display the wedding sheets, stained by the blood of the broken hymen as Morrison points out – a scene that Vogel also captures at the beginning of her play though due to the nature of her character, Vogel's Desdemona stains the sheets with the blood of a hen. And if such proof could not be provided, as Boose points out, "Deuteronomy 22 dictates the execution of the bride unable to produce the necessary 'ocular proof' of her marital fidelity, the blood-stain 'tokens' on her wedding sheets" (273). Hence, by

transforming the sheets into a smaller but recognizable piece of cloth, a white handkerchief with red strawberries embroided, the handkerchief was a symbol of such virtue and purity, Othello's insistence was really a need for reassurance of his wife's loyalty and Desdemona's plea on her not having lost it is an honest one, as she has not lost her virtue – and to a certain extent, she has not lost Othello's gift either, as it was stolen from her.

Othello's foreign nature is as well contested by Morrison's text. He is not any more the "loyal black warrior" (*Desdemona* 51) that enamored his soon to be wife with stories of far away lands and people but a real soldier who has seen the terrible consequences of war and battle and suffered them in his own flesh and psyche. Much like the main character in *Home* (2012) Frank Money, a veteran from the Korean War who narrates how he killed an innocent girl after her sexual advances, Othello changes his colorful stories in the seventh scene to narrate how after a battle both him and Iago entered a stable in which they encountered two old women and they decided to rape them. While they were committing this crime, a boy interrupted them but instead of stopping, they continued their actions while the boy observed. While this scene could not be shared between the lovers when they were alive, Othello can finally be honest after death.

OTHELLO You don't understand. Shame, yes, but
worse. There was pleasure too. The look
between us was not to acknowledge shame,
but mutual pleasure. Pleasure in the
degradation we had caused; more pleasure
in leaving a witness to it. We were not
only refusing to kill our own memory, but
insisting on its life in another. (38)

Much like the case of Frank Money, the shameful realization comes when instead of loathing the acts they have committed, they are sexually aroused by them. Morrison affirmed in an interview that she " 'wanted to show that rape is not about sex or seductive at all …Those women were not winking at him, and their dresses were not too short'" (Sciolino). In doing this, Morrison was trying to ellucidate the rape culture that blames – be that completely or partly – the victim. None of the blame can be put on the older women while Othello finally realizes what he has done by finally verbalizing and sharing his true story with Desdemona as she remarks "[t]he unspeakable is no longer. Now you have / pried loose the screws twisting your tongue. / The telling is itself courage" (38). However, Othello through his telling is not looking for compassion but rather forgiveness

OTHELLO … Yet there is another
question, a vital one. Can you forgive me?

DESDEMONA No, I cannot. But I can love you and remain
committed to you.

OTHELLO In spite of what I have described?

DESDEMONA In addition to what you have described.
… Honest love does
not cringe at the first roll of thunder; nor
does it flinch when faced with the lightning
flash of human sin.(39)

Desdemona's refusal to forgive him breaks the traumatic cycle that was established by Othello by raping the old women and that was continued afterwards by

murdering her. It is not she who must forgive him for the actions he committed during war times but rather it falls on him to forgive himself, and work through his traumas in order not to perpetuate such behavior. By establishing this dialogue and confessing their traumas, the lovers can finally be on an equal ground and create a community in which to share their experiences.

Through Desdemona's dialogue with Othello in Morrison's play, she rebels against the role assigned to her. She is not the passive subject of a tragedy or the vessel in which to pour Othello's sins but rather the agent of her own fate. When Othello asks her why she did not fight death she responds "[y]ou were not killing me. You were killing / Othello. The man I believed you to be was / lost to me" (50). Hence, through her actions she was killing the social façade that Othello had, the construction that both society and she had imposed over him in order to discover the real him after death. Even though her death could be understood as a passive one, as she did not fight for her life, for Desdemona it was a way to rebel against the community's views on both her and her husband. For her, it was not useful anymore to live in a pantomime created by society where their roles were not only imposed but so deeply internalized that they, themselves where agents of such imposition onto each other, with Othello believing she was just a pure, virginal, ideal woman and Desdemona perpetuating the image of the Moor as the mysterious and exotic foreigner who would take her away.

By setting the characters outside the realm of the living, Morrison is able to break the constant echo that the female roles were doomed to reutter. Desdemona and Othello are not condemned to repeat over and over, like Echo, the words and roles given to them by society, but they are free to express their views and traumas in a setting free of these constraints, liberated and able to create a community of equals in which their voice will be heard. As a result, Desdemona is not a passive voice that repeats the

words of her lover but rather a woman, with virtues and flaws, who can establish a dialogue with the different elements in her environment, while Othello can escape the white gaze that was upon him and be a real man, not a stereotype of an old and racist view. Through their conversation, they can finally break Echo's curse and create a new relationship through the knowledge of one another, as Desdemona concludes

OTHELLO And now? Together? Alone? Is it too late?

DESDEMONA 'Late' has no meaning here. Here there is

Only the possibility of wisdom. (55)

3.2. "My telling can't hurt you": Writing through trauma and finding one's self during slavery in *A Mercy*

> Nothing has been left undone to cripple their intellects,
> darken their minds, debase their moral nature,
> obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind;
> and yet how wonderfully they have sustained
> the mighty load of a most frightful bondage,
> under which they have been groaning for centuries! (6)
> Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

The disadvantages and prejudices against other races that the Western society has cultivated for centuries were not only based on the color of the skin. In addition to this, philosophers during the Renaissance and Enlightenment wondered if these individuals from far away lands were capable of reasoning, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr. In his description of the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he remarks how following Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* maxim – "I think, therefore I am" – other races were deemed inferior, even subhuman, due to their lack of display of such reasoning through writing, artistic expression, science, or battling skills (Henry Louis

Gates, Jr. 25). Such line of thought was followed by other prominent philosophers of the time such as Kant or Hume, among others[30].

Therefore, writing and artistic expression have traditionally been valued as proof of reasoning. However, when an individual of another race portrayed such gifts, he or she was looked upon as an exception that needed to be carefully studied, not as a rule. This is the case of one of the first documented African writers in the United States, a woman by the name of Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784). When in 1772 she tried to publish her collection of poems, which had been submitted by her mistress to a local newspaper, the Boston *Censor*, most people did not believe that an African slave in her teens could have produced such poems. In fact "not enough Bostonians could believe that an African slave possessed the requisite degree of *reason* and *wit* to write a poem by herself" (Gates, Jr. 22, italics mine). Hence, a committee of eighteen men in diverse fields of knowledge were gathered to assess the question "was a Negro capable of producing literature?" (5). Even though the details of such trials, as Gates Jr. affirms, are lost – as there is no transcripts of what happened on them - when the trial of this teenage girl finished, all the members of the tribunal assured that the poems were indeed written by her. In fact, Wheatley was recognized as an author and as Gates continues

> Voltaire was moved, in 1774, to write to a correspondent that Wheatley had proven that blacks could write poetry. John Paul Jones, on the eve of sailing to France in June 1777, on the newly commissioned warship, the *Ranger*, sent a note to a fellow officer, asking him to deliver a copy of some of his own enclosed writings to "the celebrated Phillis the African favorite of the Nine [Muses] and Apollo." (33)

[30] It must be said at this point, however, that these judgments on the nature of reasoning or the lack of it on other races must not be read as a way to muddle the name of these philosophers or others that might be mentioned in this chapter but rather to shed a light on this particular issue in which they were following the moral ideas of their time.

Even though for some the production of original works of literature could be regarded as a potential way to judge whether a person or group can qualify as "human," for people in power the written word can also be considered as dangerous. The ability to write one's thoughts in a creative manner, be that as a novel, a poem, an essay, a play or any other form of literature to be read by the public can be risky in a society ruled by a particular race, party, or class. Actually the censorship or complete erasure of literature has been a common denominator for oppression for example, as portrayed in science fiction novels such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). As Toni Morrison writes in her essay "Peril", the introduction to the book *Burn This Book*, "[u]npersecuted, unjailed, unharassed writers are trouble for the ignorant bully, the sly racist, and the predators feeding off the world's resources" (2). Thus, publicly acknowledging that a member of a minority group that was at that point considered "non-human" could perform what was until then deemed impossible was not only an individual feat for Wheatley, but rather a communal one, one which would give testimony that the African race was part of the human race and that the system of slavery was an abominable one. As a result of her trial, Wheatley was given her freedom and became a published writer with the volume *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), printed in London. Even though she died at a young age and in poverty, she is recognized as one of the first African American poets.

With her poems, Wheatley not only praised fallen personalities of her time but also expressed her opinion on moral and ethical matters. Through poems such as "On Imagination," "On Virtue," or "To the University of Cambridge, in New England," she was able to share her thoughts on diverse matters, opinions that otherwise could not have reached the public. By making her inner thoughts public on these *various subjects*, as the title of her book points out, not only was she attesting her authority but also she was

creating her own self by the reading of her texts by others. Because of them, she was no longer just recognized as "another slave," someone that could be otherwise overlooked by that time's society, but rather she was a published writer, a reasonable being, an equal to the community of Boston who looked at her, nevertheless, as an exotic creature.

Through the production of her own poetry, Wheatley was able in the eighteenth century to break free of the bonds that were set upon her through slavery and racism. However, the question resides on how much of her identity was created through her writing, as an original and creative author, and how much of it originated once her book was published and read, changing her status from a bonded woman to a free one. How much did the institution of slavery oppress the African American community even after this teenage girl proved her intelligence? How much of the Cartesian proposition, *cogito ergo sum*, resides on the self and how much of it resides on the other? That is, is the active production of the self that creates existence or is it the appreciation of said production that creates it? And also, how does the mastery of one's language set the individual free, not only physically but also mentally? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will focus on Morrison's 2008 novel *A Mercy*, particularly on the character of Florens and how through her writing and the writing of others she is bound to slavery or free from it.

When the slave narrative flourished in the in the eighteenth century former slaves had an outlet with which to denounce their past scarcities[31]. Through their memoirs they conveyed the physical and mental punishments and circumstances they had to endure under the slavery system: the inhuman conditions of their dwellings, being treated as animals, forced to work even when sick, or other hardships they had to endure.

[31] Some books on the matter of slave narrative for further reference include *The Cambridge Companion to African American Slave Narrative* (2007) or *Classic African American Women's Narratives* (2003). Moreover, some authors of slave narratives include Harriet Jacobs, Kate Drumgoold, Lucy A. Delaney, Mary Prince, Soujourner Truth, Olaudah Equiano, or Soujourner Truth, amont others.

As Mary Prince, an eighteenth century slave, reccounts in her narrative "[w]hen we were ill, let our complaint be what it might, the only medicine given to us was a great bowl of hot salt water, with salt mixed with it, which made us very sick" (268). Re-telling and denouncing a current situation served as a way of thereapeutically negotiate a traumatic past in order to re-intepret it.

> [R]emembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present. The process is not a passive one of mere retrieval from a memory back. Rather, the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering. (Smith and Watson 16)

However, the slave narrative was not only the memoir of a survivor of a traumatic past but also had other political and social endevours. Through their narratives not only where the slaves and former slaves denouncing the problematic nature of holding humans in bonding but also sheding light on the very nature of their humanity. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. points out "[h]ave there ever been more curious origins of a literary tradition, especially when we recall that the slave narrative arose as a response to, and refutation of, claims that blacks could not write?" (3). It is through their narrative that these slaves could not only describe and narrate their past but also convey the idea that they were able to express themselves through pen and paper. Much in reverse of what the British satyrical writer Jonathan Swift articulated in his celebrated novel *Gullivers Travels* (1726) through the creation of the Houyhnhnms – horses with the ability to use reason better than humans, - the African and African American slaves were listed amongst the rest of the cattle and bereft of their reason[32].

[32] Let it be noted for the sake of this argument that when Gulliver finally returns to Britain after his many voyages, he will favor the company of his horses, locking himself in the stables and rejecting engaging with humans, considering them Yahoos – humans without the ability to reason that inhabited the land of the Houyhnhnms.

Listed with the rest of the cattle in auctions, African and African American slaves had to fight in order to be acknowledged as part of the human race. Being counted as another of the beasts to be dominated, according to the Genesis book of the Christian faith, was collected also in the laws of the states, as William and Ellen Craft illustrated in their autobiography

> In South Carolina it is expressed in the following language: - "Slaves shall be deemed, sold, taken, reputed and judged in law to be chattels personal in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators, and assigns, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever. – 2 Brevard's Digest, 229. (7)

Amongst the myriad of elements that the slave narratives denounced, two major tropes must be underlined. The first trope is not only emphasizing their capacity to reason but also their inclusion within the human race. The Cartesian proposition that was mentioned earlier, and that acknowledged the humanity of an individual had two dimensions, the inherent ability to reason and the possession of a soul. The second trope would be to state the transmission of such reasoning through their writing. Both of these elements were not attainable for the African and African American individuals, banned from ever accessing any religious congregation or faith and education. Both dimensions answer to the Greek and later on Christian division of the human self between body and soul, understanding the soul as the part that is connected to the spiritual while the body is connected to earthly matters and physical challenges. Due to the misconception that placed slaves within the same category as "non-rational animals," they were not considered to have a soul and therefore they were only corporeal entities.

The ratification of the spiritual dimension of their self was a capital matter for African and African American women in their narratives. Viewed by slaveholders as just an asset capable of producing wealth in form of babies that they could sell or have them

work in the fields, a permanent factory of slaves, they were constantly linked to the physicallity of their bodies. In order to separate themselves from such beliefs, slave narratives such as the ones written by Soujourner Truth, Jarena Lee, or Kate Drumgoold, paid particular attention to the moment in which they discovered the Christian faith, or when God presented himself to them. Kate Drumgoold relates this as when "[t]he dear pastor came to me the first one, for he did not stop to think whether I was an African or what nation I had come from, but he saw in me a *soul*, and he wanted to find out if there was any room for Jesus to live or what I should do with Jesus, or what should I do for Him, who had done so much for me" (118, italics mine). Not only was the recognition of a soul within them important, but rather it was necessary that outside authority, such as the pastor in Drumgoold's extract, saw in them a glimpse of their humanity in an effort to convert society towards the abolitionist cause.

The fight for the admission of black members into a Christian congregation is also a capital part on Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. Set in Maryland in the second half of the 17th century, during the early stages of slavery within the United States, the novel describes the lives of the inhabitants of the Vaark plantation: Jacob, the patriarch, Rebekka, his wife, and their three female slaves, Lina, Sorrow, and Florens. The novel describes the evolution of the plantation from its humble beginnings in a small cabin to its downfall, when Jacob tried to enlarge his property through building a mansion, which he will never inhabit, since he will die before he can do so, and in which Florens will write their history.

The contact between the inhabitants of the Vaark household and the various religious faiths that surround them – more specifically the Anabaptists and the Presbyterians – is a complicated one, especially in the case of Lina and Rebekka. Lina, a Native American whose village was decimated by illness, was educated by the

Presbyterians who taught her their faith even though she was a heathen, and they accepted her taking part on their daily prayers – "although they would not permit her to accompany them to either of the Sunday services they attended" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 46). They named her Messalina, shortening it to Lina "to signal a sliver of hope" (45). However, while they educated her to leave her traditions and customs behind, she was never able to fully be a part of their community – as she maintained her former customs and beliefs – and they left her behind with Jacob Vaark, even before his wife Rebekka had arrived from the Old World to join him in his venture in America.

Rebekka's dealings with the Anabaptists differ greatly from those of Lina. Rebekka, a lower-middle class woman from England, was sold to Jacob Vaark as a wife by her father and shipped to him in a boat, going through what could resemble to some extent the slaves Middle Passage from Africa to the American shores or that of the system of indentured servitude[33]. Lacking a community when she arrives to the Vaark plantation, she tries to establish links with the Anabaptist congregation nearby. However, these ties will be severed once they reject to baptise her soon-to-be dead baby, thus denying him entrance to Heaven according to the Anabaptist faith. Therefore, she will renounce their faith and bond with Lina through domestic chores, learning from her the different aspects of running a household. However, when her husband dies and she is sick, Rebekka decides to convert to the Anabaptist faith once more, turning her back on her slaves in order to save her soul, and by proxy, save the souls of her dead children.

> Natives and Africans, for instance, had access to grace but not to heaven – a heaven they knew as intimately as they knew their own gardens. Afterlife was more than Divine; it was thrill-soaked… Frolicking. Dreams come true. And perhaps if one was truly committed,

[33] Indentured servitude was a system between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries by which generally poor young men and women from Britain or Germany would sell their services in order to secure a passage for North America. By entering such deal, these young men and women would work for a certain amount of time in return for the price of their ticket on these voyages.

> consistently devout, God would take pity and allow her children, though too young for a baptism of full immersion, entrance to His sphere. (96–97)

The religious doctrines promoted by the slaveholders would later change from separation and rejection of the black population onto acceptance. The admission of the African and African American individual into the Christian faith could be seen as a tool to control the slave population. After the escape of several slaves searching for freedom to the North of the United States, Canada, and even the United Kingdom and revolts such as the one lead by Nat Turner in 1831, slave masters regarded religion as a way to control the slaves. This way, they thought the idea of eternal salvation and Paradise would lighten the burden set by suffering under the slave system. As W. E. B. Dubois refers to it "losing the joy of this world, [slaves] eagerly seized upon the offered conceptions of the next; the avenging Spirit of the Lord enjoining patience in this world, under sorrow and tribulation until the Great Day when He should lead His dark children home" (125). Hence, the recognition of the spiritual dimension amongst Africans and African Americans by white slaveholders was only granted as a way to control an increasingly frustrated population, who was looking for ways to escape their bondage. Even if they could not escape slavery in this lifetime, they would be free in the next.

The road to freedom for slaves and the escape from their previous captors was a most dangerous path. Not only did the former slaves have to endure the dangers of walking through the night – although thanks to the Underground railroad[34], which was a system of safe houses and collaborators that helped these escapees, they were able to avoid some dangers – and the possibility of being seized by head-hunters in order to be re-sold in auctions. They also had to worry about their freedom once they had reached

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[34] Some books on the Underground Railroad for further reference include *Underground Railroad: An Encyclopedia of People, Places and Operations* (2008) or *The Underground Railroad: Authentic Narratives and First-Hand Accounts* (2007)

their destination. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a law by which slave holders could send bounty hunters to the North in order to reclaim their human property, and the lack of protection by the government made the African and African American former slaves easy prey to bounty hunters and traffickers of slaves who would capture them and take them back to the South. This constant threat is described by William and Ellen Craft in their memoir, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860). In this account, both protagonists not only feared being trapped during their escape to the North, but also had to move once they were settled due to head hunters catching up with them years after they had escaped. Being brought back to the plantation terrified the ex-slaves, as was portrayed by? the Margaret Garner case in 1856 – a woman who preferred killing her children to having them taken into bondage again, a case that inspired Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Likewise, in Harriet Jacobs autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) when she talks about her children being born free and how "I [Jacobs] thought to myself that, God being my helper, [her children] should never pass into his hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power" (529).

For former slaves, liberated men and women, and slaves who were alone for some commission only a piece of paper protected them. Free men and women and travelling slaves had usually a letter of safe passage that both identified them legally and protected them from possible attacks. As William and Ellen Craft say

> There are a large number of free negroes residing in the southern States; but in Georgia (and I believe in all the slave States,) every coloured person's complexion is prima facie evidence of his being a slave; and the lowest villain in the country, should he be a white man, has the legal power to arrest, and question, in the most inquisitorial and insulting manner, any coloured person, male or female, that he may find at large, particularly at night and on Sundays, without a written pass, signed by the master or some one in

> authority; or stamped free papers, certifying that the person in the rightful owner of himself. (20)

Such document was forged by Ellen Craft when she disguised herself as a white man in order to escape bondage with her husband, who was portrayed as her slave in said document of safe passage. Another example of the power of such letter is given by Morrison in *A Mercy,* when Florens has to abandon the plantation in order to look for a man who could possibly cure her mistress, Rebekka. Her mistress, writes such a pass that will be used when encountering the anabaptists. However, this document of free pass or even stamped free papers lacked any real protection as Solomon Northup illustrated in his autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave* (1855). Being born free in New York, he was captured and taken to Lousiana where he had to work as a slave. Even though he had such a document, his captors destroyed such proof of his liberty for their own purposes. Therefore, for slaves and former slaves their identity and safety was given by a fragile piece of paper written by their owner. The individual had no power over their own legal identity nor safety that said document would protect them permanently, due to the color of their skin and the presupposition that all black men and women were slaves.

At this point, another dimension of the human condition repeated through slave narratives and contained in Morrison's *A Mercy* must be taken into account: the ability to portray one's thoughts on paper. Writing and reading documents was something far from the reach of most slaves, as teaching them to do so was against the law. Ellen Craft's ability to forge a document of safe passage is an exception to the rule, as she accounts in her narrative the case of a white woman who dared teach slaves.

> Margaret Douglass … [y]ou are guilty of one of the *vilest* crimes that ever disgraced society; and the jury have found you so. You have taught a slave girl to read in the Bible. No enlightened society can exist where such offences go unpunished. The Court, in your case,

> do not feel for you one solitary ray of sympathy, and they will inflict on you the utmost penalty of the law. In any other civilized country you would have paid the forfeit of your crime with your *life*, and the Court have only to regret that such is not the law in this country. The sentence for your offence is, that you be imprisoned one month in the county jail, and that you pay the costs of this prosecution. (18–19, italics mine)

Achieving an education while in the slave system was not only a feat, but as it has been shown, a danger even for sympathizers of the abolitionist cause. Despite cases of former slaves who were instructed in the basics of reading and writing, such as Phillis Wheatley, Ellen Craft or Frederick Douglass, these were but exceptions to the rule as Southern states had strict laws on exposing slaves to any sort of education. Not only that but slaves were not able to teach one another, as Harriet Jacobs mentions in her narrative since slaves "were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read" (Jacobs 522). This prevented them from proving their humanity through the exploration of their thoughts in their own writing, exposing the evils of the slavery system and converting others to their cause, as Nellie McKay explains: "[slaves] believed that in mastering the literacy and the language of their enslavers they could prove to their oppressors and to sympathetic white readers that people with black skins were as intelligent as other groups" (96). This impression was proven right when the advent and further development of the slave narrative during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries heightened the outrage that a large part of the white community had around the topic of slavery, re-inforcing – if not completely (re)creating – the abolitionist cause.

However, writing their personal stories themselves was not the only way the former slaves could convey their story to paper. In fact, as achieving alphabetization was not easy, relying on others who could write was a necesity. A large portion of slave narratives, then, were dictated by the slave and written down by amanuensis who would copy and embelish the narration. While this was a common practice, and it helped the

abolitionist cause to move forward, it raises several concerns. Even though most of these narratives had several notifications which testified to the veracity of the stories, given by the former slave as well as influential (white) members of the community who warranted the genuineness of what was written, these narratives tried to hide passages too hard to put into words and to some extent cannot be deemed as completely reliable narrations. With sentences such as "I would not describe them if I could; they were too low, too revolting" (Jacobs 526) or "[b]ut these are things too heart-sickening to dwell upon. God alone knows how many hundreds of plantations, all over the South, might furnish a similar record" (Forten 387) former slaves tried to avoid passages too hard to describe or even too terrible for the white population to accept as true due to the cruelty of the punishments and hardships.

The necessity of putting the narrative of their life as slaves to paper served several purposes. On the one hand, as it has been mentioned, it promoted the abolitionist cause and ushered an anti-slavery sentiment. On the other hand, through the re-telling of their story former slaves were not only able to access these painful memories but also to ellaborate on their past condition in order to move forward both for themselves and their community. In fact, like Marilyn R. Chandler points out

> [i]f we consider the patterns of narration, vocabulary and imagery in autobiography as aspects of its healing function, a number of close and suggestive analogies between psychotherapy and writing become apparent. The process of writing an autobiography is, after all, very like what takes place in a therapist's office – a telling of personal history. (8)

Even though the former slaves had escaped the chains of their bondage, they did not mentally feel free nor did they feel like true citizens, as Frederick Douglass would account "I was not only a slave, but a slave for life. I might become a husband, a father, an aged man, but through all, from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave, I had felt

myself doomed" (230). While they were leagally free, the chains that bonded them to slavery were still in place psychologically. The re-telling of their own suffering was as a way to denounce captivity, as well as a way to heal and claim their own identity and also to work through their own traumas.

> The writing of the narratives fulfilled certain private needs for the ex-slave also. By reenacting his life story, he could reaffirm the significance of his struggle to free himself. Then, too, in the very process of narrating his particular experience, the sophisticated ex-slave developed an analysis of the larger system out of which his individual experience evolved. (Smith 10)

The power of the written word as a healing tool has been further explored by therapists and trauma survivors alike throughout the years. As Chandler affirms, the healing power of words was already explored in ancient Greece where they believed that storytelling rituals drew energy from the gods (5). In the same way more recent trauma survivors throughout the twentieth century have relied on chronicling their experiences, be it bondage, survivors of war or genocides like *If This Is a Man* (1947) by Primo Levi, illness like *Borrowed Time* (1998) by Paul Monette or *The Cancer Journals* (1980) by Audre Lorde, or victims of rape like *After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back* (1999) by Nancy Venable Raine. Re-telling the event not only serves to expose and denounce a situation but it also serves as a tool to elaborate and analyse the events of the individual who is telling them. First, the individual expressing his or her thoughts on the written page can experience psychological improvement. Second, through the personal telling of the author's story, he or she is also calling attention – even if partially – to the story of the community of survivors of that same trauma. And finally, by reading the book the individual narrator exposes a community of readers to the facts that occurred in the author's past. As Toni Morrison stated "[c]ertain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or

the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination" (4).

Language and her responsibility as a writer have been two leifmotifs in Toni Morrison's career. Through several essays and even in her Nobel acceptance lecture, she has made language – or the lack of language, silence – not a menial device by which to earn a living, but rather she accepted the responsibility that comes to the writer by using the written word. She acknowledges the role that words have for the world, not only for the sake of writing, but for denouncing and sheding light over historical and current events too uncomfortable to discuss otherwise. Writing can both be a healing tool for the writer, as it has been discussed, and also as a weapon, making the writer a dangerous individual for regimes which want to keep the masses uninformed of events in their territory. The power of this written word "lies on its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of speakers, readers, writers" ("The Nobel Lecture in Literature" 203). However, Morrison's writing requires active participation on behalf of the reader as she desires "[her] fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of data" ("Memory, Creation, and Writing" 387). Morrison is not only writing for her personal gain or as a way to expose her thoughts and put them onto the page, but she needs of the reader to actively comprehend and assimilate her works in order to fully realise her labor as a writer and for her use of language to be effective.

Much of Morrison's own thoughts on writing and the relationship between writer and reader are protrayed in the character of Florens in *A Mercy*. Florens learnt how to read and write thanks to the tutelage of a catholic priest. Because of this ability, she is able to explore her thoughts through writing and see the relationship between the written

word and the readers, how the way she is portrayed in the document of safe passage written by her mistress, Rebekka, can influence the unsuspecting colonizers of the New World when confronting the black individual. Therefore, Florens is both object and agent of the written word. She is an object when she is defined by others – as Rebekka's property – and she is subject of the written word when she identifies herself as a separate entity – when she writes about her own experiences.

Florens becomes an object the moment that she is needed to help her mistress. When Rebekka Vaark becomes ill, Florens is the only one who can aid her and she leaves the plantation to look for the smith / healer who can cure her. This smith is also Florens' lover as they became acquainted when he was working in the pharaonic construction of the Vaark's mansion. Florens departs the plantation on this chore with the only protection of her shoes and a letter for safe passage, much like the one the Crafts had to forge to avoid further inquiry from the individuals they encountered along the way. This letter, sealed with wax as to supplement the authencity of the document, is placed in one of her boots for safe keeping and it depicts her as "the female person … owned by [Rebekka]" (*A Mercy* 110). This document illustrates physical traits that describe Florens as property of the Vaarks but nevertheless acknowledges her as part of the human race, a feature that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century in America could not be taken for granted. Furthermore, Rebekka pleas to whoever reads the letter to "[a]llow her the courtesie of safe passage and witherall she may need to complete her errand. Our life, my life, … depends on her speedy return" (110), indicating how desperate the situation is and how much trust she places in the girl's hands, confiding in the sympathy of strangers to aid young Florens in her task.

This necessary document for legal purposes at the time becomes the target of deeper analysis when Florens comes accross a village. On her way to find the smith,

Florens encounters a community of anabaptists and a widow, Widow Ealing, who allows her to spend the night with her, her daughter Jane and her daughter's sick baby. While trying to sleep, Florens learns that the women are undergoing an investigation as the villagers suspect that Jane might be a demon, since it is rumored that she had an encounter with the Black Man – one of the name religious congregations in the New World gave to Satan – in the woods. Even though Jane is worried about her own safety, her mother assures her that the community is only after "the pasture" they own and that the wounds they are inflicting on her will prove she is not a demon, as demons do not bleed (107).

However, when the morning comes and the four prominent members of the community arrive to the house, they are no longer interested in Jane but in Florens. The four citizens are taken aback when faced with Florens, as she is probably their first encounter with an African individual. Due to the superstition associated with the skin color of the devil, the pious parishioners are afraid of her, not daring to even touch the note that proves that she is "nobody's minion but [her] Mistress" (109). After examining her naked self, they decide that "We will study on it, consult and pray and return with our anser. It is not clear it seems whether or no I am the Black Man's minion… The man says not to leave the house. He takes the letter with him" (111). However, Florens escapes the house and the village with the aid of Jane without waiting for the results of their inquiry.

Through the thorough physical examination that the anabaptists carry on Florens, they are not able to conclude if she is in fact a person or not and they need further analysis in order to fully recognize her as part of the human race. While the initial trauma is caused by means of the language describing her in the document of safe passage, the traumatic event is deepened by the fact that they do not even dare to touch

her to complete the observation, helping themselves with a cane. Florens is not even a Lacanian Other to the members of the community, someone in which they recognize humanity, but rather what W. E. B. Dubois described as *tertium quid*, something that they cannot conclude is human.

An instance of equivalent nature happens in *A Mercy* when Florens encounters a tribe of Native American men on the road. In this instance, Florens is the subject while the Other in this case is the group of Native Americans in a scene in which the animal gets mixed with the human as "[t]hey wear soft shoes but their horses are not shod and the hair of both boys and horses is long and free like Lina's"(100). Terrified by the sight, she is not able to move when the Native Americans offer her water and food and though she recognizes that "I want it am dying for it but I cannot move. What I am able to do is make my mouth wide" (101). This event illustrates the multifacial nature of the Other, how even though Florens is the object in the interaction with the anabaptist, she is nevertheless the subject with the Native Americans, as the notion of Otherness is multifaceted and multidirectional.

Another element must be underlined, however, when talking about the objectification of Florens – and consequently, the objectification of slaves. Even though Rebekka's document describing Florens as her property could be understood as an "innocuous" one at that time and just a legal requirement, not being in complete control of her own description makes Florens a target for the interpretation of the other. As Butler describes in *Excitable Speech* (1997), as humans we are "linguistic beings" and as such prompt to be injured by insidious speech (1). However, Butler continues, two different speech acts can be understood to exist when talking about language: illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. The first describes the speech acts that "in saying do what they say, and do it in the moment of that saying" (3) while the second

"produce certain effects as their consequence; by saying something, a certain effect follows" (3). Due to its immediacy, then, hate speech or any other act of linguistic violence would fall onto the first category, as illocutionary acts, according to Butler. These acts rely on "injuring in and through the moment of speech, and constituting the subject through that injury" (24).

In order to cause an injury onto the object of the act, this type of linguistic exchange needs of both interlocutors to call linguistically into existence the object of their attack.

> One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survival objects. (5)

It could be argued, then, that being at no point responsible for the linguistic exchange, produced by either an oral conversation or by a document, and having to wait to be recognized by the Other, the object of said exchange suffers the linguistic violence of the interlocutors and she or he is victim of said linguistic injury. Not being the owner of his or her own description and having to let others describe him or her also caused the African and African American slaves to be victims of direct or, in the case of Florens, indirect hate speech acts. One such hate speech act can be found in *Beloved* when the slave master Schoolteacher in Sethe's plantation instructs the children to analyze the slaves according to their human and animal characteristics, as was previously observed in this dissertation. In fact, Sethe's decission to never go back to the plantation radicates from it as "nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (*Beloved* 296).

Even though Rebekka by giving the letter of safe passage to Florens is just complying a legal requirement at the time, the description recalls the one done by Schoolteacher and his pupils. While her description of Florens identifies her as part of the human race with the word "person" and to the contemporary reader it would seem that by not relying on the color of her skin she is not following patterns of racist slurs or attacks, it is by assessing that "she is owned by me" that the violence is being perpetrated. Furthermore, by elluding to mention the color of Florens' skin Rebekka is not necessarily helping her, as the parishioners will nevertheless fall into the superstion of the age by identifying Florens as a minion of the "Black Man." By not being the owner of her lifestory on paper but being owned by another, she is unable to escape the wounds that the inspection of her naked body, like she was a piece of cattle or similar, will leave on her psyche. As she affirms "[s]wine look at me with more connection when they raise their heads from the trough" (*A Mercy* 111).

However, and following Butler's paradigm, when the victim of a traumatic event is able to account for his or her story, such an act would constitute a perlocutionary speech act, one by which certain effects happen. When a victim is empowered to own her or his story and write down the account of such an event, it creates an effect both on the writer and on the potential reader. As has been analyzed in the case of slave narratives, through the telling of the event, victims are able to elaborate their experiences as slaves in order not to traumatically repeat it and work through the pain caused by it. Hence, the act of putting the event down to paper is causing what Butler defines as perlocutionary speech act, "certain effects as their consequence; by saying something, a certain effect follows" (*Excitable Speech* 3). For autobiographical narratives, the written word would be the speech act, while the effects of this act would entail the processes of overcoming the event or events.

Nevertheless, a second effect must be taken into account: the recognizition of oneself through one's own words and the reflection on the Other. Since human beings are linguistic beings and as such they are recognized by the Other through language as part of their community, owning said language of description is a capital tool in order not to be misconstrued as something else. The exercises of owning one's narration has a double path. First, the writer must put into words the description of him or herself in order to be read by his or her audience. However, this action would be meaningless without the desire to be recognized or read by the Other. Secondly the author needs the reader in order to complete the healing process. This process of dual necesity – both to be author of one's story and to be acknowledged by the reader – is portrayed by Butler on *Antigone's claim* when she affirms that

> recognition begins with the insight that one is lost in the Other, appropriated in and by an alterity that is and is not oneself, and recognition is motivated by the desire to find oneself reflected there, where the reflection is not a final expropriation. Indeed, consciousness seeks a retrieval of itself, only to recognize that there is no return from alterity to a former self but only a transfiguration premised on the impossibility of return. (13–14)

Florens would be an example of such desire for recognition as an author and of the desperate need to be acknowledged by the Other. As the object of someone else's narrative, she is a victim to the Other's views on her own person, not being able to escape the misconceptions that the color of her skin had at that time and suffering linguistic injuries by white society. However, as the author of her own narrative, she desires to be read by her lover, to be recognized by him as the woman that she is. This recognition starts on the first encounter between them, by means of the gaze, as Florens enters where the smith is sleeping and wakes him up by accident. "I run away not knowing then you are seeing me seeing you. And when at last our eyes hit I am not dead. For the first time I am alive" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 36). Their first moment of awareness is

therefore a visual one, but this is too superficial as Florens is not able to fully articulate her whole persona onto such gaze. Therefore, she embarks herself on the telling of her life story by writing it down in the walls and floors of the Vaark mansionlike house in hopes that her lover will read it.

> If you are live or ever you heal you will have to bend down to read my telling, crawl perhaps in a few places. I apologize for the discomfort. Sometimes the tip of the nail skates away and the forming of words is disorderly. Reverend Father never likes that. He raps our fingers and makes us do it over. In the beginning when I come to this room I am certain the telling will give me the tears I never have. I am wrong. Eyes dry, I stop telling only when the lamp burns down. Then I sleep among my words. (156)

By writing her story, Florens is demanding recognition from the reader. However, the reader has a dual nature within the book. On the one hand, Florens as the narrator is asking for her lover to acknowledge her as his equal, as his partner, and describes on the landscape of her trauma – the walls on the house – the episodes she has had to endure – the abandonment of her mother, the arrival to the Vaark household, the illness of her mistress and its aftermath, etc. On the other hand, Morrison as the author is forcing the reader to acknowledge the violent beginnings of the establishment of the slave trade and slavery systems on the American soil and therefore positioning herself as the master writer of a narrative that will hopefully cause an effect onto the public, much like the slave narratives tried to accomplish when they were published.

In this way, Morrison will fulfill her role as a writer, as she described it in her acceptance lecture of the Nobel Prize, and hopefully create an everlasting effect on the reader. As she describes the wise blind woman who is the vehicle of said lecture she states that "[b]eing a writer [the blind woman] thinks of language partly as a system,

partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences" (199).

3.3. Conclusion

The creation and recreation of literary tropes has been a common denominator through the history of literature. Not only do authors take previously composed myths and give their own personal touch in order to grant a more modern approach to universal themes, but also, to contest previously accepted ways to see the world. In doing so, literature gives voice to matters and characters that were otherwise overlooked by critics and readers. Other times, authors fictionalize real situations to contest and expose traumas that an entire community had to suffer, bringing the traumatic event to the center of social and political discussion and trying to heal psychological wounds of the past.

The analysis of Morrison's *Desdemona*, a re-telling of the canonical work by Shakespeare, helped analyze multiple hypotheses. Traditional criticism on Shakespeare's *Othello* often highlighted how the relationship between the Moor and the noble Desdemona was an impossible one due to the racial difference between them, deeming it a play only to be read and impossible to be staged, as the relationship between the Moor and Desdemona would be too shocking for the audience. Through the re-writing done by Morrison, she tackles the racial divide by giving voice to those who were more affected by it, in this case, Desdemona, Othello, and Sa'ran. Desdemona and Othello's relationship was tainted in Shakespeare's play by the mental misconceptions and stereotypes that the fair maiden had on the Moor. Likewise, Desdemona and her servant's relationship – whom she sees as her best friend from childhood in both plays – is revealed to be flawed by those same prejudices. Only after death can they all realize the

error of their mental images heightened by social misgivings. Death acts as a liberating and equalizing space in which the characters dispose of social constructs and can be themselves.

In the same manner, gender constructs in Shakespeare's play around the character of Desdemona make it impossible for Othello to fully grasp her personality. Described by Shakespeare as an ideal woman, full of virtue, she is not given an equal chance in the play to defend her character and virtue verbally as male characters such as Iago, Cassio or Othello do. This same argument is carried on through Paula Vogel's play, which gives voice to all three main female characters in the play and realizes them as complete women. Likewise, Morrison's Desdemona is not a passive receiver of her death but rather a conscious one, an active participant in her dying at the hands of her husband. Only after death can Othello fully grasp the meaning of her sacrifice and her actions. This notion of hereafter as the locus in which individuals can break free of social norms is also explained through the figure of the ghost in other works by Morrison, like *Beloved* or *Love*. However, in these other works, the violent nature of these ghosts' departure and their imposition on the living taints the haunting as a negative experience – or at least negative at the beginning – while by placing all the characters in the afterlife in *Desdemona*, Morrison levels the plain for true interactions between them.

By giving voice to otherwise misunderstood characters, Morrison is changing their agency, from objects or victims of the traumatic event, to agents or survivors of their own story. This same shift can be appreciated in slave narratives. While at times problematic, as they were not the *de facto* authors of their stories, and had to trust amanuensis because of illiteracy, through these narratives former slaves claimed their own voice and their own story to describe to others the sufferings they had to endure. The dichotomy between agent and object can be appreciated in *A Mercy* where Florens is

first described by others without taking into account her individual traits, making her the object of a description she does not recognize herself in. By having others define her, they psychologically wound her due to the imposition of such a definition. The injury will also grow deeper when instead of treating her as a human being, they treat her like an animal whom they do not dare to touch.

However, claiming one's traumatic story needs alterity to be fully realized. The healing process can only commence once the subject takes control of his or her own story, though the process will not be complete unless a potential reader can be achieved or even fathomed. Therefore the Other, the reader, is needed in order to be healed. This can be appreciated in Florens, since the book the reader has in her or his hands has been inscribed in the walls of the mansion she inhabits. With her estranged lover in mind as the potential reader, she goes on to fill the walls and floors of the mansion, accessing such dual processes within and outside of the world of the novel: within as Florens envisions her lover reading her story; outside as the potential readers of the book read both Morrison's and Florens' story.

By retelling and recreating the stories of Desdemona and slave narratives, Morrison is giving voice to previously mute individuals. On the one hand, she is creating a complex work, from the point of view of gender and race, by re-imagining Shakespeare's play after the death of its characters – that is, at the end of *Othello* – exposing them to the limitations of their views on the original play. On the other hand, she is shifting the master narrative of the oppressors by making a slave tell her own story, switching the positions between agent and object of the story and giving the oppressed their own voice.

PART FOUR: THE COMMUNITY

Like most animals, the human being is a communal being. In nature one can find examples of gatherings of creatures throughout zoology – and in English most of them have colorful names: a pack of wolves, a clowder of cats, a murder of crows, or a parliament of owls are but some examples of the social nature we ascribe to these animals. These conclaves usually serve a specific purpose – protection, survival, reproduction, etc. – since the individual needs the other in order to achieve certain solidary objectives. It is because of the other that the individual can leave being an "I" behind and become "we," a group with which to reach goals that, as a singular entity, he or she could not attain. Either engraved in their DNA or passed on from previous generations, individuals learn that some actions and decisions could not be taken without the aid of the group—be that hunting a particularly difficult prey, migration to warmer climates or the prime time for reproduction.

These similar patterns are followed by human beings. However, unlike the more intuitive or instinctually-driven animals, the human individual usually needs ancestors to

teach them how to perform even the most basic of tasks. It is true that one cannot undervalue the power of reasoning that human beings possess and makes them the most dangerous creatures on the planet. Because of his or her reasoning a person can harm animals – be it for nourishment or sport, - ecosystems – by exterminating a species or imposing their presence through changing it, - or even hurt other people. Nevertheless, this could never be so without the aid of the ancestors who teach younger generations the basic tools to analyze the world around them and create new ways of solving problems – or give new solutions to obsolete approaches. It is because of these forefathers that men and women can know their own history, the reasons behind the creation of a community, and can move on within the safety of said group. As Morrison said

> I have suspected, more often than not, that I know more than my grandfather and my great-grandmother did, but I also know that I'm no wiser than they were. And whenever I have tried earnestly to diminish their vision and prove to myself that I know more, and when I have tried to speculate on their interior life and match it up with my own, I have been overwhelmed every time by the richness of theirs compared to my own … these people are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior life. ("The Site of Memory" 115)

For the African American individual, the sense of ancestry and history is of particular importance. Under the slavery system in the United States, the parents and grandparents of a child were often sold to different plantations, making it impossible for the person to have a clear sense of who they were or where they came from – this being one of the tools the slave masters used to control the massification of the plantations and avoid bonding between slaves. Marriages amongst slaves were promoted in order to produce offspring that would in turn work in the fields and produce more workforce, but these marriages were not recognized by the law. With such arrangements the

circulation of slaves from one plantation to the next could be made freely, as there were no legal marital ties binding him or her to the previous plantation. Moreover, the slave father of a child had no rights over the baby by law, as the baby followed the slave condition of the mother – and therefore it was the property of the slave master. As Dunoway affirms "[l]egally, offspring were the property of the mother's master. When they were held by different owners than their wives, fathers retained no legitimate right to command visitation privileges nor to maintain linkages with their children" (64).

A community is necessary for the individual in order to form a sense of self and belonging. And it is in the intersection between community, trauma and history that this section will focus on. First, it will center its attention in the creation of a community of survivors of trauma and its vulnerability due to the dangers it might pose to the bigger group. It will analyze how the stranger becomes a danger for the survival of the community once he or she becomes an active member of this community. With *Love* (2003) Morrison will focus on the relationship between two little girls, Heed and Christine, and how their community breaks apart, only to be fixed when it is too late for them both.

Secondly, this chapter will focus on the historical trauma suffered by the community after its formation and the stagnation resulting from a fictionalized past will prove to be fatal for its survival. In the last part of Morrison's trilogy[35] initiated by *Beloved* (1987), continued by *Jazz* (1992) and finished with *Paradise* (1997), she describes how the all-black[36] town of Ruby is a formal Utopia for African Americans, created by individuals once chased out by others similar all-black towns as they did not possess the means

[35] Morrison herself refers to these three novels as a trilogy in a 1992 interview with Elissa Schapell entitled "The Art of Fiction"

[36] All-black towns were created throughout the mid-West in the nineteenth century after the end of the Civil War. These towns welcomed African Americans as long as "they had resources to last them for two years" (Tally 16). All-black towns disappeared in the first half of the twentieth century.

necessary to stay in those towns. However, the presence of the Other (in the case of Ruby, the outside inhabitants of the Convent, a group of runaway women from different places that ended up in this haven by chance, creating a community of survivors of various traumas) and the interaction between the men of the town and the women of the Convent will precipitate the dismantling of the perfect "utopic" community.

4.1. I blame her for the hate, I blame him for the theft. (Re)making the community in *Love*

The proof that the state is a creation of nature
and prior to the individual is that the individual,
when isolated, is not self-sufficing;
and therefore he is like a part in relation to a whole.
But he who is unable to live in society,
or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself,
must be either a beast or a god.
Aristotle. *Politics.* (1.1253a20-29 tran. Jowett)

The creation of a community can have distinct effects on society. On the one hand, by associating with persons who have endured the same experiences, individuals that share common ideals and/or goals, they can feel at ease with the people they live with and become more productive members of society. Such is the case of persons with mental ailments, individuals with addictions or victims of traumatic experiences. By meeting with peers, shared experiences such as group therapy in a medical environment, addict communities such as Alcoholics Anonymous, support groups for rape victims, and others act as a therapeutic way station on the road to health. As Laurie Vickroy points out "survivors […] need public forums, the chance to connect with fellow survivors, to overcome shame and silence and to win the awareness if not empathy of readers"(20). No matter how small, the community is formed – even if is formed just by

two individuals, as will be explained in this chapter – vis-à-vis the relation of collective experiences, allowing the person to elaborate a past situation and build upon it.

On the other hand, associations of people can be a disruptive force for the status quo. While the individuals in a community will feel accepted by the group of peers, such alliances could threaten to overpower established governments or social dogmas. For instance, such a threat appeared with the Women Rights Movement, which menaced the patriarchal society that had dominated Western civilization for millennia. Even though success was achieved in many areas in this fight – the fundamental right to vote, to receive proper and equal education as men, or to have access to positions of power in government, to name but a few, – complete gender equality has remained elusive. Nevertheless, when such disequilibrium is pointed out, a certain kind of member of the community – in this particular instance, men – looks at it as a cultural threat to preconceived notions of gender propriety.

Cultural threats such as the Women Rights Movement, the African American Civil Rights Movement in United States, or the LGTB social movements around the world are often met with violence or force. Instead of creating a dialogue with ideas that could otherwise enrich and help move forward a society, threats to established norms encounter physical and verbal violence. Police or military forces often subdue, under the direct order of governments, a myriad of conflicts and demonstrations that populate the world currently with extreme violence. However, the violence does not only reside in the use of force but also the use of language that perpetuates social stigmas or pre-conceived ideas of right and wrong in media or day-to-day language as the lexicon around rape, which in many cases blames the victim for the traumatic experience she or he had to

endure rather than blaming the perpetrator[37]. Statements such as "wearing those clothes, she was asking for it" or not believing the victim's claim among other reasons pointed out in Zaron Burnett's article "A Gentleman's Guide to Rape Culture" (2014) perpetuate linguistic violence against victims and communities that should be heard. Burnett asserts that men should acknowledge women's position of vulnerability and bear that in mind in their interactions.

> A woman must consider where she is going, what time of day it is, what time she will arrive at her destination and what time she will leave her destination, what day of the week is it, if she will be left alone at any point ... the considerations go on and on because they are far more numerous than you or I can imagine … As men we can enjoy this particular extreme luxury of movement and freedom of choice. In order to understand rape culture, remember this is a freedom that at least half the population doesn't enjoy. (Burnett)

Yet the attack on potentially dangerous movements or communities which threaten the status quo is not something brought upon by the beginning of the Modern Era. Moreover, the association of women was already perceived as something dangerous to the ruling power during Greek times, as the myths like the Amazons, the women community around the goddess Artemisia, or Philomela and Procne portray. The latter legend can be of particular interest when describing the violence against a community of two women or, in this case, sisters. According to Grimal, and as told by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, Philomela and Procne were the daughters of Pandion, king of Athens. When Athens was under siege, Tereus, son of Ares, helped the people of Athens so he felt compelled to give the hand of Procne[38] to him in marriage and together they had a

[37] This relationship between language and the victim has been analyzed when talking about *Desdemona* (2012) in this dissertation and the power relationship that Judith Butler establishes through language speech acts and the individual.

[38] Some versions of this myth, Grimal points out, reverse the roles of the sisters and it is Philomela who marries Tereus. The outcome of the myth is nevertheless unchanging (Grimal 366).

son called Itys. Nevertheless Tereus fell in love with Philomela and, as his advances were rejected due to his relationship with her sister, he raped her. Fearing that she would tell her sister, he decided to mutilate her, cutting her tongue so she would not speak the evils that he had done and breaking the bond between both sisters. Yet the truth came out when Philomela, unable to speak, communicated the crime to her sister through embroidery and together they were able to re-create the bond between them and exact their revenge[39].

By the intrusion of a foreign element into their relationship, both Athenian princesses were first separated and then reunited by the crime. Their sisterly bond was not only threatened by the physical violence of the rape but also by the impossibility of using words to narrate with words her own story on the case of Philomela, what would have otherwise made the victim seal herself up. However, even if in the Hellenic myth the son of Ares separated them, how much does the influence of the foreigner rip apart or bring together a community? And when the bond is broken between individuals, how can they come back together? And for what cause? Toni Morrison's eighth novel, *Love* (2003), presents a similar situation in which the relationship between childhood friends Heed and Christine is broken and then repaired by external elements of the relationship. It is on the creation, separation and final recreation of this community that this chapter will focus.

Unlike the relationship between Philomela and Procne, some bonds are created amongst individuals not through a filial connection but by necessity. In *Politics,* Aristotle

[39] It must be stated that the revenge of the sisters passed by killing Itys and serving him on a stew to his unknowing father while the sisters escaped. Once he realized of the crime, he went after both sisters who were transformed into birds thanks to the mercy of the Olympian gods.

expressed how the individual is a social[40] animal, one that cannot thrive without the aid of the others. In fact, Aristotle once wrote that "a social instinct is implanted in all men by nature" (1.1253a29-30 tran. Jowett) and it is by this social instinct and the interaction of the individual with the State that the notions of right and wrong are implanted in him or her. Be it in tribes, clans, groups, communities, or as a society, men and women had to ally with one another to get the most out of the land in which they lived or to procure services and goods that they would otherwise not have access to or have the ability to make. These necessities could be understood as the root of all societies: individuals who have joined together in order to obtain certain benefits that they could not gain on their own.

Even though the creation of a community can be due to pragmatic reasons such as goods, protection, or procreation, individuals unite for different reasons. Communities are also shaped in order to request certain rights that were until then denied to individuals by the government or superior power of the society. Other communities are born out of the racial, religious, or cultural elements they share – language, artistic products, traditions, etc., – that bind them as a homogenous community even across geographical or political boarders. As Kali Tal would put it

> Membership in a targeted group is determined on the basis of externally imposed definitions (i. e. race, class, gender, religious affiliation), which are created and enforced by dominant social groups, and which – once created – are often internalized by members of targeted groups and incorporated into their individual self-concepts. (9)

However, some groups are created by a shared experience of violence. Such is the case of the community of survivors of traumatic events such as rape or war –

[40] In some versions the term *social* has been translated as *political* animal as the term *politikos* makes reference to a person that lives in the *polis*, a city intended as a plurality of citizens and therefore a society. Then, in this context, political and social are synonyms.

although these two events differ greatly. Soldiers who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, such as the case of Frank Money in *Home* that was previously analyzed, can come from diverse war landscapes but their experiences are similar to one another. There are many elements that diverge between one rape victim and another but they do have the terrible fact of rape in common. Individuals who have suffered a traumatic experience share this unfortunate common ground. In this case, the creation of the community is not rooted in the necessity of the citizens for goods or services or the similitudes between their traditions, but rather it is created from the need to share an experience in order to work through it and move on from it.

By suffering a traumatic event, the individual is often severed from the rest of his or her original community. In fact, survivors often struggle to re-adapt themselves to their previous group, no matter the amount of empathy these communities offer, as the members of said group may find it difficult to relate to the psychological duress endured by survivors. Furthermore, by recognizing difference in themselves, trauma victims can feel a sense of isolation which severely delays their psychological healing. As Kali Tal would affirm "[t]rauma is a transformative experience, and those who are transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence" (119). Thus the trauma survivor changes from well-adapted and functioning member of society into stranger. In fact, following the archetypes set by Toni Morrison when she coined the concept of re-memory in *Beloved* – re-memory is the remembrance of a memory, be this memory of one's own or of a different person – this individual would be a re-memory of him or herself for the community, an indelibly marred copy of an original that no longer exists. However, the trauma victim is in this case the object, not the subject, of the interaction. He or she is the one who is observed and re-membered by the community. As she would describe in *Beloved* (1987)

> Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (43–44)

Because of this traumatic event, the individual becomes a foreigner to his or her own community. Victims of a traumatic event feel as though they no longer belong to the community or nation that previously nurtured them and thus they must find a new one in which they can heal. Sometimes, searching or even establishing this new group will result in permanent separation from the previous one. In other cases, this separation is only temporary or even co-existent with the other community, not severing the ties, as it is understood as a transitory step before the complete healing. Through this either permanent or temporary separation, the individual can re-create his or her identity after the traumatic event that disrupted his or her previous self. In fact, as Schreiber points out "retelling and remembering the trauma within a supportive community enables trauma victims to move forward. Morrison's novels explore how loving relationships with individuals and communities assist in the creation of self" (Schreiber 16).

Therefore, the community of survivors is composed of individuals who were first foreigners to one another, coming from a variety of contexts. A community like this is, even if formed by only two members, what is shown in Toni Morrison's novel *Love* between Heed – short for "Heed the Night" – Johnson and Christine Cosey. As children, when they first meet, both girls come from separate social backgrounds and contexts however, they recognize commonalities in each other. Heed comes from a poor family in the slum district of Up Beach, outside the social circles of the Coseys, a rich

family who owned a beach resort where whites and rich blacks mingled on the days when the patriarch, Bill Cosey, ran the hotel. Due to the poverty and lack of means of her family, Heed is poorly tended to, left to wander other parts of the city that are barred from her family because of their social status. Christine, the daughter of Bill Cosey's late son, Billy Boy, and May, his widow and late manager of the resort, is also removed from the hotel due to her young age as well as her grandfather's inability to separate Christine from the memory of his beloved departed son. Furthermore, May's focus on running the hotel for her father-in-law leaves young Christine ostracized from the care of her direct family only to find comfort in L, the hotel cook, who will look after her.

Because of the disconnect from their respective families, both girls could be considered to be orphans. Even if their respective biological parents are alive – though in the case of Christine it is only her mother – they lack a mirror image, a model from where to grow as individuals. As Lacan would explain, "the sight in the mirror of the ego ideal, of that being that he first saw appearing in the form of the parent holding him up before the mirror" (257). Moreover, as Julia Kristeva declares in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) that "[t]he foreigner, thus, has lost his mother" (5). Both girls are therefore strangers to each other and to their own community, as motherlessness is one of the characteristics of a stranger. And it is in this foreignness that Heed and Christine find each other one day at the beach when they are both children.

> Once a little girl wandered too far – down to big water and along its edge where waves skidded and mud turned into clean sand. Ocean spray dampened the man's undershirt she wore. There on a red blanket another little girl with white ribbons in her hair sat eating ice cream. The water was very blue. Beyond, a crowd of people laughed. 'Hi, want some?' asked the girl, holding out a spoon.

> They ate ice cream with peaches in it until a smiling woman came and said. 'Go away now. This is private.'
>
> Later, making footprints in the mud, she heard the ice cream girl call, 'Wait! Wait!' […]
>
> 'Go away?' she asked her reflection. 'Wait?' How could she do both? (78)

Though the description of each girl differs greatly, it is as foreigners that they are attracted to one another. One dressed with a man's undershirt, the other one with white ribbons eating ice cream by the sea, they are two pictures of separated strata of society, reinforced by the comment "go away" uttered by the grown up woman that accompanies the rich girl. The woman, May, is a powerful and beloved member of a community. In fact, she is the woman that venerates the family patriarch, not wanting to disappoint her father-in-law and trying to live up to the image he has of her husband and his son. As such, she does not want the outside element that Heed represents to corrupt the upbringing of the potential heir to the Cosey fortune and estate.

The two girls have divergent impressions of each other in this first meeting due to the mental images they have of themselves and one another. On the one hand, both girls are projecting onto the other a picture of themselves. According to James M. Mellard, Heed and Christine work as imperfect images of each other, acting as disruptive mirrors of one another's longings to be accepted within their set communities. In accordance to Lacan's theory on mirroring, Heed sees in Christine her "ideal ego," that what she strives for, everything that she thinks society wants her to be and she wishes to achieve, "the girl with the white ribbons, ice cream, and all the rest" (Mellard, "Families Make the Best Enemies" 703). Much like the main character in *The Bluest Eye* (1974), Pecola, and her fascination with Shirley Temple, Christine represents the ideal little girl

that the media wants the audience to fall in love with[41]. For Christine, Heed represents the rejection of society and, more importantly, the rejection she suffers at the hands of her mother. As Mellard would continue "Christine needs to find manifested in Heed distance or separation not from her mother but from *rejection* by her mother" (705, italics in the original). By accepting Heed as her friend, by asking her to "wait," Christine is asking her to stay so she can project onto Heed the rejection she suffers from her mother, that is, Heed acts as a receptacle of Christine's feelings. Both children act out their roles within the mirror stage of psychological development, as Mellard will affirm:

> To the extent that post-infantile identification repeats that of the mirror stage, the contradictory tension there occurs in the relation between the narcissistic image of the double and the subject's own body. In one paradox, the very wholeness of the identificatory double seems at some point to threaten that of the subject. But in another, the aggressive tension between identificatory double and identifying subject is marked as well by an erotic tinge. (706)

On the other hand, by recognizing themselves in each other's alterity, they are able to create a community. As previously stated, one of the characteristics of the stranger is that he or she is a motherless individual – according to Kristeva's definition of foreigner. Because of this, once they he or she accept the fact of being an orphan, he or she "wanders about the world, neutral but solaced for having developed an interior distance from the fire and ice that had seared them in the past" (Kristeva 9). Furthermore, every individual, continues Kristeva, is a foreigner to him or herself, connecting her theories to Freud's theories on the unconscious. According to Freud's psychic apparatus, where a person is divided between ego, super ego and alter ego – all three divisions separated though permeable, as some unconscious thoughts can enter the

[41] As a matter of fact, Mellard will relate the encounter between the girls to the meeting of the protagonists in a romantic comedy, as he says they " 'meet cute' " (703)

conscious individual as in the case of victims of traumatic events and their pathological repetition of actions – the individual has the Other within him or herself. Due to the porous nature of these three stages of unconsciousness, aspects of the repressed behavior do not seem altogether unfamiliar but rather preserve some corrupted familiarity, giving it its uncanny nature. This oddness fits into the concept coined by Freud in *The Uncanny* (1919) where he exposed the familiar nature of unfamiliar situations when traumatic repetition occurs. As Kristeva affirms "[u]ncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided" (181).

When applying these theories to *Love,* the meeting of the two girls changes their foreign nature. Even though they are both foreigners within their own communities because of their specific factors – the poverty and rejection suffered by Heed and the negligence in Christine's upbringing – it is in recognizing one another as foreigners that they can establish a community of the dispossessed, as Kristeva would say.

> *Meeting* balances wandering. A crossroad of two othernesses, it welcomes the foreigner without tying him down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him. A mutual recognition, the meeting owes its success to its temporary nature, and it would be torn by conflicts if it were to be extended. (181, italics in the original)

Once they overcome each other's foreignness and welcome each other's presence in the space, Christine and Heed can establish a community. However, said community cannot thrive as their particular environment and influences interject in this relationship, mostly May and Bill Cosey. When the relationship between both girls blossoms, Christine's mother, May, tries to separate them. In fact, in their first interaction, as shown before, she tries to stop the encounter from ever becoming a relationship. The difference in class between the two girls, one from the slums, the other the heiress of a wealthy resort, in addition to the constant effort May done to her father-

in-law's businesses, make her dismiss little Heed, seeing her as everything that is wrong with the African American community from a social mainstream – white – point of view.

The tension between white and black, one of the common tropes in Morrison's work, is of particular importance when analyzing the Coseys' resort. Set in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, the novel contextualizes the intra-racial tensions of the African American community in Bill Cosey's business. Established with the inheritance Bill Cosey received from his father Dark Cosey – an informant working for the police, targeting and informing on his own community – the hotel creates a divide in the African Americans of the community. While there were African American individuals who could stay in the hotel, educated, upper class individuals, there were also those who could only work in it, as they were not wealthy enough to stay at the hotel. These two groups, even if they shared the space of the resort, did not mingle due to the social divide. As one of the characters of the novel would say "Cosey didn't mix with local people publicly, which is to say he employed them, joked with them, even rescued them from difficult situations, but other than at church picnics, none was truly welcome at the hotel's tables or on its dance floor" (41). However, Bill Cosey is filled with contradictions, as it is only in these local people that he confides, as will be shown later on.

The divide between rich and poor is even greater as far as May is concerned. Though her father in law does not mingle with the locals within the walls of the resort, he nevertheless welcomes their presence in other contexts – such as the fishing trips he takes with Sandler Gibbons, a worker at the resort. However, May tries to remove herself completely from those who seem unworthy of her company or business. As a foreigner herself, finally accepted in the community of the resort – first by marriage, then by merits as manager of the same – she does not welcome the presence of Heed as she sees in her a potential pollutant of her stability. Heed represents what May deems as wrong with the

African American community, everything that was at the same time being fought against by the Civil Rights movement: segregation and its consequences – poverty, inequality in the justice system, inability to access proper education, to name but a few. However, May's conservative ideals and desires to not fight the status quo were disregarded by everyone who encountered her.

> As the Movement swelled and funerals, marches, and riots was all the news there was, May, prophesying mass executions, cut herself off from normal people. Even guests who agreed began to avoid her and her warnings of doom. She saw rebellion in the waiters; weapons in the hands of the yard help. A bass player was the first to publicly shame her. "Aw, woman. Shut the fuck up!" It was not said to her face, but to her back and loud enough to be heard. Other guests became equally blatant, or just got up and left when she entered their company. (80–81)

Her fight against change and the prevalence of the status quo could be understood as a way to preserve what she had achieved and in Heed, the potential to disrupt her success. May's actions to keep Heed at bay are rooted in the recognition of herself as a little girl, previous to her arrival to the Cosey family. While Christine sees Heed as a distorted mirror, a place to store her mother's disregard for her, May sees in Heed what she was and what she could potentially be without the safe haven and power of her father in law.

May's initial reaction against Heed is anteceded by another character in Morrison's work, Geraldine from *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Geraldine, a prototypical housewife with a perfect house, perfect husband, and perfect son has to face Pecola, a mistreated, "ugly," little girl defenseless against what society may think of her. Geraldine's household represents the ideal house according to mainstream United States ideals: clean, populated with good Christian symbols, and complete with a pet and a

beautiful son. A house where the woman works hard so she can have a warm dinner ready by the time her husband comes back from work and a boy, Junior, as – much like May – "Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled" (*The Bluest Eye* 67). In fact, it should be noted that in the previous list of elements of the ideal house, the son is listed as one of them – not as an individual but as another object within the paradigm. However, due to her mother's estrangement, Junior grows to be an abusive boy, mistreating both their cat and other children like Pecola, already an scapegoat for the rest of the community. It is in one of these instances that Pecola accidentally kills the family cat and Geraldine discovers the two children and the corpse of the cat in her house. When she sees the little girl in her house and the remains of the family pet by her, Geraldine's reaction towards Pecola foreshadows the first interaction between May and Heed as she says "[g]et out … You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (72). Both May and Geraldine have the same reaction towards an uncomfortable element of their own community: shunning the potentially dangerous stranger – a foreigner in the case of Heed, a stranger to the household in the case of Geraldine – who reminds them of themselves before they reached their current station in life.

In *Love*, May is a product of both her adoptive environment and her time. Even if the fight for the rights of the African American community was not only a fair one but also a necessary one, shadows can be found in this otherwise bright moment of United States history. While with this movement segregation would come to an end, what leaders like Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. continuously combated against, making equality before the law and institutions formally achieved, some other elements were relinquished. And with these rights and duties that were brought upon with the social union came the adoption of customs mostly associated to

mainstream – white – society, like, for example, patriarchy. The power that society has given to men over women and its role in interactions amongst individuals resides at the core of the novel, as Morrison affirmed in an interview with the Los Angeles Times in 2003 "a certain kind of license that men have and that we give them, complicated roles that they may not be able to shoulder" (O'Connor). Furthermore, Morrison went on to say that even if patriarchy is imposed by society "[p]atriarchy is assumed, but women have to agree to the role" (O'Connor). And it is May in *Love* who first accepts the power that Bill Cosey has over them. As Mar Gallego points out

> African Americans' adoption of a patriarchal model is reckoned as the greatest source of conflict in the text. The black notion of patriarchy personified by Cosey forecloses any idea of kinship and community because, as the head of the clan, he miserably fails to foster a sense of family and to guide and protect its members. (94)

It is the patriarch of the Cosey family, Bill, who conducts the interactions between the women until the end of the novel. Bill Cosey personifies patriarchal society in all its forms. Formally, this is specified through the title of the chapters – "Friend," "Stranger," "Benefactor," to name but a few – by which the patriarch's relationship with the character on which the chapter focuses is announced. Narratively, while he is alive, he subdues the women he has contact with to his every whim: first, May, then Celestial – a prostitute he has a relationship with, – and finally Heed and Christine. Later, after his death, he will still make his presence known through a portrait at the house in One Monarch Street where they live. In fact, the portrait was an element previously used by Morrison as was case of *Jazz*, previously explored in this dissertation. Through it, Bill will continue to haunt the women as well as mold a new victim, Junior, Heed's personal assistant.

As previously stated, as eleven-year-olds, Heed and Christine had established a community united by their own familiar trauma. For Heed, Christine represents everything that she aspired to. For Christine, Heed is everything that her mother loathed and therefore the perfect locus in which to deflect her mother's rejection. Even if the union between the two girls is frail, the bonds they build through their games and the creation of their own private language – Idagay[42] – with which to share their experiences is strong. At this point, the male presence is hardly noticed as they hide in Christine's room or play along the beach. However, idagay will not be able to convey their future experiences, and all this changes the moment that Heed bumps into Christine's grandfather.

> He touches her chin, and then—casually, still smiling—her nipple, or rather the place under her swimsuit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes. Heed stands there for what seems an hour but is less than the time it takes to blow a perfect bubble. He watches the pink ease from her mouth, then moves away still smiling. Heed bolts back down the stairs. The spot on her chest she didn't know she had is burning, tingling. (191)

Following this interaction between Heed and Bill, Christine accidentally witnesses her grandfather masturbating to the event. Through these consecutive actions, the community created by both girls is ruptured, as both of them are unable to reveal to the other what they have suffered/witnessed and thus starts a division that will later on transform into the schism of their alliance when Bill, in his fifties, takes Heed, eleven years-old at that point, as his bride.

[42] As it is explained in the novel, idagay is the language in which they expressed themselves as "idagay was for intimacy, gossip, telling jokes on grown-ups. Only once was it used to draw friendly blood" (188).

Even though the nature of the marriage between Bill and Heed can be analyzed from diverse psychological stances, the focus here will turn on the social reaction of the community to the topic. Society surrounding the Cosey resort views this marriage as problematic. Not only is a fifty-year-old business man marrying a girl young enough to be his granddaughter but he is also buying her from her parents as Heed would recount that her price "was two hundred dollars he gave my daddy, and a pocketbook for Mama" (193). Due to society's views on marrying a child, Bill has to constantly defend his marriage, making it look like both a charitable action, as he is taking Heed away from poverty, as well as an investment, someone he can groom to be the perfect heiress to his empire. However, as a friend of Bill affirms "[a]lthough by then Cosey was fully involved with grown women, the memory of having a child bride still stirred him" (148).

Through his actions, the image of Bill changes for society, from an idealized leader to a perverted pariah. According to Mellard's article "Unimaginable Acts Imagined: Fathers, Family Myth, and the Postmodern Crisis of Paternal Authority in Toni Morrison's *Love*" (2010), Bill's image changes for society between the Lacanian concepts of imaginary father to the real father. Due to his business success, charitable actions, and his charm, he is able to achieve what others cannot and admire his accomplishments as lifetime goals. As Mellard says Bill is "one of their own who is hardly different from themselves and yet who has the genius to make good when for a black man success was very improbable" ("Unimaginable Acts Imagined" 245–246). However, by marrying Heed, this image of Bill is shattered, only to unveil the real or primal father, the one who personifies those societal taboos – like marrying a child. Therefore, through his marriage Bill is breaking apart the community he formerly helped, contaminating any previous success he achieved and sending the community to an original state of economic depression as a result of the closing of the hotel.

However, it is Heed and Christine's two-person community that is more violently fractured due to this marriage. Through the marriage both girls achieve what they first thought they wanted, yet with it came the end of their sisterhood and the beginning of their traumatic imprisonment at the house of One Monarch Street. As Carden points out

> Bill Cosey disrupts [Heed and Christine's] love relationship by insisting that they identify themselves as his wife and his granddaughter and occupy corresponding places in his hierarchy. This arrangement redirects their passion into vicious competition and bitter recrimination. […] Each believes herself abandoned by the other. Heed feels betrayed when Christine adopts May's scorn, while Christine stews in her sense of rejection. These responses to their positions within the patriarchal hierarchy control and shape their lives' possibilities. (138)

For Heed the marriage to the Cosey patriarch represents attaining her idealized image, the perfect white-ribbon girl that Christine represented. By marrying Bill, Heed assumes she will achieve her ego ideal, her mirror image that she located, as it was stated before, in Christine. In doing so, Heed believes she will not only obtain love, beauty, and luxury but also a deeper connection with Christine. As she confesses in the last pages of the book "I wanted to be with you. Married to him, I thought I would be." (193). In fact, in several occasions Heed tries to re-establish the previous bond by making herself look beautiful or even offering Christine her wedding ring. Nevertheless, these peace offerings are rejected by Christine and therefore Heed's desire to achieve a further connection with her is made temporarily unobtainable. This rejection is fueled by Christine's perception that she was being replaced, driving her to jealousy.

> Slowly she tapped her middle finger on the lawyer's desk to stress certain words. 'I am the last, the only, blood relative of William Cosey. For free I have taken care of his house and

his widow for twenty years. I have cooked, cleaned, washed her underwear, laundered her sheets, done the shopping...'

'I know.'

'You don't know! You don't! She is replacing me.'

'Wait now.'

'She is! That's been her whole life, don't you get it? Replacing me, getting rid of me. I'm always last; all the time the one being told to go, get out.' (94–95)

For Christine, Heed's wedding meant the end of their friendship and the beginning of her relationship with her mother. While the connection between the girls drew them apart and in Heed, as it was analyzed before, Christine saw a receptacle for her mother's disapproval, it is in allying with May against Heed that she thinks she reaches the ideal mother-daughter relationship. This blissful image of the mother and daughter is short-lived as the strain between the two adolescents will force Bill to send Christine away to boarding school, only to come back years later, when both Bill and May had died.

Therefore, through Heed and Bill's marriage all characters fulfill their ideal image, but nevertheless break their communal connections. Due to the approval of the adults, both children are forced to separate and break the small community in which they felt the comfort of being in a company of a fellow survivor. As L, the cook at the Cosey resort, would analyze

> If Heed and Christine had ideas about being friends and behaving like sisters just because a reckless old reprobate had a whim, May put a stop to them. If she couldn't swat the bottlefly, she could tear its wings, Raid-spray the air so it couldn't breathe – or turn her daughter into an ally.

> Pity. They were just little girls. In a year they would be bleeding – hard. Skin clear and death-defying. They had no business in that business. (136-137)

The original trauma and the rupture of the small community creates some traumatic behaviors that are perpetuated by the appearance of Junior and the persistent presence of May and Bill in the house – mostly Bill. Through the inhabitance of both Heed and Christine, now grown women, within the walls of One Monarch Street and under the strict surveillance of Bill's portrait over Heed's bed, Heed and Christine perpetuate the animosity bestowed onto them by their supposed protectors. They repeat the same traumatic behavior, as they are in a state of stagnation within the walls of the house until Junior appears, disrupting their conducts.

As a foreigner, Junior acts as a catalyst for breaking the patterns established by the original traumatic separation of the two women. With a past of rejection, exclusion from her own family, and survivor of sexual violence, Junior arrives to the house hired by Heed to work as her secretary and amanuensis for her memoir. However, Junior becomes infatuated with the phantasmagorical presence of Bill Cosey – whom she will baptize as her "Good Man" (116). Junior will transfer her idealized notions of fatherhood and sexual virility to the persona she creates in the patriarch of the Cosey clan. Not only does his portrait above Heed's bed sexually arise her, but she also searches for his approval and protection.

> She stroked ties and shirts in the closet; smelled his shoes; rubbed his cheek on the sleeve of his seersucker jacket. Then, finding a stack of undershorts, she took off the red suit, stepped into the shorts, and lay on the sofa. His happiness was unmistakable. So was his relief at having her there, handling his things and enjoying herself in front of him. (119)

While Junior's pathological behavior and obsession are reminiscent of the previous behaviors of Heed and Christine, it will force them to exit the house and with it

their mutual animosity. By including the new element in the house, Junior, and by her absorbing the patriarchal presence, the grown women feel the urge to claim Bill's inheritance as their own. Therefore, they both leave the house in order to find the original last will and testament of Bill Cosey at the Cosey resort – or, in its absence, forge one.

Leaving the house is both a physical and a psychological action for Heed and Christine. Not only are they exiting their home but they are also breaking away from a plethora of pathological and traumatic behaviors inherited from their direct ancestors, and separating themselves from the intoxicating phantasm of Bill. However, this separation is not complete until they both fall down through the floor of the Cosey resort, leaving one of them injured and about to die. It is then that they can fully realize their errors, ushered by the substitution of Bill's presence by that of L, the resort's cook.

> Contrasting Cosey who shatters his women and silences his mansion, L presents a groove, a traumatic memory of maternal silence, which incites the women into wrestling with each other. Eventually, as a maternal African trickster, L, through her signifying, turns a discourse of the cultural trauma of slavery into a source of individual healing through communal responsibility. (Lei 100)

While the presence of May and Bill acts as the patriarchal force in the community, disrupting the blissful group established by the little girls, L acts as a matriarchal force that helps initiate the healing of the community. In fact, when they enter the abandoned Cosey resort, it is Junior – who will later abandon Christine and Heed to their fate – that smells "baking bread, something with cinnamon. 'You smell something?' she asks. […] Heed sniffs. 'Smells like L,' she says" (175). By acknowledging the presence of the maternal, Heed can distance herself from the intoxicating presence of Bill, a separation that will later be broadened by the fatal accident in which her and

Christine will be involved and which will result in one of their deaths. It is at that point that both women can re-establish their broken community through the confession of their past mistakes.

Even if L's presence is felt throughout the novel, it is only at the end that the main characters, and the reader, are able to recognize her actions in the narration. It is impossible for the main characters to perceive it as the phantom of the patriarch is omnipresent in their everyday lives, forcing them to do his bidding and perpetuate their pathological hatred. The reader recognizes the presence of L formally through the novel as they realize that the second narrator, set apart from the first one by the use of italics, is in fact L sharing her thoughts with the reader. It is L that first tells the reader about the separation of both girls and what the title refers to, the love between these two individuals.

> Heed and Christine were the kind of children who can't take back love, or park it. When that's the case, separation cuts to the bone. And if the breakup is plundered, too, squeezed for a glimpse of blood, shed for the child's own good, then it can ruin a mind. And if, on top of that, they are made to hate each other, it can kill a life way before it tries to live. I blame May for the hate she put in them, but I have to fault Mr. Cosey for the theft. (199-200)

Through her presence, L forces Christine and Heed to accept their mistakes and re-constitute their trust and camaraderie. Even if it is too late for one of them, they can finally recognize their misconceptions about one another as Christine shares with Heed that "[h]ating you was the only thing my mother liked about me" while Heed affirms that her marriage was because "I wanted to be with you. Married to him, I thought it would be" (193).

In conclusion, the existence of the foreign element for Christine and Heed has a dual nature. While at first it helps them both create a community through the acceptance of one another's traumatic backgrounds, it will also be the downfall of the community as the paternal/patriarchal forces of Christine's family will act upon it in order to break it. Through this interference, these patriarchal forces – Bill and May – will establish a traumatic behavior that will set the individuals to hate one another. However, it will be the presence of a second foreign element – Junior – that will force them to reconfigure their demeanors and accidentally make them re-connect by including a non-judgmental maternal/matriarchal presence, L, in their relationship.

4.2. Bewaring the furrow of their brow: racial sin, utopia and community in *Paradise*

Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones
in their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,
and start their silent swinging, one by one.
black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
and there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,
his belly close to ground. I see the blade,
blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.
Jean Toomer. *Cane.* (7)

Disasters, be them natural or otherwise, are part of the human experience. The unknown, unwelcomed, unforeseen event rattles the foundation of the person's belief system and causes a profound change in them, a crisis that shifts either the world around them or their own view of the world. In a communal sense, these crises can either dismantle or reinforce a community. The traumatic results that these catastrophes string along, according to Kai Erikson's analysis, have "both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back" (186). However, in the aftermath of such calamities communities tend to do one of two things: either try to come back to the community setting prior to the incident or to establish a new basis for the creation of a new community.

The experience of survival in the face of unsettling odds has been reflected in a myriad of myths and literary works. In fact one of the foundational books of Western civilization, the Bible, contemplates such shuttering events in more than one occasion through different myths – more specifically for this study, in the books of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. Stories like the tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, or Noah's Ark, to name but a few, meditate upon the continuity or rupture of the community when natural – or godly – events occur.

Catastrophes and the way they mold human behavior are such intrinsic parts of life that it is not surprising that the Bible should open with one of such myths. The first of them is related in the Genesis, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, and describes the eviction from the ideal locus – in this case, brought upon by the fault or sin of the inhabitants of Paradise. Even with the specific prohibition of not eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve, tempted by the Serpent, decides not to adhere to the norms set by God and takes a bite from the proverbial fruit, later on tempting Adam to imitate her. Because of their sin, the human inhabitants of Eden are expelled from it, condemned to wander the world in search of a home that would somehow resemble the blissful and easy life they once had protected by God.

In fact, this loss of Paradise inspired communities to traverse the Atlantic in order to recreate it. In the seventeenth century, a community of Puritans in England crossed the ocean escaping the persecution they were suffering in their own land and trying to create the "city upon a hill," a figure taken from the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus told his followers "you are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). The Puritans believed they were the chosen people who would create a utopia on Earth, an idea later on imbedded in the American imaginary within the concept of American exceptionalism. As Byers explains "the claim that

America is… unique, one of a (superior) kind… [with] a unique moral value and responsibility" (86). This same idea of American exceptionalism is translated in Morrison's novel *Paradise* (1998). Set in 1976, the year of the American Bicentennial, Morrison presents the readers with an African American utopia, analyzing how the idea of American exceptionalism can be transformed in the all-black town of Ruby and the limitations that such conception of "utopia" has. As Dalsgård affirms "[r]ather than a perfect paradise, Ruby ends up as a conservative, patriarchal, thoroughly racialized, an violent community" (233).

Sin and the search for a place to call home are also fundamental parts of another Biblical story, the escape from Egypt and the arrival to the land of Canaan by the people of Israel lead by Moses, as described in the books of Exodus and Numbers. After being liberated from the chains of Egyptian slavery by Moses and their frantic escape crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel were trying to reach the land of Canaan, promised to their forefather Abraham by Yahweh. Once they were close enough to Canaan, according to chapter 13 of the book of Numbers, Moses sent twelve spies ahead so they could examine the terrain and the people that were settled in the land. Ten of these spies saw the fortified cities that populated the land at that time and gave negative reports, not believing that the people of Israel could conquer this land. Disheartened by these news, the Israelites complained to Moses, declaring that they were in better conditions in Egypt, and attempted to go back. Because of their complaints and their lack of faith in the Lord, Yahweh punished them to wander in the desert forty years. Furthermore, none of the adult Israelites would live to see the land of Canaan and only their descendants would be allowed to settle in it – hence the forty-year hiatus in the desert. Moses himself would not live to experience the land of Canaan, only catching a glimpse of it from afar because of a similar distrust in God. During their walk through

the desert, the people of Israel were thirsty. Yahweh instructed Moses to talk to a rock and the rock will give them water. Instead, Moses knocked on the rock with his rod directly disobeying Yahweh's instructions. Because of his actions, he would not live to experience the Promised Land (Numbers 20: 8-12).

Three distinct concepts interact in these foundational myths: the Promised Land, sin, and exclusion. In the first of these myths, the pleasurable Garden of Eden was lost because of the sin of rebelling against God's rules – however menial they might have seemed. Due to their sin, Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise never to return. In the second one, the narrative is reversed as the people of Israel start already being excluded from the paradise they were promised, suffering slavery in the land of Egypt, and after being liberated by a messenger from God, they are finally free to go to their utopic locus, Canaan. However, due to their lack of faith the adult Israelites are further excluded, as they will never reach the land of milk and honey. Yet analyzing these foundational myths millennia after they were written, questions should be raised as to the veracity of this land of plenty and the creation of a society once they arrive to this land – after all, even if the people of Israel were able to maintain a certain number of their traditions under the rule of the Egyptians, they would have to construct means of government and control as described in the books of the Bible, Judges 1 and 2 and Kings 1 and 2, amongst others. Israelites did not know anything about this new land, just the stories passed from one generation to the next, not comprehending what to anticipate – some could even expect a return to an Eden-like place after their suffering in Egypt – so their distrust in the Lord would be more than understandable.

History, story, and myth are easily confounded and misrepresented in an ancient narrative such as the one from the Israelites. The usage of a national history – and to some extent, of a national identity – has been a common denominator for the

establishment of states and countries. It is not the aim of this dissertation to describe the intricate political and historical nuances of such complicated processes, though in some cases these grand national narratives have served as a justification for one culture to dominate over another for the sake of achieving – or creating – a promised land, a utopia. Such narratives can unite a community to reach a common goal or to exclude someone from said goal. Even if a utopia is considered a perfect place, it comes with consequences, as Toni Morrison analyzes in her 1997 novel *Paradise*. In this novel, the Nobel Prize winner describes an all-black community, Ruby, Oklahoma, a utopic place for the 'Eight-Rock' black population as no whites or outsiders ever disturbed their lives and no one has ever died, as the town's unofficial historian, Patricia 'Pat' Best Cato, reminds her daughter in her recollection of the town's history.

> I [Patricia] may as well tell you that except for you and K.D.'s mother, nobody in Ruby has ever died. Please note I said *in* Ruby and they are real proud about that believing they are blessed an all because after 1953 anybody who died did it in Europe or Korea or someplace outside this town. (199, italics in the original)

Therefore, Ruby is a blessed place for these 'Eight-Rock' black families, who thrived in this isolated community of Okhlahoma. The term 'Eight-Rock' is given by Pat Best Cato to those families after one of the deepest levels in a coal mine, indicating that their skin is of a bluish black (193). These nine founding families, with the Morgan twins as leaders, have controlled the community over the years through a master narrative of initial exclusion and creation of their utopia, a narrative imbeded in their history and repeated year after year in the school Nativity play. However, when this status quo is in danger of being corrupted by outside forces, how does a community react? What are the approaches a community has towards their own history? When does a myth become a history? And to what point does a history make a community? These are some of the

questions that this chapter will try to ellucidate with the help of Nietzsche's methodology on history and different theoretical approaches to the creation of a society.

History and memory are necessary and fundamental parts of the human experience. After all, it is because of memory that the human being has been able to recollect where to find nourishment, where to find shelter, who is an ally, or what type of foods can be poisonous. However, it is through history that these remembered but otherwise particular or individual facts are catalogued formally for a larger group of people to know. It is by this formal recollection that individuals can get to know their communal past, to study the way in which an ancient civilization lived or to try to understand why a particular behavior or tradition is maintained in a culture. Friedrich Nietzsche would assert in his treaty *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* written in 1874 that "we need it [history] for life and for action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and from action or for merely glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to serve history only insofar as it serves living" (24–27). Therefore, history should be a part of human life as long as it serves a purpose, so far as it pushes individuals to persue their passion, evolve, or carry on with their lives. However, the German philosopher also warns against the dangers that history might have for the person. Indeed, it is only when history serves the purpose of helping that humans should preserve it as he continues to assert that "[t]he human being, by contrast, braces himself against the large and ever-increasing burden of the past, which pushes him down or bows him over" (59).

For Nietzsche, then, history might have two possible outcomes. It can either aid the individual to understand the world around him or her or it can crush him or her due to the expectations it might create. And in here lies the danger of history, as it may aid the individual and, as a consequence, his or her communities to evolve into something

new or to break apart. In his approach to history, Nietzsche is in favor of selectively forgetting events that might stop individuals from fully realizing their potential, qualifying them as "unhistorical." For Nietzsche, the historical and the unhistorical are both important processes for the evolution of society, the unhistorical event being the one in which the past is not taken into account and just the present instance counts, forgetting – either temporally or indefinitely – what one should expect if one took the past into consideration. However, as it has been argued in this dissertation, forgetting or repressing a traumatic event can prove to be challenging and also dangerous.

Thus, history and the human experience are directly intertwined according to Nietzsche, it is part of the way of viewing the world and it can either fully realize or destroy the individual, as Nietzsche affirms that "[i]n three respects history belongs to the living person: it belongs to him as an active and striving person; it belongs to him as a person who preserves and reveres; it belongs to him as a suffering person in need of emancipation" (185-187). With these three respects in mind, Nietzsche devises three methods that correspond to ways the individual has of viewing history: monumental, antiquarian, and critical. These models are repeated throughout Morrison's *Paradise* in the way the citizens of Ruby and the inhabitants of Convent, located outside of the town itself, respond to their past and organize their community. This Convent in the outskirts of Ruby is populated by women that runaway from different traumatic situations, finding themselves as inhabitants of an abandoned convent.

According to Nietzsche, monumental individuals are not concerned with the causes but rather are focused on the effects of their actions. They are active people striving for greatness whose only worry is to live and leave great deeds behind, pushing the boundaries of their ambition without taking into account the historical minutia that the event they strive to change has, not analyzing it before they push themselves – and

their community in most cases – to modify their society. However, their transformative actions are only cosmetic, as they will not modify their way of living in a profound way but rather the milestones left by these individuals will serve only as "theatrical costume in which they pretend that their hated of the powerful and the great of their time is a fulfilling admiration for the strong and the great of past times" (Nietzsche 275-276).

Individuals such as the ones portrayed by Nietzsche's methodology are the founding fathers of Ruby, Oklahoma, Morrison's fictitious all-black town. In doing research for her book, according to Justine Tally, Morrison uncovered advertisements for all-black towns in the Mid-West that flourished in the Mid-West after the American Civil War in the nineteenth century up to the beginning of the twentieth century. One of these advertisements said "Come Prepared or Not At All" (Tally 15), what inspired the author to write about what would happen if a community of freed men were, indeed, *not* prepared.

> At one point there were 200 freedmen and their families who came to Fort Smith and tried to get into one of these Black towns and were turned away precisely because they didn't have anything. And I [Morrison] suppose, being a novelist, that I was interested in what on earth that must have felt like, to have come all that way and look at some other Black people who said you couldn't come in. (16)

In *Paradise*, the community that was not accepted, the founding fathers of Ruby, established a town out of the ashes of their previous one, Haven, the town their fathers had founded before them. From Haven they took a reminder, a monument to what their grandfathers had created and also in rememberance of those towns who did not accept them – what is known within the community as the "Disallowal," – the Oven. This oven that is situated at the core of the town and that previously had a pragmatic use as citizens of Haven gathered around it to cook and to socialize will shift its meaning in Ruby. It

will serve as a constant reminder of their humiliation, of being rejected from town to town, and of their survival as creators of a blessed community, economically thriving and where it is believed no one dies – at least within their borders. Moreover, the town's motto is engraved on it, passed on also from Haven.

> [t]he rule was set and lived a quietly throbbing life because it was never spoken of, except for the hint in words Zechariah forged for the Oven. More than a rule. A conundrum: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow," in which the "You" (understood), vocative case, was not a command to the believers but a threat to those who had disallowed them. (*Paradise* 195)

However, in 1976, the moment the novel takes place, the motto on the Oven is starting to vanish. The physical letters on the verb of such strong command are starting to disappear which leads to the disagreement between younger and older generations. For the older generations, the maxim is still clear and it commands the members of the community to be cautious and outsiders to notice the Lord's wrath. Yet, for younger generations it is not such a command but rather "Be the Furrow of His Brow." Hence, instead of urging the citizens of the town to remain passive in terror in case they would offend the deity, this new motto would push them out of their comfort and into a more active community, abandoning the protection of their home and opening up to the world. The discrepancy between the two possible maxims – and the disagreement between the older generation and the younger one – leads to the second method of viewing history according to Nietzsche: the antiquarian method.

The antiquarian approach, and the followers of such method, is dedicated to preserving and revering the past. While people attuned with the monumental method were active individuals striving to leave their mark on history, antiquarians are consumed by preserving their past and where they come from, which stops them from progressing.

Even though both of these methods try to protect the status quo, the monumental one pushes the individuals to leave their mark for future generations even if said mark is just superficial. However the antiquarian individual's only concern is for everything to stay the same, afraid that some of the changes he or she might produce in the community might go further than changing it superficially. As Nietzsche explains

> [w]hen the sense of a people is hardened like this, when history serves the life of the past in such a way that it buries further living, especially higher living, when the historical sense no longer conserves life, but mummifies it, then the tree dies unnaturally, from the top gradually down to the roots, and at last even the roots are generally destroyed. (326-328)

One could understand from that quote when applied to Morrison's work that the men of Ruby are entrapped between these two ways of looking at history. On the one hand, the generation that founded the town was one of scorned individuals but that nevertheless wanted to leave their mark on the world, creating a new haven for their community where no one could reject them. On the other hand, the current men inhabiting such utopic town resist any change, as the memory of their father's achievements stops them from creating new models of living. After all, "[a]ntiquarian history knows only how to preserve life, not how to generate it" (335). Therefore, the current citizens of Ruby are static towards history, trying to remain passive in an ever-changing world that threatens to break their bliss. Like Sarah Appleton Aguiar explains

> [t]he citizens of Ruby have re-created Eden to their own specifications; and like the original death-less Eden, nobody dies in Ruby. Yet nobody "lives" in Ruby either, as the town exists within the isolated parameters of its citizens' powerfully executed will. By allowing no outside encroachment, Ruby remains dead to change. (513)

In this conflict between these two Nietzschean methods of viewing history, some of the citizens of Ruby are entrapped: the women and the young people of Ruby.

The community lives under the patriarchy of the founding families and the crushing history they share, instilling in their younger generations how, because of the sin of being poor, they were not accepted anywhere until they created this "city upon a hill" for the African American individual. The patriarchal power over the community is portrayed during the negotiation between the Fleetwoods and the Morgans – the two most prominent families of Ruby – when they discuss the future of their kids once Arnette Fleetwood is pregnant with K.D. Morgan's child. As Rob Davidson puts it

> The exchange in the Fleetwood house exemplifies how things work in Ruby: the town elders negotiate on behalf of the younger men and all the women. Deals are cut in the back room, and a blind eye is turned toward unfortunate accidents like Arnette's pregnancy. Above all else, the 8-rocks want to preserve the town's stability, and, of all the elders, the Morgans are most interested in preserving the status quo. (357–358)

Therefore, the younger generation, the sons and daughters of the antiquarian generation, has to conform to the laws dictated by their parents. This same pattern is repeated with the women of Ruby with their fathers and husbands. It should be pointed out that during the description of the methods of viewing history in this chapter, there was no mention of the women of Ruby. This is because the women in town are not allowed to have a vision of history other than the one provided by the official historiography indoctrinated at school and repeated every year on the Christmas school play, in which the biblical story conjoins the town's history of rejection and search for a new land. However, one of the women, Pat Best Cato, decides to research the history of the town in order to pass it on to her daughter. It is through her research that she manages to understand the tools the patriarchs have used in order to control the town and how they have subdued the rest of the citizens of Ruby.

> This time the clarity was clear: for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves. Serious enough that their daughters would be shunned as brides; their sons chosen last; that colored men would be embarrassed to be seen socially with their sisters. (Morrison, *Paradise* 194)

Even though according to the official history, their community is a utopia for the African American individual, in reality there is still racism and male chauvinism in the way the patriarchs govern the town. Individuals who do not conform to the racial models of the founding fathers – that is, the "8-rock" paradigm explained before – are observed as lesser than their darker counterparts. Therefore, even though they defend a non-racist community officially, they still imitate the distorted ideas that other societies have. And this pattern is repeated as the patriarchs reject to question their own history.

It is life and the idea of progress that threatens the town of Ruby when the latest inhabitants of the Convent, women who have suffered different traumatic experiences in their past, make their presence known, and with them the third of Nietzsche's methods of viewing history: the critical method. The individuals who identify with this approach are those who have suffered in the past and therefore are in dire need of emancipation from it. Instead of finding ways of trying to perpetuate the past by performing grandiose feats or securing it from ever being corrupted, these individuals hold on to their past but stop it from halting their lives, being able to analyze it and objectively assessing the facts. As Nietzsche explains "[i]n order to be able to live, a person must have the power and from time to time use it to break a past and to dissolve it. He manages to do this by dragging the past before the court of justice, investigating it meticulously, and finally condemning it" (344-345). This method closely resembles other

criteria enumerated throughout this dissertation as a way to work through trauma by individuals who have endured such experiences, like Freud's theory around traumatic repetition and working through.

The women in the Convent personify this critical method of looking at history. The Convent situated in the outskirts of Ruby has suffered various changes throughout its own history. Built as a mansion / playhouse by an embezzler trying to escape prosecution from the North, it was later transformed into a boarding school for Native American girls by a benefactress who gave it to the Catholic nuns. The nuns hid away the promiscuous past of the mansion that will later be discovered by the current tenants of the Convent. The pornographic ornaments that populate the house included "nipple-tipped doorknobs," "brass male genitalia that had been ripped from sinks and tubs," and "alabaster vaginas"(Morrison, *Paradise* 72). Through their labor, nuns had to

> bring God and language to natives who were assumed to have neither; to alter their diets, their clothes, their minds; to help them despise everything that had once made their lives worthwhile and to offer them instead the privilege of knowing the one and only God and a chance, thereby, for redemption. (227)

The labor of the women in the Convent has changed from the time the nuns ran it. While the nuns work was to erase the Native American girls' past, giving them a completely new life, the current inhabitants of the Convent are outsiders trying to run away from their traumatic past. However, instead of forgetting it, they are able to objectively analyze their experiences in order to carry on with their lives. Helped by Consolata – also known as Connie, the leader of the women, brought by one of the nuns as a girl and educated with the Native American girls, the women find a shelter in the Convent from the various experiences, some of them traumatic, they carry with them: death of children in the case of Mavis, racial violence suffered by Gigi, abandonment

endured by Seneca, or betrayal experienced by Pallas. By embracing their history, taking control over it and observing it, they are able to work through these traumas after a scene in which the women are driven to the basement by Consolata, get naked and are instructed to observe their naked bodies and celebrate their scars. It is after being able to deconstruct and judge their history that, as the narrator says, a person observing the women would "realize what was missing: unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted. Or hunted either, she might have added. But there she would have been wrong" (266). The convent, that space that was first created by the white man in order to escape society and give into sexual debauchery, has become a place of female healing, as Cynthia Dobbs describes.

> This masculinist mansion of iniquity, turned Convent, then transformed into true haven for the utopian town's female castoffs and scapegoats, becomes a palimpsest of failed white and black patriarchal designs. What begins as a white male design for violent self-protection and objectified sexuality is temporarily transformed by the diverse women who inhabit the space into a haven from the excesses of black patriarchy. (113)

Out of Nietzsche's three methods of analyzing history, the critical method is in complete opposition with the monumental and antiquarian approaches. While the monumental and antiquarian try to carry on with the past and tradition without questioning the reasons behind such past, the critical method tries to deconstruct it in order to find value or discard what is useless or fallacious. And, as analyzed before, the women and younger generations of Ruby are lost in between both positions, grounded between the conservative views of their elders and the revolutionary ways of the Convent women. The elders of Ruby, fearing that the clutch they had over the community is becoming less tight, are pushed to annihilate the potential threat to their status quo by murdering the women from the Convent. As Davidson puts it "the 8-rock men – who

intimidate and threaten their own townsfolk into submission – execute the Convent women not for moral reasons but as a show of strength" (368).

In the violence found in the end of the women living in the Convent not only are two opposite views of history in conflict, but also two ways of understanding society as a whole. Following Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts, Grasset differentiates between the concepts of *majority* and *minority*. However, these concepts should not be confused with the number of people who uphold a value but rather the majority would be "that what generates and determines a pattern […] by which each particular case will be valued" (Grasset 55, my translation). The number of people who support said archetypes is important to understand Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of majority and minority as they do not rely on the total of persons but rather majority entails a "constructed and established standard […] supposed to serve the community in as much as it orders and determines a constant" (55, my translation). In contrast to said majority, the minority encompasses the heterodox and creative, that which is individualistic instead of communal and which pushes the community towards its potential, instead of relying on pre-established values.

While through Grasset's analysis the values upheld by the minority represent the progressive potential towards which the community should strive, the inhabitants of Ruby in Morrison's novel do not hold this position. The rift opened by the argument between generations by the motto on the walls of the Oven represents a menace to the utopic society that the patriarchs of Ruby believe was entrusted to them by their forefathers and they must protect. The Oven becomes the biblical Tree of Knowledge where the elders are transformed into Adam, the ones who want to stick to the given rules, while the younger generations are Eve, the temptation, the desire for a change. However, the equivalent of this original sin in this story does not have a negative

connotation, as even though the initial innocence of the community will vanish with the loss of formal rules, progress will be gained by breaking away from the artificial utopia / Eden.

The idea of utopia is deeply embedded in the tradition of the United States as a country. The idea of the United States as the New Jerusalem is one of the running themes throughout American culture, passed on from the Puritans escaping from religious prosecution to the current inhabitants of the land. In fact, was previously explored in this dissertation when analyzing the journey of Frank Money in *Home*, trying to create a perfect home. However, utopic places such as Eden, Arcadia, Ruby, and others, perfect locations of bliss, innocence and happiness, are rigidly structured, with incomprehensible rules that one must stick to in order to remain in such paradise. Rules that are upheld by the idea of majority as a helpful standard that confines the minority. Ruby becomes a carbon copy of these fictitious idyllic locus through the rules passed on from the elders.

> By juxtaposing Ruby, an all-black town in rural Oklahoma rigidly structured along the lines of color, gender, and age with a group of abused women who take refuge in the nearby Convent, Morrison criticizes a notion of utopian perfection that is predicated on purity and exclusion and envisions a better place, an alternative community characterized by negotiation rather than negation. (Harz 1)

It is in fact through negation and rejection that Ruby, the utopic locus, is built. As Toni Morrison herself affirmed when asked about the purpose behind her novel in an interview in 1998 "[a]ll paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in" (Morrison). Instead of the creation of a place around the inclusion of other types of thought, a place where the minority – following the concepts previously explained– could rule, utopias are therefore built around a fixed set of formal

rules that adhere to the majority and where the minority would be not only excluded but prosecuted.

The creation of a utopic community by ways of exclusion – creating a divide between "us" and "them" – is one of the consequences of the majority concept explained earlier, what Jacques Rancière calls the ethical community. Said community resembles the above-mentioned concept of majority in so that it tries to give order to a heterodox group of people. Yet instead of doing so through a set of formal norms that do not reflect the interests of the larger community, Rancière's model tries to achieve this order through a consensus as it "is the reduction of these different ways of being the 'people' into a single one, one that is identical with the counting of the population and of its parts" (6).

The creation of the ethical community through the homogenization of a group of individuals into a single unit has nevertheless its dangers. Through this unification, elements of the community that do not adhere – or do not want to adhere – to this uniformity are excluded by the society. Furthermore, any outsider who might want to come into the community will be rejected, as he or she was not one of the original elements that inspired the union. As Rancière continues

> [t]he excluded, therefore, has no status in the structuration of the community. On the one hand, he or she is simply the one who accidentally falls outside the great equality of all: the sick, the retarded or the forsaken to whom the community must stretch its hand in order to re- establish the 'social bond'. On the other, he or she becomes the radical other, the one who is separated from the community for the simple fact that he or she is alien to it, that he or she doesn't share the identity that binds each to all, and that he or she threatens the community in each of us. (Rancière 7)

Even though Rancière affirms that the excluded "has no status in the structuration of the community," they are fundamental for the creation of a utopic community. It is by creating an antagonistic dichotomy, us against them, that the community can re-affirm its identity. In the biblical examples, Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden because they did not adhere to the norms given to them. The people of Israel that were not able to enter the Promised Land also committed the sin of not having faith in Yahweh. Through this dichotomy the Chosen people can both re-affirm their identity and use the excluded as a cautionary tale for future generations.

Because they have suffered exclusion from other dwellings, the founding fathers of Ruby have engraved this type of exclusionary community in their minds. Instead of refusing the models that dismissed them because they were "not prepared" they perpetuated such design through the preservation of the traumatic memory. First, they needed to create a safe space where no alien force could disturb them and that is why they chose an isolated location, far from any other city center. As Morrison affirmed in her interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth for PBS,

> [t]he isolation, the separateness, is always a part of any utopia. And it was my meditation, if you will, and interrogation of the whole idea of paradise, the safe space, the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But, in addition to that, it's based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in. (Morrison)

Secondly, the founding fathers of Ruby had set up the tools by which said memory would be preserved. As has already been analyzed in this chapter, through the explanation of Nietzsche's monumental method – even more so by literally building a monument to remind future generations – and by the current adult generation of Ruby adhering to the antiquarian method, preserving their traumatic past, they were able to

persevere in the dream of this deathless utopia. In order to engrave the details of their rejection, they created a myth around it, first by codifying it – the Disallowal – and secondly by embellishing some of the details around it. In fact, by misremembering the exact details and demonizing the individuals involved in the Disallowal, the founding fathers of Ruby wanted to enlarge the divide between the citizens of Ruby and the rest of the world, separating themselves from history and bringing themselves closer to what story or fable would be. Therefore, the founding fathers of Ruby use their embellished story as a tool to control future generations.

> Morrison signals the limitations of converting memory into story and into history in her two versions of the "Disallowal;" memory is reconstructed and the story is modified to meet the need of comprehending the vast disillusion of being denied admission to all-black towns in Oklahoma. (Tally 38)

By creating this utopia, not only are the citizens of Ruby preserving their ancestors' past feat but also their resentment. And in order to continue their utopic way of life, they have to perpetuate certain behaviors and rules passed on from their ancestors, like patriarchy and fear of an all-knowing God with their motto "Beware the Furrow of His Brow". The position of this slogan on the town's Oven is fundamental as the founding fathers put it in the middle of Ruby, where the women once cooked and where the young gathered. Therefore, the two sectors of the community that are more prompt to rebel against the oppressing and misogynistic practices are reminded daily of their patriarchal society and their rules. As Morrison affirmed in her interview with PBS "Ruby has the characteristics, the features of the Old Testament. It's patriarchal. The men are very protective of *their* women, very concerned about their role as leaders" (Morrison, italics mine).

By being over-protected by their husbands and fathers, the women in Ruby have also given up their own opinion. Even though there are characters like Pat Best Cato who try to research and understand the rules behind the protective and conservative surface, most women "have given up their voice, and silence has been subtly if not violently imposed" (Tally 44). Not only that, but also through the marriage and protection by the men of the town, the women of Ruby lose their individuality as they are not recorded in any historical account by their last name but only by their first name. It is after their marriage and therefore by accepting the town's rules that they can gain an identity, as Pat Cato discovers in the novel.

> Who were these women who, like her mother, had only one name? Celeste, Olive, Sorrow, Ivlin, Pansy. Who were these women with generalized last names? Brown, Smith, Rivers, Stone, Jones. Women whose identity rested on the men they married – if marriage applied: a Morgan, a Flood, a Blackhorse, a Poole, a Fleetwood. (Morrison, *Paradise* 187–188)

Through the marriage with a member of the community, the women become members themselves. As Tally points out "[i]n earlier Morrison novels, the act of naming was used as African American resistance to white inscription […]; in *Paradise* the imposition of names is exercised as one more manifestation of male power" (Tally 44). What was a tool of repression used by the white man on the African American population in general becomes a tool of oppression towards black women by the black male in order to perpetuate the patriarchal utopia.

The women in the Convent escape such patriarchal conventions and protections. They have suffered under the dominance of men and are finally in a space of freedom in which they can finally escape society's impositions. By analyzing their pasts and one another, they are able to accept every aspect of this past and escape the impositions of such patriarchal society, creating an inclusive utopia for women. This

ideal community set in the Convent, women of all races are welcome as the first sentence of the novel reveals "[t]hey shot the white first" (Morrison, *Paradise* 3). In contrast with Ruby, the Convent breaks with the race limitations that instead of making the town progress, damn them to a complete stagnation.

Throughout the history of both spaces, Ruby and the Convent, the distance between them has been a safeguard amongst each other. This gap kept the citizens of Ruby free from the progressive ideas the women had and the women safe from being subject to the rules of the community of Ruby. Moreover, the interactions between them were amicable in principle: the women sold produce to the town's folk, even had sexual affairs with them, and both the women and the citizens of Ruby kept their peace, not interfering in each other's business. It is with the arrival of the new Reverend Misner and the progressive ideas that he defends to the younger generation of Ruby that the conflict with the inhabitants of the Convent starts. With Reverend Misner, an outsider, come the ideas of the Civil Rights movement that had not permeated into the community before[43]. As was stated before, the climax of said conflict between older and younger generations was the argument around the meaning of the town's motto. As an outsider, Misner observes how the utopic elements of the town have made for beautiful individuals as he admits that "[a]ll of them were handsome, some exceptionally so. Except for three or four, they were coal black, athletic, with noncommittal eyes" (Morrison, *Paradise* 160). As the town's reverend, he holds meetings with the younger generation, helping them understand their feelings against the fixed rules of Ruby and also representing them when the confrontation between the older and the younger generation escalates. But

[43] The African American Civil Rights movement mainly took place during the fifties and the sixties while Morrison's novel takes place in 1976. However, during the following decades the fight to maintain the rights that were gained was continued by organizations such as NAACP or CORE.

nevertheless, the dispute between the progressive ideas and the conservative ones surfaces all through his lessons, creating an unbalanced atmosphere around town.

> [T]he resistance he'd found in Ruby was wearing him out. More and more his students were being chastised about the beliefs he helped instill. Now Pat Best—with whom he'd taught Negro History every Thursday afternoon—was chipping away at his Bible class, confusing self-respect for arrogance, preparedness for disobedience. Did she think education was knowing just enough to get a job? She didn't seem to trust these Ruby hardheads with the future any more than he did, but neither did she encourage change. Negro history and lists of old-time achievements were enough for her but not for this generation. Somebody had to talk to them, and somebody had to listen to them. (209)

It is because of such uneasiness around the town that the older generation decides to kill the inhabitants of the Convent. As they fear they are losing control over the citizens of Ruby, losing control over the history of the town and the norms they inherited from their forefathers. In the conflict between maintaining the status quo or progressing into something new, they are inclined to preserve their way of living. And they do so by murdering the uncomfortable outsiders. Even though the women have nothing to do with the turmoil around town, it is because they are outsiders in an isolated location, runaways from their previous lives whom no one would search for, that they are the perfect target for such demonstration of power as a way to control the citizens of Ruby with fear. As Davidson remarks "the 8-rock men – who intimidate and threaten their own townsfolk into submission – execute the Convent women not for moral reasons but as a show of strength" (368).

Even if no formal justice falls upon them, through their actions another punishment hits the community: the loss of innocence. Instead of fortifying the community, by feverishly protecting their way of live, by opposing progress and showing

their strength through the murder of innocents, the decay of the utopia is upon Ruby. While the community was very proud of being blessed, as death had never occurred in their town, after the events at the Convent, a woman from Ruby dies. This marks the beginning of the end for such a utopic community where the past was not observed and judged but rather revered and unquestioned. It is because of this that the community cannot progress and it has to therefore, come to an end.

4.3. Conclusion

The creation of a community is a complicated process as many different elements have to be shared for individuals to join. Religion, race, or language are some of these but however history and trauma must be also taken into account, more so when talking about the African American experience. After being ripped apart from their land, the traumatic experience and their history on the American shores united them.

As shown by the examples given in Morrison's novels, the personal or communal history that the black individual possesses acts as conduit for either uniting a community or dissolving it. It is by invoking their traumatic historical past that some individuals can either bond, as was the initial and final case of the main characters in *Love*, or their past can imprison them, as the state of stagnation in which the citizens of Ruby were in *Paradise*. In the case of Heed and Christine in *Love*, being rejected by their own families – in Heed's case a physical rejection, in Christine's case a psychological one, – pushes them together as they work as distorted self-images of one another. These images are the ideal ego to aspire for Heed or a place to deposit self-hatred in the case of Christine. For the citizens of Ruby, the experience of being rejected by other communities cements the bond between them and also fixes their customs, securing a utopic patriarchal society that apparently thrives while the other populations crumble around them.

The interaction of the individuals from inside or outside the community with the historical events around them can reinforce the role of a sector of tyrants in a community or make the community stronger. By analyzing the communities described by Morrison and using the different types of methods for understanding history according to Nietzsche – monumental, antiquarian, and critical – and the way they interact with the concept of foreigner explained by Kristeva, progress heralded by an outsider is a threat to the status quo. In fact, progress will prove to be fatal for the community if it does not accept and adapt. In some cases due to the dominance of the majority concept, as explained by Grasset, progress will be met with violence, as the foreigner might act as a catalyst for change in the status quo. In return, said violence will bring upon the initial fissure of the group that will later prove to be final. In the case of *Love*, the violent dissolution of the community created by Heed and Christine will be achieved by the marriage between Heed and Christine's grandfather, which causes not only the end of the family's success but also psychologically hurts the image that the little girls had of themselves and one another. As for the patriarchs of Ruby in *Paradise*, this change will be brought upon by the interaction of the new reverend with the younger generation of the community, who will question the closely controlled society in which they live. Because of their questioning, the older generation will resort to violence against the outsiders, the women of the Convent, in order to try to restore the status quo.

The foreigner or outsider satisfies two distinct roles, as it either works as a catalyst for change or as a scapegoat for the community's faults. As a catalyst for change, the outsider gives an unbiased view of the stagnation of the community, bringing with him or her the key for progress. However, said progress may bring upon the end of the status quo, what is deemed as a threat to the leaders of the community though welcomed by other members. It is because of these new comers that the values and habits upheld

by the community are analyzed and criticized, what could signify change. Junior in *Love* and Reverend Misner in *Paradise* act as these foreign elements as they bring into question the values around them and by their presence, breaking the previously accepted establishment.

In the second of these roles, the foreigner acts as the vessel for the community's evils, as the psychological victim of their own shortcomings. As such, they must be sacrificed in order for society to continue. Heed and the Convent women act as the receptacle of the faults of Christine and the patriarchs of Ruby, respectively. As they are not members of the community, their loss is deemed inconsequential by the aggressors, who consider said sacrifice necessary. However, by doing so, they are shedding a light on the faults of the community as a whole.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The object of this dissertation has been to examine and analyze categories and concepts that, due to their nature, are traditionally regarded as antithetical. Opposing units such as body and mind, house and community, the private and the public – all under the semiotic influence of the concept of 'race' – emerge within dichotomies that cannot but operate upon social and cultural tension. However, through the type of discursive dialogue established in Morrison's work, such antinomies can be understood as necessary aspects that articulate and complement the American community – and, more specifically, the African American community, – where they are to be cultivated. This study has aimed to expose not only the richness of Morrison's narrative but also how the tensions between these elements function both in her novels and in mainstream – white – society.

By opening each of the chapters with either a myth or a recollection of a historical event, this dissertation has attempted to move from a broader point of view to a more specific perspective. Part 1 observed how the physical appearance of the individual can embody either present or past traumas. On the one hand, the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* revealed how social pressures and misconceptions revolving around superficial ideals of beauty result in the victimization of community members when such values are projected onto collectivities that cannot reach such goals. In the novel, such victim is none other than the weak and vulnerable Pecola. Applying Lacan's theories on projection and the gaze, this chapter aimed to trace how a community dominated by a larger group fatalistically redirects its own suffering, to the point that it ends up endangering its own people. Unsurprisingly, such ominous prospects tend to befall upon the most defenseless, innocent members. In the case of *Beloved*, on the other hand, the scars covering Sethe's body not only manage to colonize and disturb her everyday life – their presence attest to how victims of abuse become 'paralyzed' within their own individuality, unable to evolve unless the past is conjured and confronted. In the case of Sethe, such healing can only be achieved with the aid of the community. Neither of said approaches to these novels are new to the field. In her "Afterword," to *The Bluest Eye,* Morrison herself addressed the construction of Pecola as the scapegoat for a community that cannot cope with the frustration and anguish generated by unreachable ideals, and thus becomes a slave to its own psychological and sociological traumas. In fact, it is Morrison who reveals the source of her inspiration to have been a little girl, a classmate of hers who longed and prayed for blue eyes. In the case of *Beloved*, scholars have carried out Freudian influenced readings and other approaches associated to trauma theory, as the traumatic past is repeated in the space of 124 Bluestone Road. This dissertation has attempted to build on and strengthen previous scholarship by bringing other characters of the novels into the discussion and the theoretical developments. In this sense, Cholly

and Pauline's own stigmas and their response to and interaction with white social misconceptions about beauty standards reveal themselves to be inadequate, as they are unable to provide young Pecola with the necessary psychological tools to shape a strong and resilient identity. For Sethe, it is only with the aid of her daughter Denver and her mother-in-law Baby Suggs that she can acknowledge the physical and psychological scars in her body. By exiting the traumatic space of the house, they are able to work through the traumas illustrated in Sethe's skin and push her towards healing.

Part 2 shifted the focus from the body of the individual onto the spaces he or she inhabits. In doing so, this section analyzed the mythical connotations of the geography of the United States and the idea of the journey back home as an impossibility for the characters in *Home*. As a methodological tool, this analysis doubly employed Robert Tally's conceptualization of space and Thoreau's views on space and place to examine how their interaction with the psychological traumas the individual might possess is construed. By facing and working through the specific trauma, the space becomes a familiar place. These same methods are applied to the conceptualization and crafting of the City and the house in *Jazz*, where the Traces live in a space filled up by cracks – both physical and psychological – that recreate traumatic experiences. This chapter examined the text through the lens of Derrida's concept of trace – an antecedent to Morrison's concept of 'rememory' – to evaluate how the characters of Alice and Felice aid in the transformation of space into place. It is only through the presence of characters that are peripheral to Joe and Violet that the traumatic memory can be overcome.

The conceptualizations of space and trace carried out by Tally and Derrida, respectively, open up new lines of research on space. As Tally reflects, the last few decades of literary criticism have led to the "spatial turn" in postmodernism (3) and thus

literature is to be conceived as a geographical map: "[t]o draw a map is to tell a story, in many ways, and vice versa" (4), he explains. Meanwhile, Phillip Page's description of Derrida's notion of 'the trace' and his subsquent approach to the derridarian concept of the (non)existant through analyses of characters such as Wild provide new and alternative postmodern interpretations of Morrison's work, whereupon race is to be embedded within other philosophical concerns such as the language of the individual.

Nonetheless, in this part of the dissertation, the examination of how, under the influence of trauma, spaces evolve into places has been more closely related to the field of psychoanalysis. Hence the resurgence of the Freudian concepts surrounding the idea of the uncanny (in the original sense of *unheimlich*). It is in fact by psychologically reclaiming the spaces of trauma that the individual is able to populate a more familiar and safer environment, that of a home. Frank Money explores the American geography in *Home* and returns to the scenes of his childhood dwelling and to his memories of the Korean War – it is upon such forms of return that place comes to occupy what was previously one space. Similarly, in *Jazz*, it is through the acknowledgement of past traumas that both Joe and Violet can resurrect as subjects and turn their house into a home.

Having reviewed and examined the role of the body and the role of place and space, Part 3 turned its focus on the mind. Even though the body – as suggested in Part 1, – is the locus of the traumatic, and the vivid, physical reminder of the past, an analysis of the mind within these contexts of trauma theory allowed to challenge and dismantle some of the fallacies surrounding the cultural constructs of race and gender. By revisiting and retelling canonical narratives – such as in *Desdemona* – or by rearticulating former techniques such as that of the slave narratives – such as in the case of *A Mercy*, – these chapters dissected the different historical misgivings that affected women and the

African American community. This enterprise demanded a revision of the historical material associated to racial misconceptions that was operative around the time of creation of the Morrison's source materials, *Othello* in the case of Morrison's *Desdemona* and slave narratives in the case of *A Mercy*, to further analyse the creation of identity of these individuals, their repressed emotions and thoughts, in a time in which they were not recognized as equal to either men or white society as a whole.

Judith Butler's research on the individual within society and on gender and racial constructs – the focus of her seminal work *Gender Trouble* – is currently being examined within the conceptual implications of biopolitics. In fact, Foucault's concepts of the shift of the right of death and the power over life could be an interesting approach to the life of African American slaves and how society conceptualized them. With this theory included in his book *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction* (1984) the French thinker differentiates between how before the seventeenth century the sovereign had absolute power and control over the life of his vassals and how from that century on it was the individual who claimed power over his or her own death. Furthermore, Gabriel Giorgi's differentiation between the person and the animal – structured through a process whereupon he searches for the animal in the person and viceversa – could be another theoretical framework through which to further the research on the matters depicted in this part of the dissertation. In Giorgi's view, as he explains in *Formas comunes. Animalidad, cultura, biopolitica* (2014) the 'animal' is an inclusive category that entails anything that can be killed without such killing being considered an act of homicide. The person, on the other hand, is someone who ownes his or her own body.

However, as this dissertation is deeply rooted within an African American critical tradition, a more historical approach to these matters proved to be a better fit for the hypothesis around the identity of the individuals who are to be recognized as equal

members to the rest of society. While current theories around the individual and the notion of 'the animal' are powerful tools through which to invest in a more general examination of humanity as a whole, this dissertation found it necessary to explain the deeply rooted misconceptions primarily affecting Africanness – for the figure of Othello - and African American identity, stereotypes and misconstructions that are appear both within and outside American borders. Moreover, by scrutinizing the misapprehensions surrounding blackness and the historical innacurate beliefs surrounding womanhood, the comparative study conjoining race, gender and the traumas they entail has led to related issues.

Finally, part 4 of this dissertation aimed to explain how individuals interact with one another when they (re)create a community after having suffered a trauma either as individuals or as a whole. To analyze the development of the two-person community recreated in *Love*, this chapter used Lacanian theories on the mirror stage of the individual alongside Kristeva's conception of the foreigner. That way, this dissertation aimed to identify the determinants involved in the association and alliance between trauma victims and to consider what such alliance represents for the larger community. Similarly, the analysis of *Paradise* sought to explain the power relations that are at play in the creation of a utopic society and the dissolution of such societal structure once a foreign element is introduced. The different methodological tools outlined by Nietzsche – monumental, anticuarian, and critical – along with Rancière's perspectives on the creation of the ethical community and the exclusion of hazardous elements from society proved instrumental.

A further look into the power relations outlined in this part of the dissertation – fundamentally the presence that the patriarch and patriarchy hold in *Love* and *Paradise*, respectively – could lead to further revealing research. Patriarchy should not solely be

considered from the point of view of how it victimizes the women in the novels; it should also be analyzed as a force pressuring the masculine psyche, a notion which has been hinted at but have not considered in depth. Masculinity studies in the line of the work carried out by experts such as Raewynn Connell or Michael Kimmel could, indeed, shed further light into the intricate gender relations manifested in these novels. However, given the section's hypothesizing around the creation and destruction of communities, a closer focus on the psychological factors has proven to be more beneficial. Both the creation of a community of survivors and the struggle between the foundation of a coherent group and the exclusionary practices that communities employ for the reinforcement of their own identity were necessary considerations when talking about the struggle of the African American community on American soil. Of relevance as well was the consideration of how the originally dominated community – in this case, the enslaved one, – tends to maintain some of the organizational structures set by slaveholders even centuries after emancipation. These conceptualizations of power and the repetition of traumatic behavior were useful when studying the creation of a community and their struggle in both *Love* and *Paradise*.

The discussions held in Part 1 of this dissertation turned to Morrison's own description of the Africanist persona in American literature and the imaginary. In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison tackles the differences between what she calls *literary whiteness* – that is, American literature in general – and *literary blackness* – that is, the individuals outside mainstream literature, the individual Other of the literary discourse. Through the figure of the Other in the American literary mythos, she wants to unveil the creation of what she terms the 'Africanist persona' in literature in order to explain how it worked as a tool to position the characters against the unknown and the

uncomprehensible, and also to elucidate how the incorporation of race within the canonical narrative – or the non-inclusion of race for that matter – codifies the way American authors write. In fact, as Morrison affirms in this book

> One likely reason for the paucity of critical material on this large and compelling subject [what American means] is that, in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. [...] It is complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body. (9–10)

Keeping with these lines of thought, this dissertation has tried to draw attention to the different struggles the African American community has endured within American soil. From slavery times to the Emancipation Act, from the Harlem Reinassance to the Civil Rights movement, this study has tried to identify some of the historical and communal conflicts that the African American individual has had to face, analyzing them from a multifocal and interdisciplinary point of view. Moreover, current events across the United States have uncovered the fallacy of a race-free America and a more race-conscious society has begun, one that replaces color blindness with color awareness, one that strives to unite regardless of the differences between its members. Organizations such as "Black Lives Matter," born out of incidents in 2013 in Florida, shed light on this issue. It is not just a question of politics – even though Morrison affirms that "[w]hen matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of a humanistic nostrum – or a dismissal mandated by the label 'political'" (Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 12) – but rather a question of acknowledging the divide. It is only after race and racial difference have been acknowledged and recognized that unity can come to be.

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