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Dismemberment in the Fiction of Toni Morrison

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Summary

Dismemberment in the Fiction of Toni Morrison investigates the motif of dismemberment in Morrison's fiction from multiple perspectives—historical, psychological and cultural. My first chapter on *A Mercy* focusses on the aspect of historical dismemberment in the context of colonialism and slavery. I look at the forced separation of African Americans from their families and motherland in terms of originary experiences of racism and dismemberment. This entailed fragmentation for African Americans who struggled to develop strategies of survival in the New World.

My second chapter on *Jazz* focuses on the impact of transgenerationally transmitted trauma. I argue that experiences of dismemberment—such as feelings of amputation and phantom limbs—arise not from physical amputation but from traumatic experiences and the unconscious of preceding generations as the result of transgenerational hauntings. I borrow from the psychoanalytic insights of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in my explanation of phantom limbs in *Jazz*.

The third section of my project looks at how social order is brought about in the fictive community of *Sula* through the scapegoating mechanism. I define the scapegoating principle in *Sula* in terms of cultural dismemberment because of the ways the community members symbolically cut a pariah figure, like Sula, off by performing symbolic acts of violence. The characterization of Sula emphasizes the psychological need for a scapegoat figure who can give an outlet to the defensive tendencies of the community following discrimination.

My final chapter focusses on Morrison's most recent novel *Home*, which is about homecoming. In this novel, Morrison continues with her project of imagining a space of domestic and social comfort which is physically and psychically safe in the broad sense of a homeland for African Americans. Home offers a place of salvation from social, historical and psychic fragmentation or the traumas of racism which result in experiences of disruption, amputation and dismemberment.

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Introduction

Toni Morrison develops her narratives through an interactive dialogue between various voices and perspectives. Similarly, she encourages the reader to study her fiction via the interrelationship between or dialogization of different perspectives. According to Rachel Lister, the interaction between multiple voices, discourses and themes makes the whole enterprise of reading her novels “improvisational” (Lister 14). *Dismemberment in the Fiction of Toni Morrison* is a multifaceted study of Morrison’s fiction. It explores the theme of dismemberment from multiple perspectives—historical, psychological and cultural. Besides the dictionary definition of depriving the body of limbs or the act of destroying bodily integrity, dismemberment refers to the experience of racism as being a form of amputation, or phantom limb sensation, splitting, torture or the disruption of concrete and graphic traumatic memories. This helps Morrison to render the painful bodily and psychic impact of racism in realistic terms. It also helps her to evince a visceral response from her readers.

My study is partly motivated by Morrison’s own approach to addressing issues of literary, social, historical and political import from multiple perspectives. For example, in Morrison’s review of “Who is Angela Davis?” by Regina Nadelson, she rejects Nadelson’s biography because of its “Cyclopean view” (Goulimari 144). According to Morrison, the biography is “monoperspectival” rather than “multiperspectival” (Goulimari 144). Morrison’s method of critiquing the biography encourages the reader to adopt a similar approach to the study of her narrative strategies. Instead of building the narrative events from a single point of view, she narrates the stories from multiple viewpoints. This demands more attentive participation from the readers in deconstructing the meaning of her stories. Critics like Laurie Vickroy highlight the importance of studying Morrison’s fiction from multiple perspectives: “Morrison constructs for readers a process of looking at events from several perspectives that sometimes contradict each other, sometimes interlink or reinforce one another” (Vickroy 183). In fact, looking at the

formation of subjectivity (under the traumatic forces of slavery, racism and social oppression) from different perspectives helps the reader to understand “the multiple nature of identity” (Vickroy 24). Besides, the motivation behind Morrison’s characters’ action is complex. In an interview with Nellie Mckay, Morrison states that what fascinates her most about the “qualities of black people is the variety of ways in which they come, and the enormous layers of lives that they live. It is a compelling thing for (her) because no single layer is “it”” (Interview 145). Morrison’s comments confirm the multidimensionality of her characters. She puts her characters under duress to see how they can survive and manage to exercise their autonomy under traumatizing conditions. Quite often, the nature of physical and psychological traumas results in “radical fragmentation or fracturing of the self” which makes it difficult to establish subjectivity (Ferguson 16). As a writer, Morrison is very much interested in depicting the effects of the trauma of racism on the psyche of her characters and the concomitant experiences of dismemberment. In her words, “The trauma of racism is, for the racists and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis—strangely of no interest to psychiatry” (“Unspeakable” 16). Morrison’s comments foreground the importance of psychoanalytic responses to the trauma of racism and the resultant dismemberment. However, dismemberment has its roots in the historical and social realities of African Americans. This encourages the need to study the psychological impact of racism on Morrison’s characters through the lens of the historical and social realities which play a significant role. In her National Public Radio interview with Tavis Smiley entitled “Love,” Morrison points out that her writing is grounded in a “strong historical and cultural base in describing what impacts people, especially, maybe exclusively, African Americans” (Morrison “Love”). This implies that the characters in her fiction, who find themselves subject to experiences of dismemberment, do not have only one cause which affects the formation of their subjectivity. There are historical, psychological and social forces behind the dismemberment of the body and sense of self.

This brings me to the overarching frame of my argument, which follows the Fanonian premise of racial interpellation. According to Fanon, racial interpellation objectifies the black

subject to the extent that his/her body is exposed to experiences of irrevocable dismemberment which reduce his/her subjectivity to the state of “an object in the midst of other objects” (*Black Skin* 82). Morrison’s fiction is replete with moments of Fanonian dismemberment. Like Fanon, she enacts moments of racial interpellation in terms of literal dismemberment. Her characters find themselves in combat with their image, which shatters their sense of corporeality. Fanon’s appropriation of Jacques Lacan’s famous Mirror Theory and its (re)application in the colonial context is very helpful for understanding the relationship between black and white subjects in a white dominant society. According to Lacan, the mirror stage compensates for the lack of coherence, the loss of self-image and experience of bodily dismemberment in the early stages of one’s life—between the ages of six and eighteen months. During this phase of experience, the mirror image provides the self with an image of its own coordination and unity. The limbs of the body are not perceived as alien or parts of the outside world. They are seen as parts of a unified self. This sense of unified self-hood is one of the most crucial defining moments in the development of subjectivity. According to Fanon, contra Lacan, the mirror stage for the black man proves to be a process of racial othering. The formation of subjectivity or the orthopedic projection of the self is a construct of the mirror. Rather than enabling the subject to re-member the self, the reflection in the mirror in the racial context results in the dismemberment of the self. The experience of racial alienation brings about multiple consciousnesses with their roots in the historical, social, cultural and political conditions. For Fanon, the advent of the mirror calls for a reconsideration of historical and social realities. Fanon seeks to establish a direct link between the psychological impact of racism and the other, wider forces of historical and cultural oppression which alienate black people.

Studying the impact of racism from multiple perspectives enhances the ability to perceive complexity. It helps the reader to understand that there is not just one cause determining the subject positions in Morrison’s fiction. Morrison’s characters try to free their consciousness from their collective racial past and other determinants which influence them from all directions—historical, psychological and social. Like Fanon’s extrapolation of the lived reality of black existence, any attempt at resistance as an exercise towards subjectivity ends in

dismemberment: “the corporal schema, attacked on several points, crumble(s), giving way to a racial epidermal schema” (*Black Skin* 84). Fanon was a practicing psychiatrist who had first-hand knowledge of the harmful effects of colonial violence on the psyche of the colonized. He applies psychoanalysis, in theory and practice, in order to understand, like Morrison, the impact of racism on both the colonizer and the colonized. He describes the lived experience of being black as the lived experience of racism. For both Morrison and Fanon, the experience of racism is an experience of dismemberment—a splitting or dissolution of the self or the psyche. Like Fanon, Morrison highlights the importance of psychoanalysis in studying the impact of race. In her interview with Jaffrey, Morrison says that she “used to complain bitterly that psychiatry never considered race”:

I remember saying that, you know, in the moment when you first realize you’re a boy or a girl or your toilet training is this or whatever—all these little things that happen in our childhood—no one ever talks about the moment you found that you were white. Or the moment that you found out that you were black. That’s a profound revelation. The minute you find that out, something happens. You have to renegotiate everything. (Interview 152)

Morrison’s fiction works as a mirror in which the characters “renegotiate” their lives when faced with moments of racial alienation, interpellation and the resulting dismemberment. Similarly, the experience of racism in the ontological world of Fanon makes it difficult for the body schema to adjust itself in the world. Fanon uses a graphic metaphor of amputation to suggest how the whole experience of racism can shatter the bodily schema, creating a sense of deficiency and loss after one encounters the racial gaze: “What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?” (*Black Skin* 85). He sums up the fragile sense of being as he encounters the racist gaze of the other in terms of “an amputation” (*Black Skin* 85). Morrison, like Fanon, exposes the harmful effects of the racist gaze, which alienates the subject and reduces him/her to an object. Fanon describes the racial gaze of the Other as reducing the subject to a state of “crushing objecthood” (*Black*

Skin 82). Morrison also highlights the debilitating effect of the racial gaze as it is internalized by the characters. It is the internalization of the racial gaze which results in the “double consciousness” or the split personalities of Morrison’s characters. Like Fanon, she enacts racial alienation and the concomitant dismemberment as a multiple process which makes it important to look at her project from multiple perspectives. Examining African American trauma from one perspective forecloses the possibility of looking at dismemberment in the light of the socio-political and historical realities of African American experience in the States. As Fanon suggests, racial alienation is not just an individual question, but also involves “sociodiagnostic realities” (*Black Skin* 11). This entails a reconsideration of physical, historical, social and psychological aspects.

Following the Fanonian premise, my study attempts to demonstrate that a psychoanalytical approach alone cannot help to unravel or explain the complexities of African American experience in Morrison’s fiction. Understanding racial alienation and the resulting dismemberment means looking at the ways in which other historical, cultural or sociodiagnostic forces come to affect the subjectivity of African Americans. For example, a psychoanalytically informed study of Toni Morrison’s fiction like Jean Wyatt’s “Giving Body to the Word” can be helpful in understanding how characters like Shadrack, Nel, *Beloved* and Sethe can counter their fear of fragmentation that “precedes the cohesion of the mirror stage and motor control (484).” But the mirror does not always lay the foundation of subjectivity by developing the “moi”-I. It does not always offer the necessary illusion or fiction of the unified self to all Morrison’s characters, as I will demonstrate in my discussion of Morrison’s recent works, *A Mercy* and *Home*. In fact, the mirroring gaze of the other renders Morrison’s characters such as Florens, like the Fanonian subject, ontologically fixed. The violence of the mirror reduces Morrison’s characters to a state of “nothingness”. For both Morrison and Fanon, the mirror takes a different dimension in the dialectics of subjectivity. Therefore, I distinguish my study from the Lacanian-influenced model of Jean Wyatt because it overlooks the role that the mirror can play in the process of racial othering.

Of the other publications on the concept of dismemberment in Morrison’s fiction, my own

project shares similarities with Philip Page's *Dangerous Freedom* and Pamela B. June's *The Fragmented Female Body and Identity*. Both of these studies focus on aspects of fragmentation in Morrison's works. For June, bodily fragmentation is reflected in the narrative's fragmentation, which also bears testimony to the historical fragmentation of women. Her work draws inspiration from feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous, Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, amongst others. Thematically, June reads in the images of wounds, scars and other bodily mutilations signs of women's historical fragmentation. She argues that these wounds strengthen the feminine bonds between women and offer them "potential solutions to historical fragmentation" (June 5). Stylistically, fragmentation is also indicative of "a disjointed style of writing" and "the state of women's bodies, identities, memories, and relationships in a patriarchal era" (June 4). My argument differs from that of June in terms of its emphasis on the thematic aspect of dismemberment. Compared to June's feminist study, Page uses fragmentation as a broad and abstract concept, drawing on a framework of deconstruction, which denotes that everything is always already fragmented and falling apart. Page finds the principle of fragmentation to be operating behind each of Morrison's first six novels, which make up the subject of his study. The theme and style of each novel is characterized by fragmentation: objects, like the watermelon and doll in *The Bluest Eye* are split, reflecting the characters and their split psyches. Families and communities are divided, which in turn comments upon the divided nature of American and African-American cultures, which are "always already fragmented" (Page 36). Thus, Page reads in the principle of fragmentation an allegory for the entire African-American consciousness which is "always at least double" (Page 36). He reduces the logic of fragmentation to a notion of binary oppositions and there seems to be no a priori cause behind this. For me, dismemberment is a historically determined phenomenon which has psychic and social consequences for the next generations of African-Americans who still suffer from the effects of slavery, as my following chapters will demonstrate.

Chapter One discusses *A Mercy* focusing on the aspect of historical dismemberment in the context of Africans arriving in the New World circa 1619. Although *A Mercy* was published in

2008, before the publication of Morrison's most recent novel *Home* in 2012, "the chronology of Morrison's novel has moved backward" (Peach 241). This endows *A Mercy* with the status of an ur-text in the genre of slave narratives and Morrison's entire oeuvre. According to Linden Peach, the novel "encourages the reader to reflect upon what was to come in time" (Peach 241). It "pick(s) up a point suggested but not fully developed in *Beloved*" (Peach 241). As a prelude to *Beloved*, *A Mercy* suggests "what happened in early modern America led to the plantation system of *Beloved* and the mythologization of the South" (Peach 241). However, it is important to give prior consideration to *A Mercy* because the novel not only carves out the trajectory of Morrison's oeuvre (and that of my project), it foreshadows what happens in *Beloved* and also other novels, prominently *Song of Solomon*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*. I use the term "dismemberment" in order to emphasize the violence that entailed the forcible separation of Africans from their mother(land) and the concomitant destruction of familial ties, especially the bond between mothers and their children as they were torn apart from each other. I discuss the role that Christianity and other proslavery ideologies played in establishing a hierarchical/patriarchal society which ultimately led to the institutionalization of slavery as a race-based system. I also chalk out the originary moments when Africans were not only separated from their families but also how, in the context of the historical setting in the novel, skin colour is linked to racism and becomes a signifier of slavery. The motif of shoes in the text is at the heart of debates on slavery. Morrison uses shoes as a symbol of slavery, dispossession, and race. They are evocative of the originary loss of a mother(land). In the context of the story, they serve as metonyms of the hardship endured by the female character(s) like Florens, in terms of separation and the wilderness experience in the New World. On one level, shoes disconnect Africans not only from their biological mother but from the Ur-Minha Mãe-Ur-Africa as well. To deprive the foot of physical contact with the soil is to disrupt a nurturing relationship with the earth. Shoes embody this originary dismemberment that severed the relationship between a mother and her children and handed them over to the cruel fate of suffering, bondage and servitude—a fate likened to a living death. Florens' obsession with shoes carries a whole repertoire of meanings associated with the experience of slavery in the New

World. Shoes are even symbolic of the Middle Passage for Africans—an experience of originary exile, dismemberment, loss and separation. Thematically, Florens’ final renunciation of shoes embodies the telos of a journey from slavery to freedom.

Chapter Two on *Jazz* discusses how most of the characters like Joe and Violet Trace continue to be haunted by the specters of institutionalized slavery as their ancestors suffered in the American South. The specters of slavery not only disrupt family relations, between children and their parents, but also have the power to affect future generations’ efforts to establish relationships between themselves, as I shall demonstrate in the case of Joe and Violet Trace, and Golden Gray. In order to do this, I focus on the impact of transgenerationally transmitted trauma. I argue that experiences of dismemberment, like feelings of amputation and phantom limbs, arise not from physical amputation but from the traumatic experiences/memories of family secrets, and the unconscious of someone else, the results of transgenerational hauntings. It is the phantoms of the past which question the subjectivity/integrity of characters like Golden Gray, Violet and Joe Trace. I borrow from the psychoanalytical insights of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok on phantom and transgenerational haunting in my explanation of phantom limbs in *Jazz*. Although critics like Peter Nicholls—the author of an influential essay on *Beloved* titled “The Belated Postmodern”—have looked at Morrison’s fiction with the help of concepts like introjection and incorporation as propounded by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in their book *The Shell and the Kernel*, no one, to my knowledge, has explored the theme of phantom limbs and amputation as suffered by characters like Golden Gray with the help of phantom theory or transgenerational haunting, which offers the reader another framework for looking at Morrison’s fiction. The uncanny experience of phantom limbs in *Jazz* is about the unspeakable secrets of ancestors, which have a disruptive influence upon the psychic lives of future generations. Characters like Joe Trace and Golden Gray are victims of the violent transgenerational memories they receive through their parents, and whose traces remain unintegrated. I especially focus on the quest of Golden Gray, who wants to affirm his patrimony. Gray is haunted by phantom limbs which are the result of his parents’ secret involving the circumstances of his birth and the true identity of his father, a black slave, which is kept hidden

from him. I contend that *Jazz* is about a saga of transgenerational haunting and its iterability in subsequent generations, which can manifest itself in terms of phantom limbs. To support this argument, I borrow from Morrison's interview with Michael Silverblatt in which she describes how, as a writer, she is interested in the connections that exists "across generational lines" (Interview 217). Morrison reaffirms these transgenerational links in another interview with Sheldon Hackney: "Children can actually represent ancestors or grandmothers or grandfathers" ("I Come from People" 130). Morrison's remarks endorse the concept of transgenerational hauntings as propounded by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. To sum up, the traumatic impact of transgenerational hauntings and the consequent experiences of dismemberment like phantom limbs and amputation lead to a discussion of the importance of healing touch with the help of Luce Irigaray's concept of touch, which can mend the bodies of characters by bringing them closer and putting them back together again.

In Chapter Three, I look at cultural dismemberment in *Sula* with the help of the Girardian hypothesis of the scapegoat. According to Michael Kirwan, Girard does not present the practice of scapegoating as a conscious ritual. The Girardian hypothesis focuses on scapegoating as a "spontaneous and unconscious psychological mechanism, by which someone is falsely accused and victimized" (Kirwan 49). Kirwan further adds that a scapegoat like Oedipus and in the present case, Sula, is singled out because he or she is "especially vulnerable or marginal to begin with" (Kirwan 49). Cultural dismemberment implies the violence attached to the ritual expulsion of scapegoat figures like Sula and other marginal characters like Pilate, who are considered "peripherals" and "outlaws" (by their community) and live on the margins of society. Such Morrison characters are designated "outsiders" and find themselves pitted against their society. Marc C. Conner is one of the critics studying Morrison's "engagement with the relations between the individual and the community" ("From the Sublime" 49). Conner observes that the relationship between individuals and the community is depicted as "predatory, vampirical, sterile, cowardly, threatening; and the individual must struggle desperately to survive in the midst of this damaging community" ("From the Sublime" 49). This struggle to survive ends in the fragmentation and destruction of some characters ("From the Sublime" 49).

The community ruthlessly victimizes the individual and ultimately destroys them, for example like Pecola and Sula (“From the Sublime” 50). I contend that the community victimizes such characters as a result of internalized racism, social inequities and inherent prejudices. The community internalizes racism and deflects it to on to members of its own community. The community subjects Sula, in particular, to scapegoating because of her black womanhood/femaleness, sexuality and her disregard for the societal strictures, and her ancestors. The Bottom community victimizes Sula by symbolically cutting her off from the rest of the community. The community members make accusations and invent rituals to ward off Sula’s evil influence. They also add to her dismemberment by denying her any means of sustenance. Unlike the comments made by Morrison in her interview(s) on the nurturing role of the community in *Sula*, it is the community that seems to be strengthened by Sula. The impact of Sula’s scapegoating is also heightened through Morrison’s characterization of Sula and how, as an author, she at times endorses Sula’s treatment at the hands of the community. This prompts me to look at the tension that exists not only between the individual and the community, but also between the author, Morrison “to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed,” (qtd. in Burke 90) and Morrison as a commenter of prominence and interpreter of her own work. This disconnect can over-determine the reader’s reception of the text by creating an extratextual discourse on her fiction not necessarily in accordance with the narrative intention within her novel, as is the case with the third person narrative account in *Sula*. This tension arises especially when the reader forfeits the freedom of his/her own critical faculties and a dialogic relationship, instead depending heavily upon the author’s external interpretative insights: “But such freedom is also fraught with dangers, the dangers that the author will provide too little direction, too much direction, or enigmatically contradictory directions, and dangers that readers will resist or abandon the active role that the texts demand” (Page 27).

The purpose of the final chapter, Chapter Four, is to expand the scope of my study beyond the aforementioned multiple forms of dismemberment: historical, cultural and transgenerational. The concept of home encompasses Morrison’s fictional and nonfictional work. It also shows her

global concerns and politics. Her fiction demonstrates how the quest for home offers an antidote and refuge from the trauma of racism (Schreiber 9). Home is not merely a physical location in Morrison's fiction. It appears as a complex concept with multivalent meanings attached to it. It bears emotional, psychological and social connotations. It offers the characters a place of freedom where they can live their lives and create a psychic space that allows them to survive and relive trauma (Schreiber 11). In her interview with Ann Hostetler, Morrison describes America as "a nation of immigrants" ("The Art" 202). According to her, "one of the greatest needs of immigrants is to feel at home" ("The Art" 202). From *A Mercy* to *Home*, the concept of home embodies the African American state of exile, their search for a place of freedom and social equality. In *Home*, Morrison continues with her project of imagining a space of domestic and social comfort which is physically and psychically safe and in the broad sense, a homeland for African Americans. Home offers a place of refuge from the social, historical and psychic dismemberment or traumas of racism which result in experiences of fragmentation, amputation and lack of coherence. Finally, the theme of burial in *Home* is also important as it connects Morrison's latest novel with the larger writing project she envisions as "literary archaeology." In her essay, "The Site of Memory," she describes the process of her work in terms of a "journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (71). Morrison's act of writing is a memorial in honor of all those African Americans who made heart-rending sacrifices and lost precious lives. Her writing performs the role of a burial rite—exorcising the dead by bringing them into the discourse. She honors the dead by constructing a *tombeau* for them and by way of performing, as it were, the funeral rites. Morrison's characters re-member their past and their ancestors in order to bury them. Remember carries a double sense here. To remember is not only to recall from oblivion those African Americans who lost their lives or whose stories of sacrifice are disremembered and unaccounted for, in the words of Morrison, but also to counter multiple forms of fragmentation because "they are dismembered, cut up and off, and not re-membered" (Horvitz 166). In an interview with Gloria Naylor, Morrison describes her desire to invoke those dis(re)membered people who were "unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried," and that explains that her

desire is to bury them “properly” and “artistically” (Interview 209). Frank’s performance of burial rites on behalf of a stranger marks not only his return home, but also the writer’s “journey to a site” in order to perform “the proper burial to ensure the departed person’s journey home” (Rushdy *Remembering* 75).

There are various ways of and strategies for looking at dismemberment in Morrison’s fiction. I have tried to adopt a multifaceted approach to dismemberment to help the reader understand the complexities of racial alienation in Morrison’s works. I have adopted a Fanonian approach to demonstrate the impact of racism on the psyche of African-Americans and the concomitant experiences of dismemberment. My project argues for the importance of combining historical, psychological and sociocultural analysis of Morrison’s fiction in order to understand the overall impact of racism and its debilitating effects on the psyches of her characters. By situating Morrison’s fiction within a variety of discourses, I hope to offer a multifaceted and a highly interdisciplinary framework for a more rewarding analysis of her fiction than currently exists.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Dismemberment in *A Mercy*

(N)arrative remains the best way to learn anything, whether history or theology.... (Toni Morrison)

We must read Morrison through the lens of the plantation reasoning precisely in order to preserve and unpack (...) ambivalence. (Valérie Loichot 164)

“In all the books that you have studied you never have studied Negro history have you?” an ex-slave asked an interviewer from Fisk University. “If you want Negro history,” he insisted, “you will have to get (it) from somebody who wore the shoe, and by and by from one to the other you will get a book.” (Fisk University, Unwritten History, 45-46)

Introduction

This chapter outlines the historical basis of slavery and racism in US and then discusses how these themes are explored in *A Mercy* from the perspective of historical dismemberment, which involved the forcible separation of Africans from their motherland, disrupting the relationships that exist between biological mothers and their children, to reveal and extend the understanding of Morrison's oeuvre. The historical context of the relationship between race and slavery is discussed to show how patriarchy/paternalism and the biblical-based arguments of the pro-slavery apologists developed within the plantation system in the late 17th century. The Fanonian development of Lacan's mirror is presented as a lens for Florens' perception of her reflection as an outcast, after a discussion of the journeys in *A Mercy* and the Bildungsroman genre within Morrison's oeuvre. Other symbolism in *A Mercy* relates to shoes, which enslave and separate the

wearer from Mother Earth and the impossibility of love under conditions of slavery. These aspects and themes criss-cross each other's paths and the narrative in *A Mercy*, so their discussion necessarily involves some overlaps to support, contain and clarify them.

Race and Slavery in the Historical Context of *A Mercy*

A Mercy is set in the late seventeenth century. The novel predates the era of institutionalized slavery in Virginia and its development as a race-based system. This was a time of radical transition before racial differences and stereotypes took solid roots and slavery was established as the “bedrock of economy and of the social order” (Kolchin 29). Soon society was to create differences between blacks and whites along racial, class and religious hierarchies (Kolchin 61). In her interview with Brophy-Warren, Morrison describes how she was looking for a period in the history of the American South which offered a context in order to examine “a period before racism was inextricably related to slavery. The only place was this period before a race hierarchy was established legally and later culturally in the states. That was when people were more preoccupied with religious differences” (“A Writer’s Vote”). In her National Public Radio interview with Lynn Neary, Morrison talks about the historical background which gives her an opportunity to “separate race from slavery; to see what it’s like, what it might have been like, to be a slave but without being raced; where your status was being enslaved but there was no application of racial inferiority” (“Toni Morrison Discusses”). According to Pelagia Goulimari, the author’s statement about separating race from slavery is highly debatable: “If Morrison wishes to make the unqualified claim that early American history provides the first coupling of racism and slavery, this seems a highly controversial claim” (Goulimari 249). She then refers to Aristotle’s *Poetics* “to find the explicit justification of slavery in terms of racial inferiority: non-Hellenes and “Asiatics” are “by nature slaves” (Goulimari 249). Other than the Aristotelian idea of natural slavery, the apologists for slavery in the American South relied upon other arguments for support as well. Morrison herself broaches some of the proslavery arguments in her essay

“The Site of Memory,” which rely upon Enlightenment Philosophy and the Bible for their support. In general, Enlightenment Philosophy “relied upon the premise that Africans were godless savages, living in a brutal Hobbesian state” (M. Jackson 74). There is a whole range of similar proslavery arguments in the novel, making it less important to argue whether slavery preceded racism or vice versa than “to acknowledge that the entrenchment of racialised slavery, the development of Enlightenment science, and the rise of natural rights philosophy engendered significant developments in the ideological, legal, and everyday practices of race” (Spear 581). Besides enabling Morrison to trace the genealogy of race-based slavery in the New World, the historical setting of the novel offers her the opportunity to investigate how Africans survived the Middle Passage. The forcible transportation of Africans was responsible for creating a radical separation from Mother Africa. It disrupted familial relationships between mothers and daughters, as seen in the case of Florens and her mother called *a minha mãe*, which is a Portuguese expression for *my mother*. Because the enslavement of Africans involved the forcible uprooting and separation of people, which was traumatic and violent in nature, I refer to this uprooting as an act of historical dismemberment. The act of historical dismemberment obliterated all fragmentary traces of African and even Native American cultures. In the consequences of slavery and the break with cultures, Morrison demonstrates the need various groups of people like Africans, Native Americans and the indentured Europeans had to develop survival strategies. She also explores the possibilities of a self-presence constituting black subjectivity prior to its historical dismemberment after its encounter with the objectifying racial gaze of the New World. I will investigate this moment of originary dismemberment in Florens’ initial encounter with the Puritans with some help from Fanon and link it with her mother’s moment of being raced in Barbados. This is one of the defining moments in the novel as Florens becomes conscious of the coded language of colour. The objectifying gaze of the Puritans shatters her sense of “blackness”. Like Fanon, she discovers not only the oppressive weight of her blackness but also the burden of her ethnic characteristics. The traumatic impact of this encounter will expose her to the experience of dismemberment and alienation from others.

There were also plenty of other theological, political, historical, intellectual and cultural forces working together behind the crystallization of racial ideas which supplanted other differences of religion, class, and colour. In her NPR interview with Lynn Neary, Morrison points to Bacon's Rebellion (1676) as one of the moments behind the crystallization of these forces after former indentured servants allied with Africans against bonded servitude. Building upon Morrison's insight, Goulimari brings in Jacob Vaark's observations on Bacon's Rebellion and the subsequent enforcement of the new laws and slave codes which "separated and protected all whites from all others forever," (8) as an inaugural moment "in the creation—the institutional construction—of racism" (Goulimari 127). She also refers to Florens' experience of "race-ing" when she seeks shelter overnight at Widow Ealing's hut. There, she finds herself facing a witchcraft trial which Morrison situates in the text just two years before the actual historical events of the Salem witch trials, which began in 1692 (Goulimari 137). We can also add to Florens' moments of race-ing her mother's race-ing in Africa through the latter's experience of the African diaspora or the Middle Passage, to her enslavement in Barbados and D'Ortega's plantation in Maryland as indicative of racism's originary moments in the text, which is haunted by the trauma of slavery. As Melanie R. Anderson observes, "The haunting institution of slavery is always already present in every relationship and business transaction of this novel, even though it is not always visible" (Anderson 134). The reader, through the minute observation of detail, can also observe that the boundaries between indentured servitude and slavery are "slippery" (Anderson 131, 135). The status of indentured slaves like Willard and Scully is like that of permanent slaves as their terms of indenture, like those of the other indentured slaves, will never end. They have no realistic or foreseeable hope of freedom. Their plight is interchangeable with that of the earliest Africans who were "subsumed into the indenture system" (Hendrick 17).¹ According to Eugene D. Genovese, "We cannot be sure that the position of the earliest Africans differed markedly from that of the white indentured servants" (*Roll, Jordan, Roll* 31). In fact, it was the indenture system that degenerated and led to the development of racial and slave codes in Virginia (Hendrick 17). The text portrays this

period of transition in history when servants, like Willard and Scully, who had indentured servant contracts, mysteriously became lifetime slaves. The fate of the other indentured servants Florens finds aboard the wagon as she travels west to fetch the blacksmith—who can cure her Mistress Rebekka of the pox—is even worse than those of Willard and Scully: “They are certain their years of debt are over but the master says no. He sends them away, north, to another place, a tannery, for more years” (38). In the tannery, “only fast death in acid” awaits them (38). All the aforementioned proslavery forces play in the background as Morrison tries to investigate the race-based development of slavery—a relatively modern phenomenon—which “had to be constructed, planted, institutionalized and legalized” (“Toni Morrison Discusses”). These historical experiences of incipient slavery and racism, as well as deracination, are inherited by later generations as feelings of dismemberment or hidden family secrets, a key theme throughout the novels and considered through a multi-perspective lens in this thesis. Now I investigate the historical role that Christian theology played in promoting the proslavery arguments.

Christianity played a major role in endorsing the race concept for the apologists for slavery in the American South, who cited biblical stories in order to justify slavery with a suggestion of divine approval. Morrison considers Christianity and apologists for slavery who exploited such biblical accounts as the curse of Ham, complicit in promoting the race-based concept of slavery. In her novel, she indicts Christianity for the role it played in developing rationales for proslavery arguments. As an institutionalized religion, she aligns it with exclusion, conservatism, patriarchy, colonization and the perpetual enslavement of Africans. According to Gene Andrew Jarrett, “Racial hierarchy and paternalism descended especially from Christianity to organize social relations between masters and slaves and to implant the ethos of industry and obligation in slave communities” (*Representing the Race* 38). Religion and patriarchy/paternalism were two of the foundation structures of exclusion in Virginia and they played a pivotal role in the perpetuation of slavery during the formative years of slavery, as we shall see. Peter Kolchin, author of the seminal book *American Slavery: 1619-1877*, observes that “religious idioms pervaded the proslavery literature” which “played a key role in the defence of

slavery” (Kolchin 196). This argument is further supported by historians like Drew Gilpin Faust, who suggests that “the Bible served as the core” for the “proslavery mainstream” (qtd. in Kolchin 196). Southerners were steeped in the Bible and were predisposed to look to biblical precedent(s) to justify slavery (Kolchin 196). Christian theology helped to create a very dogmatic and racially enclosed society. Its hierarchical and exclusive structure was one aspect it shared with the patriarchal structure of society in Virginia. Religion and patriarchy/slavery were both based on the idea of Providence, which was instrumental in keeping intact the hierarchical relationships between subject and object, master and slave, man and woman.

Religious communities were complicit in justifying the dogma of slavery based on the model of Aristotelian philosophy which basically asserted the right of one race over another. As Valerie Smith points out, “Indeed, throughout the novel, religious communities prove to be sites of cruelty that perpetuate dominance and racist ideology” (V. Smith 121). The proponents of slavery fell back on historical and biblical excuses in order to justify slavery. They exploited the biblical accounts of Abraham and the curse of Ham, the perceived docility and inferiority of Africans, Greek philosophical assertions, and examples of the colonial Roman law of enslavement and other forms of arguments. Tessa Roynon quotes the last address by Florens’ mother in which she explains why she begged Vaark to take her daughter as “Morrison’s first depiction of action on the African continent and for its challenge to the oversimplified polarization between black victimhood and white oppression or to a straight equation between race and slavery” (Roynon 86). She quotes from the text the mother’s own moment of being raced and enslaved in Barbados: “The men guarding we and selling we are black” (162). Both Roynon and Goulimari describe the moment of this enslavement in terms of its universality and its relation to “universalized blackness” which reduces the subjectivity of (black) women to that of objects and other countable things (Roynon 87; Goulimari 140-1). It is the case that within the historical reality of the novel, skin colour comes to justify slavery. It is also a historical reality that Africans themselves were accomplices in slavery as they collaborated with Europeans in buying and selling human property (Kolchin 19). But it would be erroneous to

assume a single-faceted view like that of Maria Rice Bellamy, who writes that *A Mercy* “explores the involvement of Africans in the process of enslaving other Africans” (Bellamy 15). The textual and historical evidence does not allow for one-sided opinions—assuming a one-sided view lends legitimacy to advocates of the plantation and slavery like Peter Downes, whom Vaark comes across along the course of his journey. Downes sells the argument of Africans-selling-Africans under the garb of a disguised apology in order to convince Vaark: “Africans are as interested in selling slaves...as an English planter is in buying them” (28-9).² The advocates of slavery like Peter Downes wanted to justify the brutal treatment of slaves by selling the argument that Africans were themselves active in practicing slavery extensively in their own societies whereby implying that Europeans were not entirely responsible for the slave trade. As Édouard Glissant observes in his influential essay on the Plantation system “Closed Place, Open Word,” “The colonists and the Planters, as well as the travelers who visited them, were possessed of a real need to justify the system” (*Poetics* 70). In *A Mercy*, the narrator, like a historian, exposes the impulse to justify a one-sided account of history like the one presented by Peter Downes to Vaark, pointing out that Africans were willing partners in selling their own brothers into the business of slavery (Kolchin 19). According to Maurice Jackson, the logic of indigenous slavery helped undermine the moral arguments against New World slavery, hence implying that European slave traders were not entirely responsible for “introducing the slave trade to Africa but merely expand(ed) existing traffic into broader markets” (M. Jackson 81).

These are some of the historical-religious conditions of early slavery in the American South. The period offers Morrison an archaeological site whereby she can analyze the coupling of racism and slavery. It also offers her room to pose other questions concerning, for instance, baptism and literacy, not simply in terms of the redemption of souls and the manumission of slaves but in terms of existential imperatives, release from enslavement and in terms of keeping the hierarchies intact. Religion and philosophical knowledge were used (by the plantation owners) as tools to legitimize the hierarchies and to exercise complete control over their slaves. Both helped them develop a theology of slavery. Vaark’s observation on Bacon’s Rebellion mentions eliminating manumission as the turning point institutionalizing white privilege by

granting “license” to the ruling elites to undermine black autonomy “by eliminating manumission...for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason...” (8).

The novel involves many journeys undertaken by the characters, but mainly revolves around two: one undertaken by Jacob Vaark and the second by the young girl, Florens, whom he accepts as a slave from his debtor, D’Ortega, as partial payment of his debt. Vaark’s acceptance of Florens is the act of mercy the title of the novel refers to from the perspective of Florens’ mother (Roynon 80). Since Vaark makes the first journey, which Marc Conner describes as “the beginning of the novel’s central story,” (“What Lay Beneath” 151) I shall begin my discussion of the text focusing on his journey first. Jacob Vaark is a patriarchal figure like his biblical namesake. He is *en route* to the Jublio plantation to collect his debt from a Portuguese Roman Catholic planter and slave-owner named D’Ortega, in Maryland. For Marc C. Conner, D’Ortega’s plantation represents “the harsh brutalities of a Southern slave system” (Conner 152) and his/its inhuman treatment of slaves, especially that of the female domestic slaves, is ironically prefigured in Jacob’s confrontation with the maltreatment of domestic and other animals like the horse and raccoon. On his journey, Jacob has to dismount from his horse twice, “the second time to free the bloody hind leg of a young raccoon stuck in a tree break. Regina munched trail-side grass while he tried to be as gentle as possible, avoiding the claws and teeth of the frightened animal. Once he succeeded, the raccoon limped off, perhaps to the mother forced to abandon it or more likely into other claws” (9). Vaark’s act of kindness and compassion for animals like the raccoon and his horse reveals the soft side of his personality. His respectful behavior towards the animal(s) “affirms his sensitivity or fellow feeling for another creature” (Christiansē 219). This stands out in ironic contrast to the treatment he metes out to the women in his household, who live a quasi-slave-like life under his facile patronage and protection. The graphic image of the frightened young animal suffering from forced abandonment by its mother lingers on in the text and the mind of the reader. It alludes not only to a Tennysonian depiction of nature, red in tooth and claw, but the incident also, in fact, offers a

proleptic reference to the story of the young girl, Florens, who associates herself with the plight of animals and is forcibly abandoned by her mother. In fact, the vulnerable condition of women under patriarchy or the paternalism of slavery, in general, is contrasted with that of animals. At the reception hosted by D'Ortega, Vaark rightly observes the status of domestic slaves, especially "the clove-smelling" woman who serves the food, is that of a sexual object. It is only during the course of negotiations that take place between D'Ortega and Vaark that we come to know the extent to which D'Ortega subjects his slaves to torture, violence and sexual abuse (20-22). According to Susan Neal Mayberry, there are suggestions in the text that D'Ortega "engage(s) in pedophilia" with the help of his wife" ("Visions and Revisions" 175). The extent of his sexual abuse will be out by the end of the novel when Florens' mother bears testimony to D'Ortega's sexual exploitation of his slaves as he orders unidentified men to "break" her in along with other slave women in order to increase his livestock (161).

D'Ortega is unable to pay his debt because he not only lost his human "cargo" but had to pay a fine and spend more money as he is "forced to scoop up the corpses...and ordered to burn or bury them" (14). But he ends up "cart(ing) them out to low land where saltweed and alligators would finish the work" (14). Now the only way he can pay some of his debt is in human flesh—a commodity which Vaark detests. He asks Vaark to take one of his slaves as a partial payment of his debt. Vaark initially resists D'Ortega's offer of a slave but is coerced to yield to the temptation as he cannot see "any other form of remuneration" coming from D'Ortega (V. Smith 122). He also realizes the futility of fighting a lawsuit against D'Ortega because of his lower class position (21). He asks for "the clove-laced" woman "On a whim, mostly to silence him and fairly sure D'Ortega would refuse" because she serves more purposes than cooking by producing more children to be slaves as she would pass on her own status to them (22).³ Like Sethe, who murders her daughter out of desire to put her somewhere safe lest she inherit the slave status, the clove-scented woman—described as "a minha mãe"—desires the safety of her children, especially her young daughter, Florens, whose budding sexuality will render her a sexual object just like herself (160). She does not want her daughter to be the object of sexual exploitation as she was, "by the paternalism of slavery" (Christiansë 193). Out of a desire to

protect her daughter and keep her somewhere safe, she bends on her knees and begs Vaark to take Florens instead. Afraid of passing her own status on to her daughter and convinced of the humanity in Vaark (who in the eyes of the mother, at least will not prey upon her daughter sexually), she can sense that he sees in her daughter “a human child, not pieces of eight. (She) knelt before him, hoping for a miracle” (164). Being an orphan himself, Vaark can empathize with “waifs and whelps” and their need for shelter (30). Reminded of his own deprived childhood, he is moved by self-pity to accept the young girl. But his motive in taking the girl is not as altruistic as it seems. He deliberates upon his decision “thinking also” about his wife who would “welcome” the child as a relief from the painful memories of having lost her own daughter—the same age as Florens (25, 30, 95).

According to Susan Neal Mayberry, “Naïve or not,” Vaark’s decision to take the girl “endorses slavery” (“Visions and Revisions” 172). For all his moral abhorrence, Vaark’s fateful meeting with D’Ortega proves to be “the catalyst for his participation in the slave trade” (Wardi 24). By the time he leaves D’Ortega’s mansion, he has undergone what Anderson describes as “a crisis of conscience” (Anderson 133). He has seen and internalized D’Ortega’s world of the plantation, with all its excess and pomp, into his own dream world. He wants to build another house similar to D’Ortega’s with the money he will reap by investing in “rum” and sugar production in Barbados. He tries to justify not only the act of having a grandiose house constructed on top of a hill which “stands in ironic counterpoint to Saint Paul’s vision of God’s kingdom and John Winthrop’s iconic vision of a “city on a hill,”” (Roynon 83) but also his involvement in the slave trade abroad: “And there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labor force in Barbados. Right? Right?” (35). However, as Goulimari observes, “participating at a distance in slavery does not absolve one of participation” (Goulimari 132). According to Anderson, Vaark cannot deny “the moral implication of slavery” by refusing to acknowledge “its reality in his profit” (Anderson 133).

Vaark’s journey ends on a note of self-justification and it is at this conjunction that the two plots of the story involving the journeys taken by Vaark and Florens seem to merge/intersect

with each other. Both embark upon different journeys. Their narratives are also told from different perspectives: “One is narrated in the first person; one is told in the third person” (Christiansë 188). Whereas the first journey undertaken by Vaark (as he sets off to Maryland to collect his debt from D’Ortega) initiates him into the realm of slavery, the second, undertaken by Florens, carves out the trajectory of her journey from the state of slavery to freedom symbolized by her obsession with shoes, which embody life under slavery, and her final rejection of them as an assertion of her freedom. This is the moment of final epiphany in the novel, which Morrison describes as a realization, from ignorance to knowledge. I shall discuss this moment in the latter part of this chapter.

The Significance of the Bildungsroman

Florens’ journey embodies her *rite de passage* as it enacts the movement from slavery to freedom. It is more in the tradition of the Bildungsroman as it sketches the coming-of-age of a female character, focusing on the maturation of a young slave girl within the patriarchal order of plantation and slavocratic Virginia. The goal of this Bildungsroman for Morrison is highly subversive as it seeks to expose and undermine the structure of patriarchy, slavery and the historico-religious order that helped generate ideologies of slave-owning paternalism. In broad terms, the Bildungsroman is defined as a narrative of development and education. It instructs the reader in the art of living. Susan Fraiman postulates that the Bildungsroman as novel of development carves out trajectories of self-improvement in terms of heightened self-awareness, initiation, quest for identity, individuation, transformation, self-awakening and completeness or self-invention (qtd. in Castle 214). The formal characteristics of the Bildungsroman focus on the development of characters and the narrative plot. Some of the Morrison Bildungsromans like *Beloved* and *A Mercy* have life under slavery and freedom from that life as subject matter, which makes the heroic quest the plot of the narrative. Most of the Morrison Bildungsromans such as *Song of Solomon* also meet the conventional demands of the Bildungsroman genre in terms of some kind of individuation or self-realization achieved by the characters.

In *A Mercy*, most of the female characters, like Florens, embark upon a journey defined in terms of a wilderness experience and terrifying “pathless” dark night—an apt metaphor for the nightmarish experience of slavery. The characters adopt various resources for survival: they survive the experience with the help of folk-tales, rites and rituals and by invoking personal gods, deities, benign and guardian ancestral spirits, to come to their aid. Lina, a native Indian whom Vaark purchases from the Presbyterians, is highly eclectic in her approach to living:

(She) decided to fortify herself by piecing together scraps of what her mother had taught her before dying in agony. Relying on her memory and her own resources, she cobbled together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be in the world. (46)

Tessa Roynon reads in Lina’s self-invention an attempt to create “a new, hybridized identity” which comments upon “Morrison’s conviction that the modern condition and modernist response to it—that of dislocation and reformation—began with the colonial project and slavery” (Roynon 84). Above all, the female characters survive “the arrows of adversity with the help of rebellious humor which signifies the triumph of a spirit which refuses to be put down” (Levine 343). Memory also plays a selective role in the creation of a syncretic faith which helps them connect with nature/Mother Africa and attain some kind of communion, redemption, self-invention or personal conversion experience, as with Lina who “sorted and stored what she dared to recall and eliminated the rest, an activity that shaped her inside and out” (48).

However, unlike the conventional Bildungsroman, not all the protagonists in Morrison novels like *Tar Baby* arrive at the desired goal of self-actualization. Quite often, the characters fail in the process of maturation and development. This has led some critics to think that Morrison’s novels also work as anti-Bildungsroman, especially when the resolution of the novels thwarts the expectations of both the characters and the readers (due to an apparent lack of

closure). Heinert identifies some of the reasons why Morrison's Bildungsroman fail to realize the objectives of a conventional Bildungsroman. According to him, Morrison's Bildungsroman is subversive (Heinert 12). It is unconventional and modernist in using multiple Bildungsroman motifs in the text at the same time, making the relationship between the genre and novel problematic, as Morrison does not write her Bildungsroman in what is described as the tradition of formal realism. What makes the relationship more complicated are the ways in which the conventions of the genre are shaped and influenced by the values and logic of the dominant culture, which exerts its own influence on the lives of the characters. For example, citing Nguyen, Heinert sums up the American version of the Bildungsroman as having a basic plot that "emphasise(s) the moral development of the hero in the face of the corrupt influences of the society" (qtd. in Heinert 14).

We have multiple Bildungsroman narratives in *A Mercy*. There is the development of young, orphaned and sold women who narrate their stories from their third person points of view. Their stories intersect with and complement each other. Running parallel to these Bildungsroman narratives, is the (anti)Bildungsroman of Jacob Vaark who is "a ratty orphan become landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life" (10). His initial portrayal is as a humane person. He is a conscientious objector to slavery and a kind of patron saint in the tradition of the biblical patriarchs who took responsibility for their herds. Determined to prove he can make a living without trading in the "flesh-peddling chivalry" (Genovese *World Slaveholders Made* 123) which strengthened the patriarchal social structure in a market economy based on the slave-trade (20), Vaark's quest is seen in terms of survival and the pursuit of wealth, which the Virginians identified with work: "He was determined to prove that his own industry could amass the fortune, the station, D'Ortega claimed without trading his conscience for coin" (26). Goulimari describes the trajectory of the Bildungsroman in terms of "learning and integration in the society" (Goulimari 183). Vaark's quest proves to be his anti-Bildungsroman because he not only abandons his principles but, in fact, gives in to the dominant ideologies and also cuts himself off from the rest of society.

The Plantation and Patriarchism in Early Virginia

In terms of surviving the corrupting influences of society, Jacob has to compromise his morality in “an ad hoc territory” (11) and a “disorganized world” with random laws (8) which favour landowners, slave brokers and religious pundits. He cannot help doing business with slave traders. He also comes across advocates of the plantation business and slavery. In the history of the American South, slaveholders and planters shared a common ideology based on principles of patriarchy/patriarchism. According to the historian Anthony Parent Jr., the term “patriarchism” appeared in the literature/print form in 1666—during the period when slavery started taking root in Virginia (Parent 199). Patriarchism in Virginia cherished the ideals of patriarchy, which grew out of traditions inherited from Classical times and European practice.⁴ This practice of patriarchy was to degenerate into a benevolent and good-natured paternalism which, according to Eugene D. Genovese, became “the specific manifestation of class consciousness” (*In Red and Black* 134). It is important to consider the seeds or manifestation of paternalism in the context of *A Mercy* and especially in the behavior of Vaark as a benevolent paternalist because this was to become the dominant characteristic of slaveholders and planters in the Old South. For Genovese, this is important because it defines and embodies the nature of the master-slave relationship and helps establish the slave culture (M. Smith 20, 44).⁵ According to Genovese: “Paternalism did not mean kindness or generosity or love, although it embraced some of each; essentially it meant a special notion of duty and responsibility toward one’s charges. Arbitrary power, harshness toward disobedience, even sadism, constituted its other side” (*In Red and Black* 134). This kind of paternalistic outlook culminated amongst the slave owners in the antebellum period (Kolchin 60), illustrating the contradictory ways “in which the Southern slave owners looked upon and dealt with their slaves” (Kolchin 111). Kolchin finds paternalism “useful” as a concept, but he wants to identify “what it does and does not mean” due to its “widespread confusion” (Kolchin 111). According to him, “paternalism involved not a good, painless, or benign slavery—all contradictions in terms—but a slavery in which masters

took personal interest in the lives of their slaves” (Kolchin 111). Masters “expected work and obedience” from their slaves “to whom they owed guidance and protection” (Kolchin 111). In *A Mercy*, the contradictory actions of masters baffle Lina, to whom they are all “Europes”. She sees the behaviour of masters as:

An unfathomable puzzle. Europes could calmly cut mothers down, blast old men in the face with muskets louder than moose calls, but were enraged if a not-Europe looked a Europe in the eye. On the one hand they would torch your home; on the other they would feed, nurse and bless you. (44)

For feminist historians like Kathleen Brown, paternalism is not much different from patriarchy, that is rule by the male figurehead over his female and other household dependents and is quite often associated with paternalism, which wore the façade of a more affectionate or familial relationship as long as the authority of the patriarch remained unquestioned (Brown 322). Vaark embodies and heralds all the contradictions of this kind of paternalism to emerge amongst the slave owners (as in its later reincarnation in the owner of Sweet Home, Mr. Garner, in *Beloved*). One of the motives behind Vaark’s rescuing of Florens is to arrange some help for his wife and provide welcome relief for her because she is distraught with grief after the death of her daughter, Patrician, who was the same age as Florens when she “got kicked in the head” (24). However, what is shocking about Vaark is the cruel indifference with which he can entertain the notion that if Florens were to get kicked by a horse like his own daughter was hurt, “the loss would not rock Rebekka so” (24). This reveals the other side of a man who feels compassion for animals, whose whole being is revolted by the sight of a horse being mistreated, yet has little empathy for human slaves or what can transpire between mother and daughter as a consequence of a traumatic separation. This is characteristic behaviour of a paternalist who can easily switch from being sympathetic to being utterly indifferent and callous towards his slaves whom he considers to be objects for the purpose of pleasing his wife. As Peter Kolchin puts it, slaves were considered not only as “inferior members of their extended households,” but also as

commodified and disposable items of no significance (Kolchin 112).

Ironically enough, the southern slaveholders, who conceived of a community that took pride in a patriarchal and paternalistic ethos, failed their “charges” precisely in terms of their responsibility. Despite the fact that the community prided itself on the rule of a resident planter whose plantation was like a home and all the residents part of his extended family (Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 5), it was within this context that the plantation system and slavery grew up together, each a product of the other (Genovese *In Red and Black* 285). For Amiri Baraka, the hideous face of slavery concealed itself behind a benevolent paternalism. Slavery was above all a “paternal institution”—a most humane and mild form of exploitation (qtd. in Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 4). According to Genovese, paternalism grew out of the necessity to morally justify this system of exploitation (*Roll, Jordan, Roll* 4).

The planters and slave holders in late 17th century Virginia projected themselves into the role of biblical and paternalist patriarchs. They considered themselves to be the heads of households and society. They governed the state through mutual responsibilities and obligations. They took it upon themselves to make sure that they provided the society with its needs and regulated each member of society according to his/her place and title in the great scheme of things. In promising welfare to the slaves, they made a covenant with God (Miller 5) and they expected nothing but unprotected deference and silent obedience in return. The reception Jacob receives at the hands of D’Ortega soon turns out to be a lecture first and initiation afterwards into the values of patriarchy, ironically enough, vouchsafed by the wife of D’Ortega:

They both spoke of the gravity, the unique responsibility, this untamed world offered them; its unspeakable connection to God’s work and the difficulties they entered on His behalf. Caring for ill or recalcitrant labor was enough, they said, for canonization. (16)

Patriarchy, like slavery, is viewed here as a divinely sanctioned duty. It is aligned with Providence itself. Other aspects of patriarchy are order, provincialism and the pastoral or the

idyllic construction of paradise as an exclusive place (Parent 200). The Anabaptists present this appealing concept of Paradise to the bedridden Rebekka, based upon the exclusion of others: “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” (96-7). Patriarchal order, just like Christianity, is defined in terms of an organizational belief system that structures society around the authority of a patriarch as the fountainhead figure (Parent 199-200). The emphasis on order/organization is twofold: first of all, the patriarchs were different from the rest of mankind because of the nature of their character and second, because they were at the top of the ladder in terms of rank or superiority in relation to other classes. Jacob endorses, in his own way, some of the values of the patriarchal system represented by the society and D’Ortega. In his search for a docile wife to look after his domestic affairs:

...he wanted a certain kind of mate: an unchurched woman of childbearing age, obedient but not groveling, literate but not proud, independent but nurturing. And he would accept no scold. She never raised her voice in anger. Saw to his needs, made the tenderest dumplings, took to chores in a land completely strange to her with enthusiasm and invention, cheerful as a bluebird. (18)

The domesticated subjugation of women through idealization belongs in the patriarchal regime. Despite all his moral aversion to D’Ortega and his way of living, Jacob is not immune from the ideology of patriarchy so prevalent in late 17-th century Virginia. On his return, Jacob adopts aspects of the patriarchal way of life he seemed to detest at the beginning and undergoes a radical change of heart. His visit to Jublio proves to be his initiation into the patriarchal way of life rapidly materialized by his involvement in the business of rum and (sugar) plantations. Just as religion shaped the hierarchical structure of society in Virginia—itsself based on the models of European society in its practice of slave/civil laws and religious and patriarchal hierarchies—patriarchy was just another unavoidable aspect of the same hierarchical class that structured the ideological foundation of society. In characterizing Vaark as

a vulnerable man whose morality is compromised and who succumbs to the evil influence of society, Morrison “symbolizes the corruption at the heart of American national mythology” (V. Smith 123). Because of his self-interest, Vaark becomes a product and victim of that society and the values it places on the slave system represented by the likes of D’Ortega. He envies D’Ortega’s big mansion and endorses his status as a patriarch who valorizes a system like the plantation, which is dependent upon the coerced labour of obedient slaves. Vaark’s dreamworld entices him to step beyond the threshold of D’Ortega’s universe and try to build a replica of the plantation symbolized by D’Ortega’s big house. He desires to materialize his dream of building a domain similar to D’Ortega’s without compromising his conscience and with “None of that pagan excess, of course, but fair” (25). Ironically enough, his dream of pastoral independence, permanence and ease is undermined by the presence of (spiritual) disease and death. None of his progeny survive and yet he still conceives of building his self-sufficient kingdom in the Eden-like setting of a garden.

Eden in the image of a garden is a classic pastoral and Utopian ideal, be it in the form of Arcadia, a mythical earthly paradise or even Virginia itself, referred to as a land of “Virgin Purity and Plenty of the first Creation” (Marx 76). According to Lee J. Greene, it was the founding metaphor for the New World in the colonial imagination of the European mind (Greene 1). The Anglo-Americans appropriated the metaphor in order to marginalize and cut Africans off from mainstream society (Greene 1-2) and support the paternalist structure. As discussed, they also exploited passages from the Judeo-Christian Bible in order to justify the exclusion of Africans from American society. In the words of Greene, “The Biblical stories of the Garden of Eden and of Man’s Fall” provided the template around which was formulated “the tropological images of American society and subjects” (Greene 2). Greene terms this formulation as “the Eden Trope” which is not necessarily “confined to the Biblical narrative of Creation and of the Fall” (Greene 2). He adds, “The trope revises, incorporates and conflates passages from other sections of Genesis, from other books in the Old Testament, and from sections of the New Testament. It also appropriates nonbiblical and nonreligious discourses and

signifying practices” (Greene 2). For the early Southerners the “signifying practices” were related to the economic, social and political considerations of the New World based on a hierarchical structure, as is evident from the literature written during this period (Greene 13). Paradoxically enough, the image of Eden brought with it its opposite—an image of Eden as a vast wilderness with its roots going back to Judeo-Christian concepts. Wilderness, as opposed to the Romantic concept, embodies the biblical and existential paradigm man faced on earth. Wilderness and Eden are antipodal to each other and stand for both physical and spiritual opposites. Morrison further heightens this contradiction by contrasting the experience of wilderness (as lack of water) with the experience of the baptismal sea journey embarked upon by the female characters.

Black Outcasts, Puritans and the Fanonian Mirror

The Puritans envisaged wilderness in terms of a wild garden or a (forest-like) place where evil lurked in the shape of primitive heathens (the Indians) and savages (Greene 13) who were the devil’s disciples, the ones seduced by the Serpent for his stronghold. Southern whites subverted the Bible to justify their slavocracy and believed that “blacks were not descendants of the original parents and that their presence in the biblical Garden of Eden stemmed from the intruding evil (the snake)” (Greene 40). Blacks were subhuman and a physical manifestation of the Devil and his intrusion into Eden (Greene 40). Christiansë reads Florens’ encounter with the Puritans exactly along those lines. She describes the encounter as “the sign of evil’s first intrusion in their midst” (Christiansë 57). Goulimari describes Florens’ metaphorical journey through the wilderness and her encounter with the Puritans as representing emergent “Africanism” and “an allegory of the simultaneous emergence of racism and transition to an economy systematically relying on African slaves in the American colonies” (Goulimari 138). On her journey to find the blacksmith, Florens feels the need to take shelter in a village of Puritans. Widow Ealing and her daughter, Jane—who has a “wayward eye” and is being persecuted for being a demon by the Puritans—give shelter to Florens when the Puritans come

to interrogate them. The mother inflicts wounds on her daughter so that she can prove her to be human. However, the Puritans get distracted by Florens whom they call “the Black Man’s minion” because of the colour of her skin (“Visions and Revisions” 182). At this juncture, Florens discovers her blackness is essentialized. She experiences being the black other due to her different skin. This is a traumatizing moment for her as she becomes aware of racial attitudes and her otherness for the first time. In a moment reminiscent of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*, when the author finds himself interpellated as a child utters the words “Look- a Negro! I am frightened,” Florens, too, undergoes a moment of racial interpellation. Fanon describes his traumatic encounter with the child as the “epidermalisation of being” (Fanon 109). Stricken by the racial interpellation, Fanon becomes an object, from the state of being a subject. He finds his body vulnerable to dismemberment: “What could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my body with black blood” (Fanon 112).

Similarly, Florens undergoes a Fanonian moment of interpellation as one of the Puritan women derogatively describes her as “Afric,” while another woman describes her as both “Afric and much more,” pointing to the little girl “shaking and moaning by her side” (109). The little girl is also reminiscent of the frightened child who shatters Fanon’s ontological resistance to the extent that he feels ashamed of his race and ancestors. Fanon discovers that the lived experience of being black is essentialized by the essence of blackness and all coordinates associated with the bestial, the primitive, the evil and the biological and so forth.

Florens discovers her essential blackness after the group of Puritans subject her to objective examination. They force her to take her clothes off in order to inspect her body: “They look under my arms, between my legs. They circle me, lean down to inspect my feet...” (111). The scene of Florens’ examination is evocative of *Beloved* when the Schoolteacher orders his nephews to count the “animal characteristics” of Sethe. In both scenes, the subject under examination is not only degraded but denied the essential attributes of humanity as well. Florens discovers her ethnic characteristics of being “black” and “Afric” like her mother did during the process of her enslavement in Barbados: “It was there I learned how I was not a person from my

country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin” (163). Once the question of race is determined, everything is reified in the colour of the skin. The mother becomes “negrita” and the daughter becomes an “Afric” because she inherits the same colour. The desire for human recognition and mutual reciprocity is closed to both after their race is determined by the colour barrier.

According to Fanon, man’s worth and reality depend upon reciprocal recognition by the other. Starved of human recognition as a subject, Florens does not find any sign of human recognition in the eyes of the Puritans. In fact, “Swine look at (her) with more connection when they raise their heads from the trough” (111). Like Fanon, Florens discovers herself to be “a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety” (*Black Skin* 117). She is denied any human recognition from the Puritans just as Pecola is denied human recognition in *The Bluest Eye* when she comes under the gaze of the shopkeeper, Mr. Yacobowski: “He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see...And something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness” (36). Conscious of the gaze which denies any human affiliation, Florens, like Pecola and Fanon, undergoes a dismemberment of the self symbolized by the loss of “something precious” inside her: “I climb the streambed under watching trees and I know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart” (113). The loss of “something precious” symbolizes her loss of subjectivity. It brings in its wake Fanonian moments of amputation and dismemberment.

Florens’ experience of her blackness is characteristic of Fanon’s “Negro” who is unaware of his blackness “as long as his existence is limited to his own environment, but the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness” (*Black Skin* 116). When the person of colour is in his/her own environment and among his/her own people, there is a mutual recognition and reciprocity which is not possible for the person of colour in the colonial context of racism because it locks him/her into his/her body. After Florens is made conscious of the oppressive burden of her blackness by the Puritans, she finds herself dissected,

exposed and overdetermined by the “white gaze.” Like Fanon’s subject, she not only experiences the white gaze, but also begins to see herself through the medium of the white gaze, which leads to further self-objectification. The white gaze shatters her perception of blackness and subjectivity. She thinks that her blackness is an ontological flaw. She also presumes that her blackness is the reason for her mother’s seeming act of abandoning her as a child: “Is that what my mother knows? Why she chooses me to live without? Not the outside dark we share, a *minha mãe* and me, but the inside one we don’t” (113). This further adds to her loss of “something precious” which will develop into what she describes as “something small, feathered, toothy”. The loss of “something precious” will develop into “the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild” (158). Florens knows that her “withering is born in the Widow’s closet” where the Puritans examine her body.

The *withering inside* refers to her dismembered self that needs a Lacanian mirror to contain it. The mirror can be in the form of an acknowledging gaze or the loving face of the mother. Shirley Ann Stave, who studies *A Mercy* with the help of Lacan’s famous theory of the Mirror Stage, interprets the wholesome impact of the mirror upon the child as “allow(ing) for the denial of child’s limitations and lack of agency” (Stave 137). There is no such medium available to help Florens from falling apart after the experience of her racial othering: “I want to put my face deep there.... Right away I take fright when I see my face is not there. Where my face should be is nothing. Where is it hiding? Why is it?” (136). According to Fanon, the mirror revolves around the dialectic of the relationship between the white world and the man of colour. For Fanon, contra Lacan, the mirror which signifies a contact with the white world does not enable the raced subject to find subjective security: “In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (*Black Skin* 83). Fanon continues his argument in the same vein, “When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place” which results in “a collapse of ego” (*Black Skin* 119). Unlike the Lacanian mirror which lays down the foundation of the ego, the mirror becomes a source of dismemberment for the raced subject. It conveys a disagreeable and flawed reflection which

denies the subject his/her subjectivity. What Florens discovers in the eyes of the others is a confirmation of her racialized difference which objectifies and negates her individuality. Like Fanon, she finds herself overdetermined from outside and becomes a slave to her appearance/colour (*Black Skin* 87). She seeks recognition as a human being but finds herself caught in a process of epidermalisation which reduces her to a state of “crushing objecthood (*Black Skin* 82).”

As Goulimari observes, “Before this scene she was a slave whose skin colour was incidental to her enslavement; after this scene, her skin colour becomes a sign of the devil and thereby eternally justifies her enslavement” (Goulimari 138). Whereas Florens’ experience with the Puritans demonstrates “how blackness became linked not only to bondage but also to religiously based notions of evil,” (Li 121) it also “illustrates the role of religion in the production, circulation, and internalization of racist ideology” (V. Smith 125). Even the letter from Rebekka, which confirms the legality of her belonging, is of little value in terms of protection and freedom to travel. The blacks/slaves had no rights except under the aegis of the gentry, which claimed ownership to both the garden and its slaves. In the words of Leo Marx, the practice of “the pastoral ideal was “removed” from the literary mode to which it traditionally had belonged and applied to reality” (Marx 73). According to Marx, this was how the myth of America was transformed from being a mere metaphor to having ideological and political advantages. A notable point here is the semantic and etymological root of wilderness as a place inhabited by wild and evil beasts. The concept of wilderness in opposition to Eden was further reinforced with the arrival of twenty African slaves in Virginia circa 1619.⁶ This appearance of black slaves in the American landscape served as a rebuttal of the idealized notion of America as the New Eden, which for the Africans, was an Eden after the Fall (Greene 18). This black presence, as Morrison points out its usage in *Playing in the Dark*, has continued to fascinate the American mind by offering a playground for the imagination. Melville, Poe and Hawthorne are examples of a few canonical American writers for whom wilderness was still “black” and symbolized a Conradian heart of darkness.

Racial discrimination and differences based on gender were at the heart of a relationship

based on dominance and submission between master and slave. What is also of particular interest to Morrison in this text is the nature of the female condition. Women were precariously placed in a society where the “marital, familial and communal order all hinged on God’s sanction of male superiority” (Brown 13). They adjusted themselves to the patriarchal ideal of domesticated women. They pursued the ideal of being good wives, mothers and the mistresses of their households. The small biographical account of Mistress Rebekka bears testimony to this historical fact. Women were not entitled to enjoy the full potential of their gender, being limited mostly to reproductive labour. Both slave and slaveholding women were part of a world in which gender structured the symbolic organization of a society based on hierarchies. Morrison projects all these issues into the stock image of slave society as a patriarchal garden in which the patriarchs viewed the hierarchy as natural among humans, just as it was among animals.

In assuming the responsibility of a patriarch, Vaark cuts himself off from the rest of mankind, which ultimately becomes the cause of his downfall. He co-opts his prized wife and the orphaned girls he adopts as the fictitious members of his family. Just like the planters who were the fictive fathers responsible for the naming, care and patronage of the enslaved, including their welfare and health, Jacob too dreams of shepherding his flock independent of all else and like a god sufficient unto himself. The kind of self-sufficiency he wants to assume is the sin of Satan himself:

Their drift from others produced a selfish privacy and they had lost the refuge of and the consolation of a clan. Baptists, Presbyterians, tribe, army, family, some encircling outside thing was needed. Pride, she thought. Pride alone made them think that they needed only themselves, could shape life that way, like Adam and Eve, like gods from nowhere beholden to nothing except their own creations. She should have warned them, but her devotion cautioned against impertinence. As long as Sir was alive it was easy to veil the truth: that they were not a family—not even a like-minded group. They were orphans, each and all. (56-7)

Needing nothing from “outside” carries within it the seeds of self-destruction. The process of self-definition poses the threat of existential loneliness, isolation, alienation and self-destruction for the individual if he/she cuts himself/herself off from mainstream society. The text emphasizes the need for some kind of encircling from the outside, like the chorus of women that encircle the bed-ridden Rebekka and comfort her with the distraction of their stories (79, 89). The chorus of human presence is still a desirable source of consolation, comfort and distraction in an absurd universe where the cosmic figure of a Calvinistic God is no dispenser of consolation. Even a prophet like Job—whose patience is contrasted with the divine retribution—finds no divine consolation and justification for his suffering in his moments of pain and existential anguish. Creating a link or connection with other humans is more sustaining. As Rebekka muses in her moments of sickness: “Well, she thought that was the true value of Job’s comforters” (89). In Morrison’s oeuvre, the survival of the individual is linked to the community. Outside the community, the individual is vulnerable. This is a double bind. On the one hand, we have the call of individuality which impels the individual characters to define and live their lives according to their own moral code of living. On the other hand, the call of conformity forces individuals to immerse themselves in the collective at the cost of their own individuality. *Sula* is a classic example where two central characters, Nel and Sula, are caught between the claims of the self and those of the community. Morrison’s characters are destined to live out this tension between the claims of the self and community (Harding 101). The community is like the *pharmakos*. It can be both nurturing and poisonous. It can foster as well as stunt the growth of characters. The survival of individuals depends as much upon conformity as upon individual development. Jacob’s downfall proves to be the result of his distancing himself from others. According to Marc C. Conner, Morrison recreates the paradigm of Adam and Eve through the tragic downfall of Jacob: “Morrison’s invocation of Adam and Eve conveys the fundamental sin that haunts much of her writing: the sin of self-sufficiency, the prideful assertion that one is self-created, dependent on nothing” (“What Lay Beneath” 158). In Morrison’s fictive world, the process of the Bildungsroman is not divorced from society and its

institutions but, rather, dependent upon intersubjectivity. Toni Morrison's Bildungsroman seeks the dialectical integration of the individual self and society based on the notion of classical Bildungsroman. Unlike *Song of Solomon*, which had to do with the writer's sense/perception of paternal loss and the void left after such a loss, *A Mercy* responds to a similar loss—that of maternal separation—but from the perspective of a female child like Beloved. In the words of the author, *Song of Solomon* created a male world inhabited by a man on a quest from ignorance to epiphany/knowledge, incompleteness to being a complete man. *A Mercy* recreates a similar quest embarked upon by the female protagonists to attain a sense of completeness or wholeness in their lives. The text celebrates maternal love with an intensity close to religious devotion and blindness. Some female characters, like Sorrow, are propelled by a kind of blind mother drive which endows them with a sense of completeness. Sorrow names herself *Complete* once she gives birth to her baby (132). The figure or apparition of the mother that appears in-between this mother-daughter text, especially in the finale, recalls the image of the holy mother.⁷

Florens constantly invokes maternal love and tries to connect herself to her mother when she is faced with emotional deprivation in her life. Her wandering is a kind of nostalgic search for her lost mother. Like most of Morrison's characters, she seeks to substitute for the loss of maternal love through complete surrender of the self and a desire to possess through the love of (an)other. Lina supplements the lack of maternal love for Florens by playing the role of a (surrogate) mother, as most of the female Morrison characters do for each other. As Mar Gallego-Duran observes, she "acts as a nurturing substitute mother for her, feeding her with stories of protective mothers which try to erase the deep hurt of her mother's betrayal..." (Gallego-Duran 110).

Like Beloved, Florens suffers from the traumatic consequences of separation. The monologues through which she converses with her mother are more in the tradition of songs of sorrow, where the child, being forcedly separated from her mother, bids her an emotional farewell and asks for her prayers while anticipating a frightful future. Just as in the theme of the sorrow songs, it is difficult to tell whether the actual separation from the mother is more painful

than the knowledge that she is/was deserted/abandoned by her mother or sold by her to a life of slavery. Florens' mind is haunted by this question of maternal betrayal: "Why she chooses me to live without" (113)? The effect of memories on the mind of Florens is the ever present fear of being rejected (Christiansë 196). In slave songs, like the various versions of "Motherless Child," the mournful partings and forced separations are rendered as worse than death because nobody could guess what the future held in store for the children.

A Mercy, like *Beloved*, projects life under slavery as a living death—a fate worse than death itself. The questions of redemption, baptism, salvation, rebirth and life-after-death traditionally associated with Christianity are interpreted in terms of release from enslavement. The sacrament of baptism is seen as a liberating force. Baptism brings about spiritual rebirth, associated with "a life of water, on water, about water" (71) or with a sea journey, which promises the baptized person a new life. There are several allusions to sea journeys and a desire for baptism linked to the gaining freedom and a new life as a free person. But the baptismal sea journey from the Old to the New World ends in a hellish nightmare and servitude, rather than the promised land of freedom.⁸

The text explores the journey to the promised land in terms of an "errand," (2) a "pathless night" (3) or a guideless roaming in the wilderness. The symbolic but perilous roaming in the wilderness signifies an existential struggle between light and darkness, ignorance and knowledge and above all, slavery and freedom. The struggle is portrayed in terms of the biblical prelapsarian and postlapsarian Creation myth, Genesis and the Exodus (exile) themes. Shoes, as explained in the following section, are at the heart of this creation myth and the theme of exile. They bear witness to the survival of the African identity as the people "chosen" from Africa, which testifies to a creation of biblical authority "in the beginning."

Shoes as Symbols of Disconnection and Mother Loss

Shoes are symbolic of origins, past and destiny. In *A Mercy*, Florens is haunted by her mother and her past. Shoes serve as a perfect biographical document of her life. They are a

symbol of her bereavement and separation from the mother. They not only bespeak of her past, but also hint at her future self or where she would. For African Americans, shoes symbolize the original exile or the Exodus from Africa. Florens begins her story with an evocation of shoes in tandem with this experience of exile and immigration: “The beginning begins with the shoes...” (2). This is the first reference to shoes in *A Mercy* when Florens’ mother makes a plea to her daughter, asking her to give up her love of shoes and her “prettify ways” (2). She relents and allows Florens to wear high-heeled shoes, but remains concerned that Florens’ feet will not become strong enough to endure the daily tasks (as a slave), if she does not go barefoot. The shoes evoked here are signifiers not only of Florens’ desires and aspirations but of violence, dispossession, poverty, separation, race, servitude, slavery and sexuality. The beginning begins with addressing the stark, historic realities of the black experience. In her interview with Donald Suggs, Morrison outlines her approach to the realities of black experience:

You start by saying, in the beginning was dispossession and violence. Then you look at what happened, what positive things came out of that, what black people were able to do with the forms of reclamation and dignity the forms of that resistance and so on...I try and say what does it mean to have no self? When the “other” denies it, which is what slavery is, and what do you do to reclaim the self or status.... (Interview 33)

According to Tommie Lee Jackson, the motif of shoes or brogans has multiple significations in the fiction of both Morrison and Faulkner. Both writers use brogans as “a signifier of race, or a condition of servitude” (T. Jackson 103). She quotes Anthony Barthelemy, for whom the symbol of brogans is “indicative of mental shackles that must be overthrown by the wearer” (T. Jackson 16). The shoes are analogous to and inseparable from the conditions of life under slavery for African Americans. Jamie Carlacio considers the motif of shoes in *A Mercy* as “the trope that defines (Florens’) subjectivity throughout most of the novel” (Carlacio 135-6). My interpretation of shoes differs from Carlacio’s as I do not consider shoes to be the sole medium

of subjectivity for Florens. According to my understanding of the motif of shoes, they are representative of the economic and material conditions under slavery. Although they are symbolic of Florens' desires and her aspirations, they are not the only medium through which she attains subjectivity. (Florens will inscribe her subjectivity through the medium of writing, as we shall see.) Shoes are symbolic of the hardships she suffers during her journey through the wilderness. They are phylogenetic of the Bildungsroman process. In the context of the story, they carve out the trajectory of Florens' Bildungsroman from slavery to freedom as she finally gives up her obsession with shoes in a bid to assert her autonomous subjectivity.

According to Cathy Covell Wagner, Morrison uses "the leitmotif of 'shoes,' as "a key structural device" in *A Mercy* (Wagner 92). Morrison employs the metaphor of shoes as a powerful synecdoche, symbolizing the experience of life under slavery. Shoes, like the body ready for inscription, inscribe the story of what was present at the beginning: "In the beginning the most important thing was the template" (*Paradise* 263). They have a ready-to-unfold narrative quality like the shoes of Van Gogh waiting on the threshold. They promise a Cinderella-like enchantment and a Karen-like (from Hans Andersen's *The Red Shoes*) (dis)enchantment to the wearer. On a literal level, shoes like clothes bespeak the ordeal slaves were forced to endure on their journey to the New World. They also throw light on what was economically affordable for slavocracy. Slaveholders were concerned even about the cost of providing the slaves with basic amenities like shoes and clothes. Slaveholders either bought cheaply made brogans or shoes manufactured at home.

Besides being the hated symbol of slavery, poverty and race, shoes are a symbol of the loss of belonging represented by mother and serve as metonyms of the hardships endured by the female characters in terms of separation and the wilderness experience. The wilderness experience, a symbolic sojourn in the wide world or forest, involved elegiac mourning over the loss of mother. Shoes disconnected the Africans not only from their biological mothers but from the Ur-Minha Mãe-Ur-Africa as well. Shoes are impediments to all levels of human development (Lyon 273), both at the physical and spiritual levels as they disconnect the wearer from the fundamental source of nurture—mother earth. Only going barefoot can restore contact

with mother earth and allow the meek to inherit the earth. To deprive the foot of physical contact with the soil is to disrupt the nurturing relationship between mother earth and the human body. Shoes embody this originary separation, the disrupted relationship between the mother and her children, and handed them over to the cruel fate of suffering, bondage and servitude—a fate likened to a living death.

Shoes, as the material raiments of separation, signify the loss of mother. As Anissa Wardi points out, “(Florens’) ill-fitting shoes, a unifying thread in the novel, bespeak the pain associated with migration and familial separation” (Wardi 26). In Jewish survival literature, shoes “as remainder serve as revenant, as spectral reminder of (maternal) loss which even a ghostly debt of mourning cannot discharge” (E. Jones 219). Shoes are linked to the loss of mother—the original lost object. In the context of slavery, shoes are a symbol of debased slavery and its passive acceptance. In order to set oneself free from the abject symbol of slavery, the enslaved must not allow shoes to shackle them into accepting this fate. They must, in fact, unlace the brogans of their minds in order to be free (Barthelemy 194). This can be done by establishing renewed contact with mother earth. Shoes embody a fundamental dichotomy for the slaves’ ways of living. Shoes were meant to be fetters for slaves in bondage. But it was their choice not to wear them, especially after they were free to reject them as the debased symbol of slavery (Barthelemy 190). The refusal to give up shoes had nothing to do with shame for their poverty or denial of the past. It had to do with their freedom and with the “claim to their humanity, their assertion that they were not chattel, not beast, not subhuman” (Barthelemy 190).

Florens is sent on a journey to bring the blacksmith, a Messiah figure, to help the ailing condition of her dying mistress. Her quest to find the blacksmith becomes a symbolic journey of empowerment, from slavery to freedom and the dominion of the self over its earthly limitations. The course of the journey is beset with perils. It is haunted by beastly images evocative of the mythical fear of the Southern night riders and white patrols. White patrols were deployed by the slave owners to oversee the movement of slaves and to tighten their supervision over potential run-away slaves and their freedom to move/travel (Kolchin 61). They were the forebears of the

Southern police forces, Ku Klux Klan and the other institutions which underpinned the system of slavery. Their aim was to control, intimidate and strike psychological terror and fear in the hearts of would-be rebel slaves by giving them the worst kind of grotesque punishments such as maiming, gashing and physical lashing or whipping. They looked for any signs of revolt and used brutal tactics and various weapons of torture, like the strip or lash to control slave behaviour. The desire to control the slaves, especially runaways, links slavery with public authority. The runaway slave could be brought to justice and given an exemplary punishment if they had no badge or a pass to prove their identity or legality. Sally E. Hadden, the author of *Slave Patrols* writes, “Patrollers’ night-to-night enforcement of slave laws undergirded the entire structure of slavery” (Hadden 72). Florens, unlike the runaway slaves, is on an errand from her mistress (103). She has to produce a letter confirming her status/legality/ownership written by her mistress to avoid the fate meted out to runaway slaves at the hands of night riders. She also needs a mentor—a guardian figure of authority who presides over his/her dominion and to whom obedience is given in return—to guide her through her purgatorial journey. She invokes a mentor through the figure of Lina and, above all, her mother who deserted her as a child but keeps vigil over her all along her journey, guiding her in dreams and in the form of benign ancestral spirits. Florens is apprehensive as she embarks on this purgatorial journey that promises “a new world breaking open for us” (3). She narrates the story of her self-development, relying upon her memory. The story of her journey gets interlinked with the other female characters who hanker after symbolic (comm)union, completion and redemptive freedom. Their hunger for communion finds different expressions. “Mother-hunger—to be one or have one” is the single most important passion/longing the characters are consumed by and which “Lina knew, remained alive, travelling down the bone” (61). It is Lina’s spontaneous maternal instinct that sharpens her devotion to Florens and makes her feel so protective of her (58). The stories she tells “of mothers fighting to save their children from wolves and natural disasters” are metaphorical stories/morality tales of how mothers fought to protect their children while teaching her, at the same time, strategies for survival and independence in a world fraught with dangers and without any protection (59).

The female characters are driven in different directions by this mother-hunger. Their mother-hunger is, as Derrida describes it, the orientation of everything (*H.C.* 41). Morrison contrasts it with male hunger. The concept of male hunger is inseparable from the desire to appropriate the universe. Male hunger, in terms of the material ownership of subjects/objects, comes under the same category as the capitalist and egocentric desire of leaving behind a legacy or reputation, the materialist's only hope of continuity that rests "in the pleasure of the process" (95). Male hunger is described in terms of slavery. The logic of male desire equates love with possessions. The love of material things prohibits autonomy and leads to loss of freedom, the ultimate slavery. Male love or love that defines itself in terms of possessions is a self-destructive process. It does violence not only unto itself but upon others as well. Love that rests on ownership and possessiveness makes no sense of self-worth or self-ownership.

The Impossibility of Love and Self-Affirmation under Slavery

Mother-hunger is described in terms of love, ownership, self-less devotion and sacrifice. In an interview with Jane Bakerman, Morrison remarks, "Too frequently love has to do with owning that person" ("The Seams Can't Show" 42). For Morrison, the passion of love under slavery is inseparable from the paradigm of ownership. The merging of the self with the beloved—the inability to differentiate one's own self from the other—encroaches upon the boundaries of the autonomous and individual self. A person should love the beloved without reservations and without laying any claim to him/her as if he/she were a piece of property. The right of ownership is another form of slavery. It can pervert the most sublime expression of love into a debilitating and self-denigrating emotion, as in the case of Florens. Love is an ennobling expression. To borrow an expression from Morrison's *Jazz*, one does not *fall* in love, rather one *rises* in love. Most of Morrison's characters try to own their beloveds without having achieved a sense of self-ownership.

Florens is a "love-disabled" girl who is sent on an errand by her Mistress to find the

blacksmith (42). The blacksmith assumes the role of a catalyst and encourages self-ownership (43). Although Florens is “crippled with worship of him,” his task is to set her free. The blacksmith voices ownership of the self antithetical to the ideology underlining the structure of patriarchy and slavery represented by D’Ortega and Vaark, a system that privileges ownership to the point of owning and seeing people as property (86). Florens considers herself as twice expelled because of the system. The first time was when Jacob Vaark purchased her as a gift to please his wife and the second time was by the inquisitorial Puritans at the home of Widow Ealing. She enacts a dreadful symmetry reminiscent of the mirror stage, which Lacan links with infantile jealousy based on identification with the other. Jean Wyatt—a Lacanian critic of Morrison’s works like *Beloved*—describes the original scene of Florens’ expulsion in terms of sibling rivalry (“Failed Messages” 133). In Florens’ eyes, the mother “prefers the son to the daughter” (“Failed Messages” 133). The moment when Florens’ mother begs Vaark to “Take her,” makes her choice clear. The same logic of sibling rivalry prevails when the blacksmith seems to express greater concern and affection for the foundling Malaik, whom the blacksmith has adopted. Malaik becomes her rival, reminding Florens of “the brother who displaced her” (“Failed Messages” 136). She finds the boy a threat to her own existence as he reminds her of “her earlier loss of her mother” (Christiansë 197). In order to prevent another scene of rejection, especially after the blacksmith comes forward to defend the boy rather than Florens, “She enacts the murderous sibling rivalry of destroying the child who threatens to replace her” (“Failed Messages” 136). According to Wyatt, “maternal abandonment would be traumatic for any child, and reenactment of the trauma is a common symptom of unresolved trauma” (“Failed Messages” 138). The same holds true for Florens, who tries to recover but finds herself unable to avoid replicating the traumatic scene of the originary “expel”: “This expel can never happen again” (135). When she finally reaches the blacksmith’s place, she re-creates the original scene of separation from her mother. She imagines a *minha mãe* holding the hand of a baby boy—“this time her baby boy is Malaik” (138). In her mind, the boy emerges as an extension or “substitute of the brother her mother chose to keep” (Carlacio 137). In order to protect herself from the trauma of being expelled again, Florens inadvertently enacts violence. She transfers

her pent-up malice to Malaik, the young boy adopted by the blacksmith, and breaks his arm. Here, Morrison brings home the evil of slavery and its denial of self-ownership, which can pervert the expression of love. For slaves, who do not own themselves, laying claim to ownership is risky. It is the loss of self-ownership that leads to usurpation of the self by “the clawing feathery thing” which has the power to make one (en)act violence (113).

Love is not possible under slavery—a system based on the principles of repressive materialism. Only freedom endows the sense of self-worth and ownership which brings with it the gift of generous love free from the violent desire to possess. Freedom (like mercy) is a divine gift offered by a human being (as a divine agent) performing (occasional) acts of mercy. It gives dominion over oneself. This transformative knowledge comes to Florens by way of a call from the (Ur)mother who has been wanting to tell Florens through dreams, telepathic empathy and through protective maternal care and devotion: “to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing” (165). Florens answers this call from her mother by the symbolic act of giving up the shoes. Her mother was worried about her “prettify ways” as she is “never able to abide being barefoot” (4). This leaves Florens ill-prepared for the life of a slave. As Lina observes, “(Florens’) feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires” (4). For Jamie Carlacio, the soles are “the homonymic metaphors for Florens’ divided soul. As a child, Florens’ soul is divided between a foundation in slavery and a misplaced desire for freedom” (Carlacio 136). By giving up her shoes, Florens asserts her autonomy and finally restores and recovers her identity through a symbiotic relationship between herself and the (mother) earth as she declares to her mother at the end of her story: “Mãe, you can have pleasure now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress” (159).

The blacksmith tries to teach Florens what her mother has (telepathically) been trying to teach all along, even in a dream state, that she is being called upon and looked after by her mother. But as Martha Nussbaum puts it: any person “who repudiates bondage to human need is

ill-placed” to pass judgement on the needs and weaknesses of other humans (qtd. in Jessee 150). The blacksmith himself was a free man: “He had rights, then, and privileges, like Sir. He could marry, own things, travel sell his own labour” (43). Less aware of what a life of slavery can do by depriving the subject of (self)knowledge, he emphasises ownership in love as slavish and fraught with the dangerous desire of owning another person rather than one’s own self. The blacksmith fails to see the impact of systems like slavery and patriarchy that inhibit the growth and development of the enslaved servants. In fact, the blacksmith replicates in all its semantic force, the orthodox theoretical conception of the slave—a mere thing without any volition or activity of mind or body—“a sheer wilderness” (139). The blacksmith reduces Florens’ subjectivity to that of being a raced object.

In her encounter with the racializing and objectifying gaze of the Puritans, Florens becomes conscious of her blackness because of her somatic otherness. Like Fanon, Florens becomes conscious of her blackness as “a negating activity” (*Black Skin* 83). Like her mother, she discovers that her blackness is a sign of lack and negativity. The blacksmith’s addition of “sheer wilderness” is evocative of Fanon’s encounter with the other. After Fanon subjects himself to objective examination, he becomes even more conscious of his “ethnic characteristics,” like cannibalism, fetishism, racial and, above all, intellectual inferiority (*Black Skin* 84-5). By assessing her as intellectually deficient, the blacksmith makes Florens conscious of her ethnic characteristics and her intellectual deficiency to the point that she finds her body dismembered and thrown into a state of “crushing objecthood” (*Black Skin* 82).

Morrison projects Florens feelings of dismemberment and the reduction of her subjectivity to that of an object with the help of animal imagery culminating in the image of something “feathered and toothy” (113). Florens seeks recognition as a free human being but finds herself, like Fanon, ontologically fixed as an object. She denounces the blacksmith’s logic of her being “a slave by choice” (139). Instead, she holds Vaark and the enclosed system of the plantation responsible for making her a slave, thus denying the possibility of being a free subject with volition and rational capacities. Vaark’s homestead replicates the the structure of the plantation system. The plantation was an enclosed placed dependent upon a slave labour structure,

especially that of women, whose lives were confined within an enclosure. The slaves were forbidden to cross the boundaries of the plantation without the written permission of the master, as in Florens' case, who considers herself lost and illegal without the letter of permission from her mistress.

Writing about the confined nature of the plantation, Édouard Glissant claims the plantation was imagined as an idyllic place. But, in fact, it was a "closed place," incapable of regenerating itself because it was dependent upon a slave structure (*Poetics* 64). Glissant compares the plantation structure to "rubble" and "ruins" because it collapsed everywhere. It is Vaark's fantasy of self-sufficiency along with his self-righteous justification of, reliance on and exploitation of (remote) slave labour which results in his downfall, symbolised by the collapse of his house. Despite the fact that the plantation was a closed place, paradoxically enough, it gave birth to the poetics of expression or words that remain open (*Poetics* 75). The story of Florens (and the other women) bears testimony to the legacy of Vaark as she inscribes herself into existence on this "big, awing house," with "careful words," which are "closed up and wide open," (159). The open word she inscribes on the walls of Vaark's new home is remarkably similar to Glissant's account of the plantation as a "closed up" place which generates the open word: "The place was closed, but the word derived from it remains open" (*Poetics* 75). According to Glissant, the paradox of the plantation is that as an enclosed structure of oppression, it still gave birth to an open word. The word is open because it symbolises the struggles of slaves for freedom and justice against a life of enclosure which struggled to contain their bodies and their creative *marronage* or flight (*Poetics* 68).

In *A Mercy*, the open word not only bears witness to the collapse of the place, but also becomes the medium through which Florens asserts her humanity and achieves subjectivity. It also bears witness to the plight of other women in Vaark's homestead whose lives were totally dependent upon their master. They all attempt to create a community but find themselves precarious and vulnerable after his sudden death. Their attempt to create a female community falls apart, leaving all the women defenceless. According to Gallego-Duran, "the patriarchal

hold personified by Vaarks seems to suffocate the community that is unable to sustain itself, and, hence, to cope with the terrible consequences of such a void after his death” (Gallego-Duran 106). In her interview with Salman Rushdie, Morrison points out the vulnerable condition of women in “one of the world’s most violent countries” (Interview 57). She refers to the women in her book *Jazz* as “easy prey” because they are vulnerable to “rape, abuse, sexual assault...understood to be the menu of Black women, in particularly a slave or post-reconstruction society” (Morrison 57). She describes the status of the women in *A Mercy* in similar terms. The novel describes them as “illegal” because “There was no protection” (Interview 57).

A minha mãe knows the plight of women without “protection”: “To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below” (163). The graphic image of the “open wound that cannot heal” evokes “the chokecherry tree” that grows on Sethe’s back. Critics and reviewers of the novel have observed the parallels and similarities that exist between *A Mercy* and *Beloved*. Some critics and reviewers like Geneva Cobb Moore and Michiko Kakutani consider the novel to be a prequel to *Beloved*. The obvious similarity between *A Mercy* and *Beloved* is the loss of the mother-daughter relationship, forced separation(s) and constraints placed upon mothers by systems like the plantation and slavery. Both novels explore the aporetics of motherhood under slavery which Jean Wyatt describes in her study of *Beloved* as “the ultimate contradiction.” According to Nancy J. Peterson, systems like slavery disrupt the bond that exists between mother and child by routinely separating them from each other (Peterson *Beloved* 35-6). Sethe and a minha mãe see themselves as acting in the only possible way to keep their children safe from slavery. In keeping with the tradition of the African American slavery narrative, both mothers enact “the possible response to an institution attempting to render meaningless the mother-child relationship” (Rushdy “Daughters” 124). Sethe kills her daughter rather than have her turn to a life of slavery. Similarly, a minha mãe prays for “One chance,” and offers to “throw” her child at the mercy of a stranger like Vaark in order to protect her from being sexually exploited. To borrow from Morrison’s opinion of Sethe in her interview with Rushdie, a minha mãe also decides to take desperate measures “out of a

determination to nurture and be a parent” (Interview 56). Like Sethe, she does not want her daughter to be “dirtied” or “sullied” at the hands of D’Ortega. While Morrison is self-consciously recreating a fictional representation of history in *A Mercy* in stark contrast to *Beloved*, she wanted to see how things were before slavery became legalised and linked to racism. The one major difference between *A Mercy* and *Beloved* is *before* and *after* slavery became established as an institution and she enacts the difference through the dilemmas faced by the mother figures (who exercise agency under this huge umbrella of determined historical life (Interview 56)) and the limited choices available to them to salvage what they can for the well-being of their daughters. Both novels have to do with the imagination of what slavery was really like for those mothers at that time, being forced to hand over children they loved to an unknown fate. Both mothers suffer torture and numerous rapes for their children rather than have them suffer the same fate. Whereas, a *minha mãe* in *A Mercy* could resort to the occasional act of mercy one human extends to another, but that is good enough, in *Beloved* Sethe cannot expect any such act of human kindness and has to desperately slaughter her daughter in order to protect her. Florens’ mother stands at the historical crossroads where slavery is in the process of becoming an institution. In *Beloved*, Morrison posits the dire consequences of institutionalised slavery which distorts mother love under circumstances that make the act of baby-killing an expression of what Morrison describes, in her interview with Michael Silverblatt, as *logical love* (“Things We Find” 172).

Slavery is an act of brutal dismemberment as it severs the bonds that exist between slave mothers and their children. The initial act of enslaving Africans dismembers them from their motherland, Africa. Edouard Glissant describes this act of dismemberment in terms of cutting the umbilical cord, which makes a parent “irretrievable” (Loichot 41). Morrison literalises this “cut in the umbilical” in the character of Pilate who is born without a navel in *Song of Solomon*. In *A Mercy*, the act of maternal abandonment dismembers the daughter from her mother just as the logic of institutionalised slavery in *Beloved* makes the expression of Sethe’s love for her daughter an act of literal dismemberment. Both acts are presented as the “logic corollary” to the

mothers' acts of protecting their daughters from the system of slavery which inscribes their fate as permanent slaves, turning their bodies into "units of production" (Loichot 3). It is difficult to separate the act of maternal abandonment in *A Mercy* and the act of literal dismemberment in *Beloved* from the oppressive context of slavery which denies biological mothers their maternal rights. By disrupting the familial bonds which exist between mothers and daughters, slavery literally dismembers families.

A Mercy bears testimony to the origins, religious justification and violence of (plantation) slavery and racism and the resultant dismemberment faced by characters like Florens and her mother, a minha mãe. The next chapter on *Jazz* will discuss the psychic impact of slavery and racism on the descendants of slavery and how they continue to be affected transgenerationally. In *Jazz*, the descendants of the victims of slavery are the recipients of the violent histories of their ancestors who actually lived through the violence of historical dismemberment. The next generations of slaves receive the violent memories of their parents in the form of phantom-effects like phantom limbs, feelings of amputation and split personality. The phantom-effects result in the psychological dismemberment of the protagonists like Golden Gray, Joe and Violet Trace.

CHAPTER TWO

Transgenerational Phantoms and the Magic of Touch in *Jazz*

Transgenerational Hauntings

This chapter investigates the experience of phantom limbs and feelings of amputation in the light of transgenerational haunting as propounded by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in their influential book *The Shell and the Kernel*. Characters in *Jazz*, like Golden Gray, Joe and Violet Trace, suffer from phantom limbs and the dissolution of self as a result of transgenerationally transmitted phantoms which have to do with the shameful family secrets and racial memories of the past. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy defines the institution of slavery as “the family secret of America” (*Remembering* 2). He further adds that “the family secret of an individual family is symptomatic of the family secret of the nation—slavery itself” (*Remembering* 10). The experience of phantom limbs and amputation in *Jazz* relates to the family secret of slavery which haunts “the national imaginary” (*Remembering* 2) because people want to forget about it rather than work through it by acknowledging it (Morrison “The Pain” 257). Nicholas Rand mentions in his editor’s note to *Secrets and Posterity* by Nicolas Abraham that this experience gets silently transmitted to following generations, who “unwittingly inherit the psychic substance of their ancestors’ lives” (“Secrets and Posterity” 166). The phantom is passed on as an unspeakable secret, like the secret behind the miscegenated birth of Golden Gray, which is kept hidden and repressed by his mother, Vera Louise. Silence plays a major role in the transmission of unspeakable secrets and the creation of phantoms which work in silence and can decide the fate of a family or an entire nation if their message is not worked through. Nicholas Rand remarks:

Whether it characterizes individuals, families, social groups, or entire nations, silence and its varied forms—the untold or unsayable secret, the feeling unfelt, the pain denied, the

unspeakable and concealed shame of families, the cover-up of political crimes, the collective disregard for painful historical realities—may disrupt our lives. (Introduction 21)

The abrupt opening of Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz* unfolds with the funeral scene of the teenage girl, Dorcas Manfred, who becomes a victim of violence at the hands of Joe Trace and his wife, Violet Trace. The cause behind this disruptive violence is the collective silencing of violent familial histories, resulting in the involuntary repetition of violence, as mentioned by Abraham and Torok in their theory of transgenerational transmission of trauma. The first paragraph introduces the basic plot as follows:

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church.... (*Jazz* 3)

The opening paragraph of the novel is proleptic as it seeks to capture the dénouement of the novel in a nutshell. It projects the entire plot of the novel on the first page. The plot appears to be “deceptively simple”, as suggested by Salman Rushdie in his 1992 interview with Toni Morrison (Interview 51). The narrative voice adds to this deception because of its unreliability as it strives to “mak(e) sure no one knows all there is to know about me” (*Jazz* 8). It talks about the middle-aged protagonist, Joe Trace, who has a teenage girl, Dorcas, for his lover. He murders Dorcas on the suspicion that she will leave him after she finds Acton, a young lover who shares a similar desire for life. Dorcas thinks that going out with Acton enhances her personality *in the image* of consumer culture (Lauret 120), whereas staying with Joe encroaches upon her freedom. Joe feels deserted and heart-broken. He traces Dorcas and finds her in a

nightclub dancing with Acton. He feels jealous and shoots Dorcas, causing her to bleed to death. His wife, Violet, motivated by feelings of revenge and jealousy goes to the funeral of the young girl and desecrates her dead body by slashing her face with a knife. This is how Morrison projects “the story in more or less the first paragraph” (Rushdie quoting Antonia Byatt 52).

The narrator—whom Morrison identifies with the voice of the book—tries to understand the motive behind Dorcas’ murder and Joe’s wife, Violet’s desecration of her dead body by disfiguring her face while the readers are left guessing and anticipating what is going to happen next as the narrator forecasts another murder. The account of the story proves to be different at every step from what “the voice thinks it can predict” (Interview 52). In her interview with Angels Carabi, Morrison explains that the reason behind the plot’s unpredictability is because “the voice has to actually imagine the story it’s telling,” and “because the characters will be evolving within the story, within the book” (“Nobel Laureate” 94). She also adds that she wanted to “get rid of that notion of the omniscient narrative voice” which traditionally assumes the position of “I know everything” (“Nobel Laureate” 94). Therefore, the reader has in *Jazz* a narrative voice that is also constantly evolving like the rest of the characters (“Nobel Laureate” 94). According to Jennifer Lee Jordan Heinert, “The narrator is incorrect about the plot; it never fulfills what the narrator forecasts and readers are tricked by what the narrator claims to know from the very first lines of the story” (Heinert 61).

However, *Jazz* is much more than what is projected on the first page. The novel captures not only the spirit of the Jazz Age but also its rendition in terms of a literary improvisation. According to Valerie Smith, “*Jazz* revises received ideas about African American migration” (V. Smith 78). The protagonists Joe and Violet join “the wave of black people running from want and violence” (33) and move to early twentieth-century Harlem in order to escape the Jim Crow south. Their lives continue to be affected adversely as they are haunted by the ghosts of the past, especially the traumatic losses they suffered in terms of violence, lynchings, dispossession and separation from their parents during the eras of slavery and Reconstruction, as did Violet, Joe, Dorcas, Alice, and Golden Gray. The reader can better understand the motivation of all these major protagonists in light of the historical forces which affect their

present lives. To borrow from Peter Nicholls' argument in his study of *Beloved*, the tragedy of Dorcas, Violet and Joe can be read as a consequence of the "traumatic force of a historicity which splits the subject, compelling it to live in different times rather than in a secure, metaphysical present" (Nicholls 58). Jill Matus reads the influence of traumatic pasts behind the behavior of both Joe and his wife Violet. According to her, "Joe's murder of his young girlfriend and Violet's stabbing of the corpse as it awaits burial indicate a powerful eruption of their unresolved pasts into the present" (Matus 130). But the characters enact not only the traumatic aspects of their pasts; they also try to live their lives in relation to their ancestors. Morrison likes to place the characters in relation to their "preceding generations" ("Blacks" 182). The tragic lives of characters are imbued with and influenced by the sufferings of their forefathers and their past lives. For Morrison, the past is infinite and it exists as a continuum. She emphasizes the importance of the past in her interview with Michael Silverblatt, "the past of one is very much connected to the past of another and across generational lines" (Interview 217). The characters re-enact the familial sagas of their ancestors and their "past" because "Children can actually represent ancestors or grandmothers or grandfathers". Representing the ancestors or living transgenerationally is "a very living-in-the-moment, living now with the past, so that it's never calculated; it's effortless. Sometimes that causes a great deal of trouble to some of the characters" ("I Come from People" 130). In another interview with Marsha Darling, Morrison highlights the intrinsic importance of the transgenerational connection that exists between generations as being central to African thought: "it was clear to me that it was not at all a violation of African religion and philosophy; it's very easy for a son or a parent or a neighbor to appear in a child or in another person" ("In the Realm" 249). What Morrison says in her interviews about African beliefs finds its reflection in her work, like *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, *Beloved* and *Jazz*. It equally reflects upon her conscious or unconscious awareness and deployment of psychoanalytic theory as propounded by Abraham who not only suggests the transgenerational makeup of those individuals who inherit their parents' secrets but also the connection that exists across generational lines. According to Abraham, the subject can display symptoms which do not necessarily spring from their own experiences but carry the traces of

their parents' unresolved secrets, conflicts and traumas (Schwab 78): "What comes back to haunt are the tombs of others" (Abraham 172). Thus, Morrison's comments on "living transgenerationally" can be linked to Abraham's notion of phantoms and transgenerational hauntings. This affirms the existence of a "collective psychology comprised of several generations" (Rand "Secrets" 166). Generations of characters mirror each other's lives in *Jazz*. Joe's life is determined by his past and in part, so are the lives of the other characters in the novel.

Spooky Love

Joe has ambivalent feelings towards Dorcas and his actions are motivated by mixed feelings of jealousy, rivalry, possessiveness and the other erotic and incestuous fantasies a subject might have of sexual union with his mother. The opening of the novel describes his love for Dorcas as the "spooky love," found in the triangle of the Oedipal paradigm. As Bouson observes, "the narrative makes explicit the 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)" (Bouson 174).

The narrator seems to think: "(Joe) fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going" (3). "Spooky" strikes, as it were, the keynote here. The word "spooky" has a symbolic and thematic load. It carries with it a plethora of meanings associated with phantoms, the spectral, the racial Other, and the uncanny. Derrida dwells on "spooky" as an integral aspect of the uncanny in his *Specters of Marx*. He associates it with the whole "question of ghost and haunting" (*Specters* 216). He rakes up its significance in the German idiom *es spukt* which literally means "it spooks." For Derrida, this German expression locates the ghostly return or return of the uncanny "in a verbal form" (*Specters* 216). According to Derrida, Freud also recognizes in his essay "The Uncanny" that "he should have begun his research (on the Unheimlich, the death drive, the repetition compulsion, the beyond of the pleasure principle,

and so forth) with what he calls the “es spukt” (*Specters* 217).” For Derrida as well as for Freud, the *es spukt* becomes (one of) the strongest example of the uncanny. The *es spukt* is not only what “spooks” but what “returns,” “ghosts” and “specters” (*Specters* 166). According to Derrida, the logic of the *es spukt* can transform “any cogito— The Cartesian Cogito” from the state of “I think” to “I am haunted.” This reduces “the essential mode of self-presence of the cogito” to “the haunting obsession of this “es spukt”” (*Specters* 166). Morrison’s use of “spooky” carries the Derridean interplay of the “es spukt,” but “spooky love” in *Jazz* enacts more than the ghostly returning of the “es spukt.” On the one hand, it is a repetition of substitute (maternal) love—the lost object of primary love and its violent displacement on Dorcas—which Joe seeks to find, track and hunt for in the figures of Wild, Violet and finally Dorcas. (And spookily enough the identities of all these three female characters are interchangeable with each other.) On the other, it is rooted in the (inter)racial love which Violet and Joe Trace feel for Golden Gray and Dorcas both of whom epitomise the ideal of light-skinned beauty. Thus, “spooky love” is an expression of blues-inspired love which is always sad and dejected because “it is the longing for a heart that you can neither live with or without, a faithlessly faithful passion, sung in both jazz music and in the blues” (Kérchy 43). For Morrison, “spooky” is loaded with the racially uncanny. It is an expression similar to “Tar baby,” used by Morrison as “a name, like nigger, that white people call black children, black girls” (“The Language” 122). “Spooky” has to do with the word “spook” which is a racial and pejorative expression used especially for African Americans.

Philip Roth also uses it as a key word in the tragic undoing of his central character, Coleman Silk, in his novel *The Human Stain*. Silk is a professor of Classics at the reputable but fictitious Athena College in the novel. He happens to address two of his students as “spooks” because they play the truant from his class. In Coleman’s mind, the word “spook” might just be an innocent expression similar to ghosts. He uses this expression to question the very existence of his students who happen to be two African American students. For the students, the word “spook” conveys an entirely different set of connotations. Coleman, aware of his own racial background as he himself happens to be of mixed race “passing” for a Jew, does not realise that

he has touched upon a taboo subject and hurt the sensitivities of his students. His absent African American students file a suit against him. This unravels a series of catastrophic events which finally bring about the downfall of Silk's illustrious career. A vigilant reader of Morrison knows her vocabulary is never so innocent. Taken out of its immediate context, "spooky love" is evocative of forbidden/incestuous love as it unfolds in the story. Another example of such "spooky love" can be taken from Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, in which the father rapes his daughter by doing "a wild and forbidden thing" (162). Paul D's making love with Beloved is also spooky, both literally and figuratively. Morrison's entire oeuvre is replete with tales of "spooky love", for instance in *Love*, which has all the tones of *Jazz*-like "spooky love."

In *Jazz*, "spooky love" is associated with maternal love (or the ghostly figure of the mother) whose absence or lack in the subject's life is unbearable and *unheimlich*.¹ "Spooky love" is also about what comes back to haunt us or what has the power to resurrect the subject from beyond the grave as in *Beloved*. What is *unheimlich* or what haunts characters like Joe and Gray in *Jazz* is the lack of paternal acknowledgment. Both Gray and Joe suffer from psychological amputation and loss of self-respect due to lack of parental love in their lives. According to Terry Otten, the theme of "horrific love" in *Jazz* like in the rest of her novels, is "multifaceted—psychological, social and historical" (Otten 652). In his essay *Horrific Love in the Fiction of Toni Morrison*, Otten observes that all the characters in *Jazz* respond to the call of "spooky love" whose presence or absence haunts them. It is "spooky" because it is unnatural and borders on the incestuous. There is an age difference of more than thirty years between Dorcas and Joe. Dorcas is young enough to be his daughter. Above all, it is a prosopopeiatic kind of love whereby the living people not only have conversations with the dead in their heads but also try to rival them. Dorcas' aunt Alice Manfred—the first person Violet meets to glean information from regarding her niece—cautions Violet on the nature of this kind of love. She advises Violet to be on her guard against rivalling the dead in love:

"You in trouble," she says, yawning. "Deep, deep trouble. Can't rival the dead for love. Lose every time."

Violet agrees that it must be so; not only is she losing Joe to the dead girl, but she wonders if she isn't falling in love with her too. When she isn't trying to humiliate Joe, she is admiring the dead girl's hair, when she isn't cursing Joe with brand-new cuss words, she is having whispered conversations with the corpse in her head.... (15)

This kind of prosopopoeiatic love forecloses the possibility of mourning for both Violet and Joe. It stays lodged in the human heart like a crypt. The narrator enacts this tale of spooky love like an improvisational jazz performance against the backdrop of a spectral city landscape and music—"with a paradigmatic display of blues-cutting and blues-shooting" (Gussow 7). The narrator also talks about the mind that becomes captive to spectral fascination with city life and jazz, while at the same time, being haunted by spectral presences from the racial past. Like the narrator, the characters fall in love with the city life and romanticize its ways of living. It provides the backdrop to their passions along with a feeling of anonymity. Denise Heinze mentions "the complex set of factors that motivated black people to the city in the first place and those factors that compelled them to stay" (Heinze 117). The people migrate in numbers and settle down to city life which promises them "economic opportunity and social equality" (Heinze 117) and "Part of why they loved it was the spectre they left behind" (*Jazz* 33).

Phantoms of the Past

According to Anderson, "Operating under the surface of the plot are the horrors that Violet and Joe have each brought with them from Virginia and the family secrets they will not share even with each other" (Anderson 102). The family secrets that Joe and Violet share have to do with "memories and effects of slavery and Reconstruction" (Anderson 102) witnessed by other characters like Golden Gray, Dorcas' aunt Manfred, and Violet's mother, Rose Dear, who commits suicide. Thus, the basic plot covers "more than the murder of a wayward lover" (Otten 661). It is also about generations of African Americans and the secrets, the gaps or lacunae left unresolved by their ancestors and their pasts. The individual lives of Joe and Violet are haunted

by the collective secrets or phantoms of African Americans. The phantoms are ancestral secrets left inside the characters in the form of lacunae. In psychoanalytical terms, exorcising the ancestors or the dead implies coming to terms with their secrets and their unacknowledged suffering. The phantoms have to do, above all, with the notion of haunting or being haunted by the secrets of others and a desire to know those secrets. The theme of the phantoms links Morrison's writings to her larger artistic project to account for the unspeakable horrors and the disremembered entombed inside the collective unconscious awaiting proper burial.

Violet and the narrator, to some extent, are determined by this curious desire to know the secrets of others and to bring them to light by exorcising the ghost(s) of the past. The novel erupts with a scene of murder and sacrilegious attack on the victim's body, whose face is mutilated in an apparent act of rage, jealousy and revenge by the killer Joe's wife, Violet, who, because of her act of violence and revenge, earns the homonym Violent for her proper name Violet. After her act of violence, Violet is curious to know why her husband, Joe, fell in love with eighteen-year-old Dorcas and why the latter was "stuck on a man old enough to be her father?" (94). The narrator comments on Violet's desire to know:

Violet didn't know anything about the girl except her name, her age, and that she was very well thought of in the legally licensed beauty parlor. So she commenced to gather the rest of the information. Maybe she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. (5)

The narrative then circumvents the facts of the murder and focuses on the relationship between Joe and Dorcas. As Violet gleans information, the "private cracks" (22-3) of her fragmented life open, while the narrative itself unfolds in a fragmented way. The reader discovers how Joe and Violet fall in love with each other in the South and "traindance" to Harlem with the other African Americans hoping to leave behind the ghosts of their traumatic pasts. Joe is haunted by the phantom of his mother. He falls in love with Violet who becomes a substitute for maternal love. She fills in the gaps of emotional love left unfulfilled because of

the loss/lack of maternal love in his life. Similarly, the “spooky love” of Dorcas compensates for the lack of maternal love in Joe’s life. “Spooky love” is a figure evocative of maternal love or a consequence of its absence in the subject’s life. The concept of “spooky love” here has to do with the traumatic remnant of ancestors—in Joe’s case his mother, who refuses to give any acknowledgement or recognition because this involves a confirmation of shame (32). For Joe, it means rejection of the body at birth as well as rejection of his essential being. He contemplates the lack of maternal love and recognition in his life. All he desires from his mother is a token or sign of acceptance in the form of a reassuring hand or touch (36). But his mother remains nothing more than a tantalising and elusive figure:

She wouldn’t have to say anything, although nobody had ever heard her say anything; it wouldn’t have to be words; he didn’t need words or even want them because he knew they could lie, could heat your blood and disappear. She wouldn’t even have to say the word “mother.” Nothing like that. All she had to do was give him a sign, her hand thrust through the leaves, the white flowers, could be enough to say that she knew him to be the one, the son she had fourteen years ago, and ran away from, but not too far. Just far enough away to annoy everybody because she was not completely gone, and close enough to scare everybody because she creeps about and hides and touches and laughs a low sweet babygirl laugh in the cane. (36-7)

The experience of maternal rejection leads to Joe’s loss of self, which creates an emotional vacuum, leading to an “inside nothing” (38) recognised and filled by Dorcas “because she had it too” (38). Joe tries to recover from this experience of loss and rejection and lack of maternal love by substituting it first with his love for Violet, and later on, with the spooky love of Dorcas. Joe’s quest for love finds a parallel in Freud’s concept of transference-love which “is entirely composed of repetitions and copies (*abklatschen*) of earlier reactions, including infantile ones.” In Freud’s estimate, any condition of being in love is always a question of “new editions (*Neuauflagen*) of old traits” (qtd. in Bowlby 217).

The Oedipal Triangle of Love

For Joe, the relationship with Violet begins with his attempt to track down his mother in Virginia which, later on, leads to his tracking down of Dorcas. He cannot understand why his mother would not raise him. He feels repulsed by having been rejected by his parent(s). He learns from his foster family that his parents left without a trace. He thinks that the trace his parents left without is actually him and he adopts “Trace” as part of his identity. As Rebecca Hope Ferguson points out, trace not only signifies Joe’s sense of “bereavement” but also his “desperate search” for his mother (Ferguson 177). In fact, Joe spends his entire life tracking his mother, whose traces he finds both in Violet and Dorcas. Joe reflects on the tracking of his mother who leaves him with no tracks at all (130): “I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me straight to her, and I tracked Dorcas from borough to borough” (130). When told in confidence by Hunter’s Hunter that Wild is his mother, Joe wrestles with the idea of a wild lunatic woman for his mother. The depiction of a woman both as the mother and the “wild” epitomises the nexus of forbidden fantasies. The aura about Wild centres on Julia Kristeva’s notion of (maternal) abjection. Her habitat, surroundings and the dwelling place are both appealing and revolting. When Joe approaches Wild’s cave, he is nauseated by a disgusting smell, a combination of honey and filth. In fact, the text describes his mother as a filthy and abject being. Bouson finds in Morrison’s depiction of Wild the portrayal of a stigmatised racial and sexual Otherness of a stereotypical black female identity (Bouson 166): “Using a discursive repertoire of derogatory stereotypes to construct Wild in this scene, *Jazz* depicts Joe’s mother as a shamed object of contempt: and embodiment of racial, biological and sexual otherness. Primitive and uncivilised, Wild is a dirty, degenerate, animalistic creature” (Bouson 171).

Joe feels so humiliated and ashamed of his mother that he thinks he would willingly trade a whore for his mother (179). In the private recesses of his mind, he cannot come to terms with maternal rejection and her lack of care: “Too brain blasted to do what the meanest sow managed: nurse what she birthed” (179). He spends a lot of his time struggling with the idea of

motherhood. He tries to disown his mother. But as the narrator observes, “Nevertheless, Wild was always on his mind, and he wasn’t going to leave for Palestine without trying to find her one more time” (178). Joe is marked for the rest of his life by his mother’s rejection of him. Because he was not nursed by his mother, he longs for her love and is curious to find any sign or trace of her. It is the lack of trace or sign which haunts him all his life. Like Sula, he has been permanently marked by the traces of his mother since he was born. When he cannot receive a sign from her, Joe equates the loss/absence of his mother from his life with “indecent speechless lurking insanity” (179).

The narrator also renders Violet’s perspective on the rivalrous Oedipal triangle that exists between her, Joe and Dorcas through the medium of a highly self-conscious Freudian mode of thinking. In this triangular relationship, Dorcas rivals the love of Violet for the affections of Joe as Violet tries to understand the supplementary nature of this Oedipal triangle:

When she woke up, her husband had shot a girl young enough to be that daughter whose hair she had dressed to kill. Who lay there asleep in that coffin? Who posed there awake in the photograph? The scheming bitch, who came into a life, took what she wanted and damn the consequences? Or mama’s dumpling girl? Was she the woman who took the man, or the daughter who fled her womb? Washed away on a tide of soap, salt and castor oil. Terrified, perhaps, of so violent a home. Unaware that, had it failed, had she braved mammymade poisons and mammy’s urgent fists, she could have had the best-dressed hair in the City...Not realising that, bitch or dumpling, the two of them, mother and daughter, could have walked Broadway together and ogled the clothes. Could be sitting together, cozy in the kitchen, while Violet did her hair. (*Jazz* 109)

The passage brings out Violet’s mother-hunger and the consequences of a life deprived of motherly love and its expression. According to Rebecca Hope Ferguson, Violet recalls the image of her own mother and projects it on Dorcas who could have been her own daughter (Ferguson 170): “Dorcas represents her rival, her desired child, and the catalyst to that “other” (Violent)

self which, bereft of both mother and daughter, commits the outrage of slashing the girl in her coffin” (Ferguson 170). Her private thoughts and reveries revolve around the matrix of desire which Morrison describes in *A Mercy* as “mother-hunger”. For Violet, Dorcas’ photograph invokes the picture of her miscarried child and feelings of wistfulness and outrage. She imagines her not only as her pampered girl but also as a rival who becomes reincarnated in order to steal her husband away. According to J. Brooks Bouson, Violet’s invocation of Dorcas as both her imagined daughter and a rival “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)” (Bouson 174). There is a cryptic identification between Violet and Joe in their love for Dorcas and each other. Joe’s love for Dorcas parallels Violet’s love for the “golden boy.” Joe’s love for Dorcas also parallels his desire for a mother and even Violet, who is a substitute for his love for a mother. When Joe is hunting Dorcas, he is, in his mind, hunting his mother (183, 184, 187). Dorcas becomes “a displacement of the original object of love”—his mother (Kérchy 51). Just as he thought his mother would not reject him, but would acknowledge and love him, he expects the same from Dorcas: “She’s so glad that I found her. Arching and soft, wanting me to do it, asking me to. Just me. Nobody but me” (183-4). Joe’s act of “spooky love” will become an expression of “crooked love” through which he can only touch his beloved, his mother-substitute, by killing her” (Kérchy 51). I shall discuss Joe’s hunting for Dorcas, which parallels his tracking of Wild, as an act of touch which becomes an appropriative gesture of violence, in the latter part of this chapter.

Now I focus on the episode of Golden Gray involving the quest to find his African American father who has polluted his biological descent by violating his family line as a white man. He intends to kill his father so that he can take revenge on behalf of his race. I want to discuss this episode not only because it is relatively neglected by critics due to its “seemingly enigmatic relationship to the text’s main plot,” (Anderson 106) but also because it is thematically and transgenerationally linked to the familial genealogy of both Joe and Violet Trace, and leads to their collective act of violence against Dorcas. The act of Dorcas’ murder has to be “measured

against the past” and “the crushing force of slavery and racism” that perverts their capacity for love (Otten 660). The story of Golden Gray helps the reader understand the stories of Violet and Joe Trace and the reason behind the emotional deprivation in their lives. It also informs the reader how their family histories intersect with each other and influence their marriage in “ultimately antagonistic and tragic ways” (Heinze 33).

The Quest for Parents

Joe’s quest for his mother, as Bouson observes, is presented as a shame drama and in many ways, it parallels Golden Gray’s quest for his father. The quests of both Joe and Gray are connected to each other and can loosely be interpreted as “the search for family roots and the slave legacy (which) leads to a painful confrontation with racial shame” (Bouson 171). Alice and Violet talk about the plight of a parentless child who wants arms (113). The quests of both Joe and Golden Gray are depicted as those of “Somebody wanting arms just like you do” (113). Both characters feel incomplete without their parents’ love. In the case of Gray, Morrison literalises the metaphor of “arms,” which stand for love. With the parental love missing in his life, Gray literally finds himself armless without his father. Part of his being desires to embrace his father so that he can feel complete. Both Joe and Gray inherit the unconscious of their parents. Both feel the absence of parents in terms of (bodily) loss. For both, the figure of the parent is a phantom figure. The novel dramatises Gray’s coming across Wild in terms of a “vision” (144). Even for Violet, fond memories are about “the joyful resurrections of this phantom father, taking pleasure in the distribution of his bounty both genuine and fake” (100). The experience of phantom limbs for Gray exists like a continuous awareness of a non-existent part of his body. Although the phantom limb has to do with the missing part of the body, he also carries the uncanny feeling of being watched by a phantom-like figure. He feels as if he were “always under the reviewing gaze of impressionable but casual acquaintance” (153). In the words of Derrida, “the specter first of all sees *us*. From the other side of the eye, visor effect, it looks at us even before we see it or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed,

sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition" (*Specters* 125).

According to Derrida, the figure of the phantom or spectre is like the "other" who commands the subject with the force of the law. Derrida also adds that the spectre's demands confirm the inheritance (of unspeakable and hidden familial secrets)—in Gray's case, his (white) descent—and response to an injunction or redress. The theme of inheritance is associated with the themes of phantoms, ghosts and specters passed down to the next generation. This ghostly inheritance in the form of unspeakable secrets is aptly associated with the spooky experience in *Jazz*. This sums up what it means to be inhabited, in the Derridean sense of the word, by the "es spukt" or "der spuk"—"the Unconscious of the other, according to what might be called the law of another generation" (Derrida "Fors" xxxi). It is this Unconscious or law of another generation, whose recognition "spooks" Gray. The worst fear that lurks in the wildest imagination of Gray is the possibility that perhaps he has a "nigger" for his father. The fact haunts his mind in the shape of a spectre after he learns "that his father was a black-skinned nigger" (143). It operates with the force of an overseeing agency and becomes a source of obligation as he sets out with a "cavalierlike courage" to "find, and then kill, if he was lucky, his father" (143). During the course of his journey, Gray has the feeling of being watched by his father or his spectre. Before he sees his father in person, he has this uncanny feeling of being watched open-mouthed by the "nigger" "from a crack in the plank that serves as wall" (147). Derrida reminds us that ghosts or specters as revenants can pass through borders or walls and skip generations in order to haunt for posterity (*Specters* 36). Gray is haunted by the ghost of his father as he proceeds towards the "place he meant to come to" in order to behold "the blackest man in the world" (157): "No one is looking at him, but he behaves as though there is" (153). His final confrontation with his father, as he "Come(s) all that way not to insult his father but his race," (143) is reminiscent of classical paradigms like that of Hamlet in which the son—kept unaware of his parents' secrets while at the same time being presided over by a parental authority—is motivated by a desire to take revenge. Gray's search to find his father takes on all the trappings of a Hamlet-like quest for retribution. Like Hamlet, he finds himself "becoming an inheritor, redresser of wrongs, that is, only by castigating, punishing, killing" (Derrida *Specters* 25). It was because of his "nigger"

father that his mother had to settle down in Baltimore with her servant, True Belle, and her son whom she introduces as an orphan so that she can hide the facts of his birth and live a decent life rather than a stigmatised one of having a mulatto (141) as an illegitimate son (139). The parents of Vera Louise disown her for the shame she brings to the family and the fact that she does something which violates the norms of society. The punishment is so big that she “regretted ever knowing him at all” (148). She does not want either her own father or the father of her son to know the truth (140): “The about-to-be father—the black boy—never found out, as far as True Belle could tell, because Vera Louise never mentioned his name or came near him ever again. The old father, Colonel Wordsworth Gray, didn’t know a thing. Not one thing” (140). Vera Louise, the mother of Golden Gray, would not have even come near her child had she not been told by the black slave, True Belle, that the child is “Completely Golden” (148) and hence acceptable. Still “It took a while” before Golden Gray became “endeared” to her (139). As Abraham and Torok propose, shameful secrets are kept secret and their knowledge is barred from consciousness. The secret of Gray’s birth is kept hidden from him by his mother. After the years of repression have run their course, she finally divulges the truth:

Almost everything she said was false, but that last bit of information he held to be graven truth. So the yellow curls covered his coat collar like a farmer’s, although the rightness of its length in fastidious Baltimore came from the woman who lied to him about practically everything including the question whether she was his owner, his mother or a kindly neighbour. The other thing she did not lie about (although it took eighteen years to get around it) was that his father was a black-skinned nigger. (143)

Bringing up a mulatto “was a renegade... thing to do” (139). In order to avoid social ostracism, she not only hid her own identity but also brought up Gray so that he could “pass” for a white. Gray’s upbringing as a white man “involves a long process of racialisation” (Goulimari 101). This meant not merely the daily practice of dressing him up “like the Prince of Wales,” (140) but also raising him “into an ideology of whiteness” (Peterson “Say” 211). Once the

knowledge of the shameful familial past dawns upon him, it shatters his world and scatters his mind. He symbolically kills his mother by tearing apart her clothes before he rides on to murder his father: “It had rocked him when he heard who and what his father was. Made him loose, lost. He had first fingered then torn some of his mother’s clothes and sat in the grass looking at the things scattered on the lawn as well as in his mind” (159). The passage shows the somatic and psychic impact once the secret and traumatising knowledge behind the birth of Gray is revealed. The suggestion of tearing apart the mother’s body suggests that the mother’s body, which was once considered to be one’s own, is no longer acceptable as one’s own. The mother’s symbolically dismembered body suggests his own scattered body, the full impact of which he will feel when he confronts his father. After the traumatic knowledge is received, distant memories and routine actions of the past take on a different hue for Golden Gray. Memories come to haunt him like the tell-tale signs of the secret family history regenerating their existence. The knowledge of family secrets radically changes his entire world. It decentres his consciousness. Now he realises that the past events were efforts on behalf of his mother and True Belle to guard the secret surrounding the circumstances of his birth:

Even when he was a tiny boy with a head swollen with fat champagne-colored curls, and ate the pieces of cake she held out to him, her smile was more amusement than pleasure. When the two of them, the whitewoman and the cook, bathed him they sometimes passed anxious looks at the palms of his hands, the texture of his drying hair. Well, Vera Louise was anxious; True Belle just smiled, and now he knew what she was smiling about, the nigger. He had always thought there was only one kind—True Belle’s kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry LesTroy. Like the filthy woman snoring on the cot. But there was another kind—like himself. (149)

This passage points out the inherent driving force of the phantom and the desire on behalf of the parent to preserve the secret intact. According to Abraham, “The phantom is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious...”

(Abraham 175). In Torok's assessment of Abraham's statement "the gnomes wreaking havoc" are not some kind of subterranean or mythical creatures but also "knowledge, crippled knowledge or nescience" (qtd. in Berthin 23). According to Berthin, "The phantom creates within the subject a "nescience" that is an unknown knowledge" which springs from experiences that are lived without the subject's complete knowledge or awareness (Berthin 18). What returns to haunt Gray in the form of a phantom limb is the shame of his family. The transgenerational trauma inherited and experienced by Gray is graphically depicted in terms of phantom pain:

Only now... that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everyone was one-armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered. The sliced flesh and the tubes of blood cut through, shocking the blood run and disturbing the nerves....

.... I don't need the arm. But I do need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It's a phantom I have to behold and be beheld by, in whatever crevices it lies, under whatever branch. Or maybe it stalks treeless and open places, lit with an oily sun. This part of me that does not know me, has never touched me or lingered at my side....I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom.... (158-9)

The passage conveys in graphic terms the trauma of separation and parental absence in the life of Gray. He finds himself lost, disconnected and amputated in the absence of his father. He experiences the absence of his father like a surgical experience or the pain of a phantom limb. He also feels himself haunted by the phantom of his father. Gray's search for his father is depicted in terms of a quest for lost origins and is similar to Joe's quest to find his mother. Gray wants to meet his father in order to recover himself. By embracing the reality of his father, he wants to come to terms with his family shame. He becomes a recipient not only of his parent's (mother's) but also of his grandfather's lived memories, which return to haunt him with the

intensity of somatic experiences. He learns the secret behind his birth from the actual memories or stories of his parents but also through the trace effects which remain unintegrated into the familial saga. The abused arm is the “unsaid” of his parents about his birth, whose secret is finally transmitted to him with all its force. He realises that his mother had been silently guarding the secret surrounding the circumstances of his birth, and tacit knowledge was shared by True Belle. According to Abraham and Torok, the subject is inhabited by the phantoms of others, meaning that he/she is inhabited by a nescience—an unknowable/unknown knowledge—that is passed down from one generation to another. This adds to the familial archive and subjects become “the products of our infinitely regressive family histories” (Rashkin 18). (Gray’s father is befittingly named as Henry Lestory, names being another site of haunting where the fight to discharge the ghostly inheritance is contested.)

To extend the argument of transgenerational haunting, what comes to haunt Gray is not just the phantom of his past and of his mother, but also the phantoms emanating from the unconscious of previous generations, including the unconscious of his grandparents, especially his grandfather, Colonel Wordsworth Gray. According to Derrida, “One never inherits without coming to terms with (*s’expliquer avec*) some specter, and therefore with more than one specter. With the fault but also the injunction of *more than one*” (*Specters* 24). Thus, as an inheritor of his parents’ secrets, Gray also inherits the injunction of his grandparent(s), which forces him to “recapitulate the phylogeny of (his) ancestor’s sagas” (Rashkin 18). As the narrator observes, it is true that “there is something about where he has come from and why, where he is going and why that encourages in him an insistent, deliberate recklessness” (145).

Gray’s quest is not solely motivated by his desire to know about his personal identity or the identity of his father but about his ancestors/grandparents as well. Gray’s feelings of “hurt” and “repulsion” can be linked via the concept of transgenerational haunting with the old father, Colonel Wordsworth Gray, whose “searching for something” “a whip, a shotgun” is reflected in Gray’s desire to shoot his father and avenge himself on behalf of himself and his grandfather. The phantom returns to haunt the subject or the descendant through a mechanism which, according to Abraham and Torok, “consists of exchanging one’s identity for a fantasmic

identification with the “life”- beyond the grave” (Abraham and Torok 142). The “I” adopts the armour of the lost object’s fantasied ego and speaks through borrowed language with a certain kind of ventriloquism. According to Abraham, “the “I” stages the words, gestures and feelings—in short, the entire imaginary lot of the lost object” (Abraham 148). Gray becomes haunted by the phantoms of history and memories. He prepares to confront the phantoms as he prepares to face his father. Abraham compares the efforts to confront the phantoms to the “staging of a word.” According to Abraham, it’s a cathartic moment in the life of a subject (like Gray) as he makes an “attempt at exorcism, an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm” (Abraham 176).

By confronting the phantoms of his past, Gray works his way toward recognition and reparation. No wonder he is equipped with the paraphernalia of his grandfather when he encounters his biological father. Like his grandfather, he has a pistol in his trunk and a cigar case (155). And when he finally confronts his father—“the blackest man in the world,” (157) he addresses him with borrowed language coming from “the Democratic platform” of his grandfather (141). The spate of debate between the father and the son alludes to the shadowy figure of the grandfather. The figure of the phantom is actually “the shadow of the object” which returns to haunt by being “reincarnated in the person of the subject” (Abraham 141). There is an “identifying empathy” that seems to exist between Colonel Gray and Golden Gray. Colonel Gray might have avenged the insult himself “(r)ealising the terrible thing that had happened to his daughter,” but for the fact that he himself is responsible for “seven mulatto children on his land” (141).

The Relationship between Racism and Dismemberment

Morrison uses the metaphor of dismemberment to demonstrate the harmful impact of white ideology or racism which results in the fragmentation of the self historically, psychically, or culturally. Morrison sees the pervasive and obsessive use of whiteness as a race metaphor in the canonical writings of American literature such as *Moby Dick*. In her view, the white whale in

Melville's text represents white ideology. The relentless pursuit of the white whale by the protagonist, Ahab, represents a struggle for power and blind devotion to ideology which renders him blind and subjects him to the experience of loss and personal dismemberment, cutting him off from the rest of mankind. Commenting upon Melville's text and the unconscious blind devotion to white ideology by the central character Ahab, Morrison observes:

...Melville's "truth" was his recognition of the moment in America when whiteness became an ideology. And if the white whale is an ideology of race, what Ahab has lost to it is personal dismemberment and family and society and his place as a human in the world. The trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis. ("Unspeakable" 15-6)

Similarly, Golden Gray's adopted white ideology/racism renders him blind to the humanity of his father, whom he refuses to acknowledge because of his blackness (Burton 178-9). This act of denial exposes him to the experience of dismemberment. The unacceptable idea of racial abjection revolts his being and exposes his fragile subjectivity, causing it to split. Not having a parent is like the surgical experience of amputation. Amputation or the splitting apart of the body as felt by the character can be likened to the phenomenon of the phantom limb. Having a parent with secrets is also an experience of dismemberment—an experience of being cut off from one's origins. A child haunted by phantoms inherits the secret knowledge and also the paradoxical imperative not to know or further understand his/her origins in order to maintain the integrity of parentage and the family. In certain cases, the child inherits the guilt parents attach to a certain event and tries to suppress knowledge of it to preserve the legacy of the family. According to Rashkin, when the unspeakable secret is silently transmitted to a child in undigested form, it stays in his or her mental topography (which he/she shares with the parents) as an unmarked tomb of inaccessible knowledge. Its presence holds the child (later, the adult) in a "pathological dual unity" with the parent, in a silent partnership dedicated to preserving the

secret intact. The child's unwitting involvement in this mute pact interferes with the normal processes required for successful introjection and inhibits his/her emergence as an autonomous subject (*Unspeakable* 95). Gray's confrontation with his "nigger" father dramatizes how the subject can struggle with his phantoms and Gray's need to overcome his white ideology in order to overcome his racial abjection, develop his identity and become whole. The phantom acts as an interlocutor. Encounters with phantoms confront the subject with a paradigm in which subjectivity or autonomy is realised through the ability to encounter alterity or otherness. The subject's emancipation is linked with his ability to encounter otherness in order to overcome it.

Gray's phantomatic encounter with Wild is also depicted in these terms. According to Rachel Lister, "His first reaction was to define himself in opposition to her" (Lister 56) and her blackness. She serves as a foil: "a proper protection against and anodyne to what he believed his father to be, and therefore himself" (149). She represents the dark and abiding African presence against which American identity defines itself. Morrison defines this African presence in *Playing in the Dark* as "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American" (38). Wild is a projection of the Africanist presence. Morrison depicts it as the other—the decidedly not-me against which the American identity constructs itself (*Playing* 48). According to Morrison, this persona "provides an astonishing revelation of white fears and desires: of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity" (*Playing* 17). It hovers in the background of classical nineteenth-century American literature which Morrison subverts in the encounter between Gray and Wild. The encounter dramatises "how the black-fathered Golden Gray finds himself sexually attracted to Wild and her unfathomable skin despite his initial attempts to preserve the coherence of his white identity by keeping Wild distanced and contained..." (Bouson 177). Gray's phantomatic encounter with Wild proves to be a catalyst for his coming to terms with the reality of his father as an ex-slave who is "black." She makes him undergo a character transformation. Like the mirror, she makes him look deep inside his own self for some soul-searching and brings him face to face with the question of his own racial identity. Gray perceives Wild not only as an uncivilised Other but part of his being, and feels attracted towards her blackness:

The thing he saw in the averted glance of the servants at his boarding school, the bootblack who tapdanced for a penny. A vision that, at the moment when his scare was the sharpest, looked also like a home comfortable enough to wallow in? That could be it. But who would live in that leafy hair? That unfathomable skin? But he had already lived in and with it: True Belle had been his first love and major love, which may be why two gallops beyond that hair, that skin, their absence was unthinkable. (150)

The attraction he feels for Wild and her abiding blackness helps break down his sense of superiority and his identity, which he relates to his privileged, white upbringing. She brings out the humane aspect of his personality as his initial feelings of abjection transform themselves and take on a new appreciative and aesthetic dimension. He starts appreciating her human blackness, which helps him overcome his feelings of revenge. When he set out to find his father, he was following a Hamlet-like paternal imperative to take revenge on his father who sullied his blood by making love to his mother. He could not separate himself from the knowledge that his father defiled his mother and stained his blood, which could have handed him over to a life of slavery but for his mother, who hid his identity and his racial past so that he could live the life of a free man. He intended to perhaps erase the trace of this contamination by killing his father. In the end, we realise that it is the presence of this black woman that makes him change his mind. Like Shadrack in *Sula*, who discovers his sense of identity through a mirror-reflection of his blackness, Gray finds the trace of its indisputable presence in his own deeper-than-skin blackness after his phantomatic encounter with Wild. When he encounters Wild, he fights the blackness within:

When he stopped the buggy, got out to tie the horse and walk back through the rain, perhaps it was because the awful-looking thing lying in wet weeds was everything he was not as well as a proper protection against and anodyne to what he believed his father to be, and therefore (if he could just be contained, identified)—himself. Or was the figure,

the vision as he thought of, a thing that touched him before its fall? (149)

This phantomatic encounter with Wild brings in its wake other phantomatic memories. It brings him face to face with the reality of his own being. It has a humanising impact on him and helps him overcome his prejudices and racism. It also helps him accept the reality of his father. He embraces his own blackness and that of his father. He takes, as it were, “ownership of his projected shame” (Bouson 178). In fact, he realises how acutely he has felt the absence of his father all along, which he experiences with all the intensity of an arm being amputated or a body being dismembered. Like most of Morrison’s characters who develop fragmented identities around the memory of “unavailable parents,” Gray constructs his identity around the figure of the absent father with a strong yearning to embrace his father so that he can feel complete (Rubenstein 115).

Phantoms of History and Slavery

The confrontation with his black father is about the phantoms of history. According to Nancy J. Peterson, the episode of Golden Gray not only highlights the problems of embedding “an intricate story” but also recreates Faulknerian themes “such as long-kept secrets revealed and miscegenation” (Peterson “Say” 211). In the opinion of Angela Burton, Gray’s quest to find his father is a metaphorical attempt to kill the blackness—his negrophobia—in himself (Burton 181). His quest can also be read as a metaphorical attempt to kill the whiteness/white ideology in himself. His desire to kill his father undermines his identity. It undermines his privileged sense of being that allows him to pass the medium of the binaries (between black and white) that existed by the end of the nineteenth century and which allowed people of mixed race to pass for white and be relatively accepted. Gray recognises his father as human only by reversing his “white ideology” (Burton 181-3) and by acknowledging the presence of an abiding blackness within his own blood (150) whose reflection in the figure of Wild exercises such a powerful fascination that its very absence seems “unthinkable” to him. Both Wild and Henry

perform a certain exorcism dispelling the deep-seated phantoms associated with fears of miscegenation.

Slavery and the racially affiliated identities are like phantoms whose abject presences guard unspeakable secrets that must be addressed and redressed. The phantom limb pain or the experience of amputation/dismemberment has centuries of history behind it. According to Maria Lauret, *Jazz* is inhabited by “a collective historical experience of slavery” (Lauret 122). This (re)produces the figure of the revenant which not only spooks but returns to haunt the characters. The phantoms are about the collective African American experience and the consciousness it entails. As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy remarks, the phantoms are about “the familial secrets” which attest to “the ongoing effects of slavery” (*Remembering* 8). The phantoms are traumatic and their phantomatic locus is transgenerational. In the words of Harris: “It has taken us (he says) a couple of generations to begin—just *begin*—to perceive, in this phenomenon, an activation of unconscious and sleeping resources in the phantom limb of dismembered slave and god” (qtd. in Punter 66).

There is an element of truth when Gray defends his mother’s motives and why she kept secret the birth and identity of her son. She was interested in the future survival of her son: “She protected me! If she’d announced I was nigger, I could have been a slave!” (172). Gray covers the gaps as his mother does by way of defensive story-telling. Here, at this point, Gray enacts the dilemma of his mother haunted by the spectre of slavery. If she revealed the circumstances surrounding the birth of her son, his fate would have been that of a slave. Gray thus becomes a performative agent who fills the gaps in the speech left by the parent(s). By defending the action of his mother, he not only defends her motives but also functions as a guardian who intrapsychically guards the familial saga in order to ensure the inviolability of the secrets and, in turn, the integrity of parents or family who would otherwise be assailed by the secret’s exposure. What made his mother secretive about his identity was the spectre of slavery. She meant freedom for her son and she kept the secret of his birth to herself because she wanted to protect him from a life of slavery and its aftermaths. She declared her son an orphan in order to protect him (139) rather than deposit him in a hospital as an act of “mortification”.

The phantom Gray struggles with has not simply to do with the idea of having a “nigger” for a father. We learn, later on, that Gray’s feelings of amputation/dismemberment or hurt were “not linked to the color of his skin, or the blood that run beneath it. But to some other thing that longed for authenticity, for a right to be in this place...” (160). It is the psychological burden and the transgenerational haunting by his parent’s sins which makes him feel like an amputee. At first, he thinks that there is only one kind of black. Later on, he realises that there is “another kind—like himself” (*Jazz* 149). What alienates him from acknowledging his father and the impulse to affirm his own identity as an African American “mulatto” is the whole question of slavery attached to the notion of skin colour. After Golden Gray’s confrontation with his father, who addresses the importance of “a right to be,” the reader observes that Gray undergoes a very radical change of heart, just like the narrator does. As Maria Lauret observes, the narrator’s initial portrayal of Gray is “unsympathetic” because “he is (at least to begin with) white-identified, arrogant and repulsed with Wild’s blackness” (Lauret 123-4). The narrator not only comes to sympathize with Gray but “imagine(s) a whole new character for him” after the latter seems to overcome his racism “and thereby redeems himself” (Lauret 124). The narrator realises that Gray’s motive was not linked to the colour of his skin alone but to his desperate need, like Joe, to identify a father figure for an authentic being. Besides, Henry subverts Gray’s sense of identity, which he associates with his (white) upbringing and the privileged life associated with it. The scene between the father and son underlines the need for “a black-identified cultural affiliation” (Bouson 178). It also emphasises the importance of being able to choose who you are and be proud of it. According to Keren Omry, “Morrison stresses consent and choice as defining components of ethnic identity making process” (Omry 29). Henry Lestroy asks his son, Golden Gray, to choose his identity: “Look. Be what you want—white or black. Choose. But if you choose black, you got to act black, meaning draw your manhood up-quicklike” (173). Choosing an identity is not based upon ancestry or a matter of descent based ideology. Choosing an identity is performative and Gray can choose to be either black or white—as he was made to think of himself as white by his mother (*Jazz* 172). He can decide to be what he wants to be. As Morrison reminds us in her interview with Elsie B. Washington, choosing an identity is not a

matter of following a static identity. It is a state of mind, a matter of mind-set. One can either decide to be white or black: “You can be Black genetically and choose not to be” (Interview 232). According to Duvall’s understanding of Morrison’s notion of race, there is no biological or genetic essence that makes a person white or black (*The Identifying Fiction* 15). However, Morrison’s characters are forced to choose certain types of identification because of fear of slavery, social oppression or out of desire for racial improvement and being socially more acceptable and having a privileged way of life. Ashraf H. Rushdy also affirms the role that slavery played in valorising whiteness, which “like any other identity, is not a genetic identity but a historical one that emerged in certain social conditions” (*Remembering* 27). Another example of making a choice between different identities, as in *Jazz*, comes from *Tar Baby* in which characters are equally concerned with the complexity of racial identity. In one scene, Gideon, the Streets’ gardener, argues with Son over light-skinned Jadine for identifying more with European-American identity rather than acknowledging their African-American origins. Son, who does not “want to have any discussion about shades of black folk,” defends Jadine saying: “She is not yalla,” “Just a little light” (*Tar Baby* 155). But Gideon rebukes Son just like Henry Lestroy rebukes his son, Golden Gray: “Don’t fool yourself...Yallas don’t come to being black natural-like. They have to choose it and most don’t choose it” (*Tar Baby* 155).

The other characters, such as Violet and Dorcas, like Gray and Joe, are haunted by their ancestors. They try to structure their identities around their absent parents/ancestors. All are haunted by phantoms—phantom arms, limbs, memories, dismemberment and the desire to achieve wholeness by the process of re-memembering. Rubenstein finds behind the images of dismemberment and phantom limbs:

...a trope for the profound damages inflicted on African Americans by the emotional dismemberments of slavery and its aftermath. Remembering—“re-memembering” (Morrison’s own play on the word)—is a crucial compensatory process that might begin to ameliorate the pain of literal and figurative, individual and communal, severances that cumulatively persist as cultural mourning. (Rubenstein 121)

It is, in fact, the “cultural memory of injury and loss—lost lives, lost possibilities, lost parents and children, lost parts of the body, lost selves” which Rubenstein sees as being “ineradicably woven into the fabric of African-American experience” (Rubenstein 112). The phantom limbs are about personal losses and historical traumas, which cannot be enacted in a linear mode of narration. They are like the presence of a foreign body inhabiting the space of the mind and psyche without the character’s awareness of its presence. Violet is haunted by memories of her home, her mother committing suicide and the occasional visits home by her phantom father (100). Above all, she internalises the image of a blond boy whom she incorporates as an idealised version of the self till she has to kill him in order to be herself again and accept her black identity. Violet was fed with stories about the beauty of this blond child, Golden Gray. Romanticising the image of the golden boy expressed a desire on the part of Violet to appropriate a white identity. Felice—Dorcas’ friend who takes the role of the substitute daughter Joe and Violet could not have—finds Violet being possessed by a double, a phantom self. She thinks that Violet’s life is “About having another inside that isn’t anything like you” (208). Violet exorcises her phantom self by metaphorically killing Gray (and perhaps Dorcas)—the other half of her self that is part white (209). Joe’s mother, Wild, is also haunted by “the queer boy she set so much store by” (168). Both Violet and Joe are haunted by Dorcas who could have been the age of the daughter they never had in real life. Alice Manfred, Dorcas’s aunt, is haunted by the memory of her husband’s betrayal. And both Alice and Violet are haunted by the memories of their mothers too, which brings them closer to each other. Above all, Golden Gray’s plight parallels Joe’s. There is an element of transgenerational haunting that links these characters together. Transgenerational haunting links the individual with secrets which belong in the familial archive. The secrets are phantoms which need to be exorcised. This can be achieved by coming to terms with the guilt and shame attached to the lies and secrets of existence. To exorcise the ghost is to accept its *raison d’être* and to come to terms with its shame. This leads to greater wisdom, a higher degree of truth, and self-identity.

The Healing Power of Touch

Joe chases his own phantoms of the mind intrapsychically with a similar dilemma to that experienced by Gray. The phantom limb phenomenon is about the fact that the ancestor continues to survive in the unconscious of the living. The separation that exists between children and parents is portrayed in terms of loss—loss of limbs or experiences like the phantom limb or what makes the body feel like a foreign entity. The experience of phantom limb pain or of embodied loss can be mitigated by the desire/immediacy of touch. Touch bestows a sense of subjectivity. It confirms identity, granted to most of Morrison's characters through the medium of identification and mirroring. The subject is both made and unmade in the image of the other. Similarly, the subject is acknowledged and rejected by the presence or absence of (maternal) touch and its warmth in his/her life. It is lack of touch which unsettles the notion of subjectivity (just like transgenerational haunting unsettles the subjectivity of Golden Gray after he becomes the phantom-carrier of his parents' secrets).

Now I focus on Joe's quest to find his mother, drawing on of Irigaray's poetics of touch. Joe desires to confirm his identity through contact with his mother. Touch, the interface between the mother and one's origin (trace), identity and subjectivity is the missing element in his life. Touch is also at the heart of Luce Irigaray's dialectic of relations with the others. According to Irigaray, it is a gesture that responds to the call of the (m)other (*Sharing the World* 20). The dialectic of touch is based upon the gesture of respect and reverence towards the source or the gesture of violence if it seeks to appropriate the subjectivity of the other (*Sharing the World* 20). To quote Irigaray, "Touching or being touched concern(s) an intimacy that cannot be approached with the hand" (*Toward a Divine* 23). Touch can be an act of physical appropriation of the body. It is a question of intimacy and one can develop intimacy through touching each other internally or intersubjectively. Touch also implies being in contact tactilely or tactfully. It sets certain boundaries and limits to human relationships. It requires mutual consent. To borrow from Irigaray, "To touch one another in intersubjectivity, it is necessary that two subjects agree

to relationship and that the possibility to consent exists” (*The Wedding* 20). Unlike gaze, touch should not arrest or grasp the subject which prevents the economy of subjectivity (*Sharing the World* 128).

Touch, in the works of Irigaray, is an expression of infinite possibilities as it circulates in the economy of fluid interchange. Touching continues to be touching as long as it does not capture or annihilate the other’s subjective autonomy (*Beyond All Judgment* 75). Irigaray also defines touching as a movement from the external to the internal (*Toward a Divine* 24). According to her, touch “is not only an external touching through our senses but also an internal touching” (*Toward a Divine* 24). She defines touch as “a medium par excellence of interiority” (*Sharing the World* 128). Touch is not merely a matter of mediated relations with the outside world, but it is also a matter of “auto-affection” which is a way of being in touch with one’s own self “with a positive feeling” (*Toward a Divine* 16). However, like the *rite de passage*, touch should also pave the way from “self-affection to affection for the other and with the other, and also lead us toward a possible Other” (*Toward a Divine* 24). Touch should perform the role of a guide along the path of becoming divine, attaining wisdom, finding and recovering our lost selves. Human relationships are prone to violence if there is a lack of immediate touch in our mediations (*Toward a Divine* 24). If touch is lacking in our mediations or relationships, it can take violent expression in the form of “hurting, cutting, striking, or dazzling” (*Toward a Divine* 24). Lack of respect for the identity and subjectivity of the other “amounts to a kind of murder: a spiritual murder, the most serious murder and also the most serious suicide” (*Toward a Divine* 15).

These are some of the poetics of touch in the corpus of Irigaray foregrounding my discussion of touch as both a source of violence and a gesture of recuperation in *Jazz*. However, unlike other theorists of touch like Levinas, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, who discuss touch in terms of a power struggle or an appropriation of the body, my discussion is based upon Irigaray’s notion of touch not only as constitutive of a physical relationship based upon consent, but also in terms of her notion of touch as a tactile and reciprocal experience of the act of communication or understanding/reading a work of art which calls for a tactile response (*The Wedding* 18). Kelly Ives brings Roland Barthes into her discussion of the aesthetics of reading, whether the text is a

painting, film, magazine, photograph or a theatrical performance. She argues that the reader derives pleasure from the text when his/her Look is aligned with that of the author (Ives 39). To extend this argument one could postulate that the pleasure of the text can be derived when the *aesthesis* of the reader is aligned with that of the author of the story. This is especially true in the case of *Jazz*, whose narrator seeks to elicit a tactile response from the reader.

Joe's love for the young Dorcas is an attempt to replace his love for the mother, as discussed earlier. It conceals a desire to touch his mother. "Since Joe's relationship with Dorcas' is attached to his mother," (Mbalia 641) he wants to make sure that Dorcas doesn't betray him like his mother. His possessive love for the mother and her absence in his life takes on a violent aspect. He wants to appropriate Dorcas and in his desire to appropriate her entity, he murders her "in a moment of blind jealousy and shame-rage" (Bouson 181). The act of murder is read by J. Brook Bouson in response "not only to Dorcas' shaming rejection of him but also to his life-long feelings of maternal rejection" (Bouson 181). Terry Otten also reads it as "the culmination of Joe's struggle to touch his mother's hand" (Otten 662). However, in his desire to touch his mother, Joe forgets the lesson learnt from Hunter's Hunter: "...never kill the tender and nothing female if you can help it. Didn't think I had to teach you about people. Now, learn this: she ain't no prey. You got to know the difference" (175). Joe ignores this advice and his act of touch, instead of being a protective one, becomes violent and disrupts the boundaries between the self and the other. Irigaray reminds us that touch is a way of approaching the other without losing the difference between I and thou, between the caresser and the caressed, between the lover and the beloved and above all, between the toucher and the touched (*Democracy Begins* 140). Touch must remain careful, non-appropriating and withdrawn to a point that it does not dissolve or destroy the other's subjectivity in the act of touching (*The Way of Love* 18). Respecting the alterity of the other, it should reach out and then withdraw itself, creating both proximity and temporality between the subjects. Above all, touch must wait upon the response or the call of the other: "Touch makes it possible to wait, to gather strength, so that the other will return to caress and reshape, from within and without, flesh that is given back to itself in the gesture of love" ("The Fecundity" 232).

Waiting for the other to respond in kind affirms the autonomous subjectivity of the other, especially the female subject. As Irving Gosh mentions, the female subject demonstrates in response that she is not only irreducibly different, but at the same time, free from the appropriating touch or caress of the male subject (Gosh 119). Touch should not be excessive. It is a question of being in touch with the alterity of the other with “tact”, which implies a fine line between a touch which is excessive and a touch which knows limits as it “involves certain withdrawal of touch” (Gosh 117). Hunter’s advice on not hurting the tender can be read as a word of caution against the dangers of touching someone so close that the gesture of touch becomes an act of *anesthetics* which kills insensibly (*Elemental Passions* 55). In other words, touch should not annul the alterity or the very existence of the other. The act of touching should not be irrevocable. Instead, touch should be, as the narrator in *Jazz* implies, “a reassurance, not an affront or a nuisance” (27).

Joe’s act of touch is aggressive. It expresses the desire to own and be owned. According to Irigaray, to own is a transitive verb which denotes possession and “the risk of reducing the other to an object” (*I Love to You* 125). Ownership in the realm of Morrison’s fiction also means ownership of the self, freedom, possession, authorship and agency. To own someone in terms of exercising absolute rights over their bodies is like having dominion over them. It is like enslaving the mind and body of the subject. It is an act of violation/violence. Any form of love which tries to appropriate the agency of the other is a violent form of love. The desire to touch as a violent gesture is synonymous with the desire to seize and to appropriate. Touch, which confers ownership, (re)assurance and possession, should not come about by force or violence. Touch which respects another’s entity is restorative. It can help alleviate painful memories, the main cause of experiences of dismemberment, phantom limbs and transgenerational hauntings. To touch and be touched in return is existential in the realm of Morrison’s fiction. As a matter of survival and aspiration, it places the subject in relation to the other in order to be and to live in the presence of ipseity, which requires auto-affection. Claire Colebrook defines auto-affection as a gesture and movement towards touching the other (Colebrook 35). The experience of auto-affection or self-touching is an act of self-recognition requiring placing oneself in relation to the

(m)other. McQuillan draws the distinction/difference which exists between touching someone else and touching one's own self. The act of (self-)touching is reciprocal. It always involves the trace of the absent (m)other who makes the act of self-touching meaningful as an experience of touch, the experience of proximity and contact at its limits (McQuillan 208). Finding the trace of one's origins is the very condition of being touched by the (m)other. Hence, touch becomes a quest for Joe to be in contact with his mother, to find the trace of his origin.

According to Sean Gaston, touch always involves the ideal of touching (the moving gaps of) the other (Gaston 219). When Joe shoots Dorcas, the desire to touch his mother is behind the motive to kill: "I wasn't looking for the trail. It was looking for me and when it started talking at first I couldn't hear it. I was rambling, just rambling all through the City. I had the gun but it was not the gun—it was *my hand I wanted to touch you with*" (my italics 130-131). Joe redeems himself as he comes to terms with his guilt and undergoes transformation in moments of confession and acknowledgement (after the confirmation he receives from Dorcas' friend, Felice, affirming that Dorcas was herself responsible for her death as she "let herself die" (204) by refusing to have medical help). He realises, as the narrator observes, that his "touch" which drew him towards Dorcas in the nightclub was not entirely intentional: "He isn't thinking of harming her, or, as Hunter had cautioned, killing something tender. She is female. And she is not prey. So he never thinks of that" (180).

The final section of *Jazz* is about the healing power of touch. The androgynous narrative voice (which personifies the book) talks about the pain of others' lives which it shares with the readers. The narrative voice finds itself mediating something profoundly wounded in their relationship with each other and their lives and finds itself touching the characters and being touched by them in return. Initially, the voice identifies itself with the characters whose lives it thought it could predict and control at will. But it finds itself exposed and vulnerable too: "I break lives to prove I can mend them back again. And although the pain is theirs, I share it, Don't I? Of course. Of course" (219). It discovers that just like the characters of the story, it needs the restorative and healing power of compassionate touch and understanding. The painful memories behind the fragmented lives of the characters are also part of its own consciousness.

When the narrative voice shares its empathy with the rest of the characters who put their lives together through the medium of touch, it finds itself healed by the restorative power of touch. After being touched by the lives of Morrison's characters, it even finds itself "Released in secret" (221). It experiences contact. A person can be made and remade through her/his contact with the other, through a relationship with the other. This seems to be the message of Morrison's last lines for Doreatha Mbalia (Mbalia 639). By the end of the novel, we find the narrator's plea and desire to touch, be touched and released by the other person/reader, which is a necessary condition of (self-)touching, knowing, relating and defining. It is as if the book itself is addressing the reader and calls for a tactile response from him/her:

...I want you to love me back and to show it to me. That I love you the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer—that's the kick.

But I can't say that aloud; I can't tell anyone that I have been waiting for you for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now. (228-9)

This is perhaps the most explicit moment in the novel when the narrator reveals its identity as the book itself. To borrow from Morrison with Carabi, she wanted to demonstrate the narrator caught in the process of narrative writing. She wanted to imagine the "voice of a talking book" and the way it would address the reader ("Nobel Laureate" 95). Morrison's comments also reveal the narrator's desire to establish a dialogic relationship between the characters, the readers and the book itself. It is as if the book surrenders itself to the hands of the readers for a meaningful dialogue to take place. According to Irigaray's aesthetics of reading, the book demands a *touching upon* from the reader who proffers his/her attentiveness (rather than appropriation), "including carnal attentiveness" (*I Love to You* 124). It invites the reader to

interact freely and engage in dialogue. The intention behind the plea is to draw the reader to the site of communication, to awaken the reader to an exchange in which the act of giving shape to words and meaning takes place, as it were, between two bodies (*I Love to You* 125). It is this moment of awakening in which the subject addresses himself/herself to an addressee in a process of reciprocal exchange that defines them (*I Love to You* 126).

The narrator's art of story-telling in *Jazz* highlights the importance of "tact" as she/he waits for the moment when the reader's tactile experience of holding the book in hand transforms itself into a response. The desire to touch and be touched is the locus of the narrative experience that exists between the reader and the narrator. Andrew Schreiber reads in the narrator's voice a desire for "the love and care that maybe mediated and expressed through the touch of fingers on...the printed page" (Schreiber 490). The narrator craves touch which creates a combination of joy and pain in the lives of his/her characters. The narrator, who claimed to be able to mould and bend the lives of the characters according to his/her will, finds himself/herself "in their hands (and ironically enough in the hands of her readers too), managed without mercy" (220). The narrator finds them "original, complicated, changeable-human" as they recover themselves by "putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of" (221). Joe and Violet recover their relationship through the healing power of touch. Felice witnesses the small moments when Joe attempts to touch Violet in order to feel, explain and mend their relationship: "And when he leaves the room and walks past his wife, he touches her. Sometimes on the head. Sometimes just a pat on her shoulder" (207). The characters' lives are mediated through the medium of touch just like the text itself is mediated through touch in that it calls for a tactile response from the readers. The narrator initially thought that it could inscribe and predict the fate of the characters, but finds itself all too vulnerable. In the final passage mentioned above, the narrator emphasises the need to construct meaning and subjectivity by drawing the readers into a dialogic interaction between the text, the characters and themselves.

Touching, which is both violent and restorative, emerges as the triumphant gesture of healing, power and forgiveness in *Jazz*. It is both a tactful and a tactile experience. It is like an address. The narrator does not literally touch by grasping or making physical contact. He or she

can touch metaphorically by way of addressing, sending, receiving and opening himself/herself to the touch of the reader. As Irigaray reminds us: “For there to be an exchange, it is essential that the other touches us, particularly through words” (*The Way of Love* 18). The experience of reading and writing is tactile. It is an experience of touching and being touched, like the touching of bodies—the bodies of lovers. The experience of reading a text can be sensuous and erotic. Holding the book in the hands is like a gift which touches. However, touch is not sufficient in itself. It always needs the other and respect for the others’ bodies is the condition of all touching. Real touch is one that is restrained and nonappropriating. Touch interrupts the bodily integrity of the other if it violates its entity. Bodies resist the approach of an unwelcome touch. They resist the violent appropriating touch. The narrative language of *Jazz* uses a vocabulary of (con)tact: touching, caressing, fingering, looking, listening and releasing. We see a similar desire to touch being reflected in the lives of the rest of the characters the narrator talks about. All these characters seek to touch and address each other. They touch and address themselves by being touched and addressed by the others. They build and re-build their relationship with each other by way of touching. When they are not responded to in kind, they find their relationship disrupted. What they need is a touch as the compassionate and healing medium to restore the normative image of the body and its orientation in relation to the other. Touch confirms immediacy of presence. Like the appreciative gaze, touch makes us aware of our corporeal existence, our embodiment in the mode of acceptance and justification. Drew Leder succinctly points out the defining moment of touch as when the subject “I feel confirmed in my body by the lover’s touch” (Leder 97). In the absence of (maternal) touch, characters like Joe and Dorcas find an emotional vacuum—an inside nothing. They try to fill in the gaps left in their lives through the medium of touch. It is this desire to touch that involves the trace of the absent (m)other, which unmakes, makes and remakes their tragic lives.

Abraham and Torok’s theory of transgenerational hauntings offers the most suitable theoretical model for understanding the family secrets which produce phantoms whose effects are visible over several generations and can, in fact, determine the fate of an entire family line. With the help of their theory, I look at how the past continues to affect the progeny of slaves

psychologically. In the next chapter, I investigate how racism, social iniquities and injustice like lack of meaningful employment make the fictive community in *Sula* scapegoat a member of their own community. This brings home my application of the Fanonian hypothesis of racism which has consequences in the physical, psychological and social dismemberment of the body. We cannot diagnose racism without taking into account all the historical, psychological and socio-diagnostic realities. To borrow Fanon's phrase, "the effective disalienation of the black" calls for an immediate and an overall recognition of all these realities (*Black Skin* 4). Disalienation in *Sula* calls for a reintegration of the marginalised and pariah characters like Sula rather than their social ostracism or cultural dismemberment through the process of scapegoating.

CHAPTER THREE

The Motif of the Scapegoat and Cultural Dismemberment in *Sula*

The images of laceration and fragmentation remind us of the endless mythical and ritual dismemberments and the innumerable versions of the Dionysiac diasparagmos. (Rene Girard)

Barbara Christian is one of the critics, like Michael Awkward, who has made a keen observation highlighting the scapegoating principle in Morrison's oeuvre. According to her, "The need human beings continually exhibit for a scapegoat, so they can justify themselves, is one of the mysteries of human existence that Morrison consistently probes in her works" (Christian 41). The scapegoat tends to be a marginalized or pariah figure, like Sula or Shadrack, who exists on the fringes of society. Sula is an ideal figure for the scapegoat. She is, first of all, a black woman whose nature is deemed "evil" by the community in order to "validate and enrich its own existence" (Christian 41). In this chapter, I focus on Sula's communal dismemberment, which reflects the mechanism of (surrogate) victim, the transformation of bad violence into benign violence, and the restoration of disorder into peace and order—the aftermaths of successful scapegoating. I also look at the impact of internalized racism within the black community which makes them scapegoat a member of their own community. The cause of internalized racism is linked to social injustice, but its transference onto the marginalized characters, like Sula and Pilate, cuts them off from the rest of the community. Because of the hidden force of violence behind the victimization or social ostracism of such characters, I refer to the process of their scapegoating as *cultural dismemberment*. I outline the process of Sula's communal dismemberment in line with Girard's theory of the scapegoat.

- 1: Sula's identification as the scapegoat is marked and facilitated by the signs of victimhood manifested in her birthmark.
- 2: Sula, as a scapegoat, is a transgressor of differences and taboos. By challenging social values and hierarchies, she initiates a crisis which jeopardizes social harmony and cohesion with the loss of distinctions within the community.
- 3: Sula stands convicted of moral crimes of a sexual nature which, in fact, reflect the hidden desires of the community at large.
- 4: Because of her moral wrongdoing, Sula unfolds a pattern of undifferentiation or cultural disorder seen by the community members as a natural consequence of her misdeeds. The disorder is indicated by the theme of plague in the novel and other images of natural disorder and loss of distinction.
- 5: Sula's scapegoating also reflects an act of *sparagmos* which is the literal dismemberment of the victim in a Dionysian context. The *sparagmos* offers an outlet to the violent imaginings of the community and their resentment against Sula. The act of *sparagmos* reflects a mechanism whereby the community will not "mob kill" Sula because she becomes for them the focus of the discharge of their aggressive instincts and violence.
- 6: Sula is a *pharmakos* for the society. *Pharmakos* is a Greek word associated with the figure of the scapegoat and it means both poison and cure. As a *pharmakos*, she polarizes violence and deflects the internal conflicts outside the community. She processes violence from bad to good. After the processing of violence, peace and harmony are restored and the communal foundation is re-established. Thus, Sula's isolation and demise seems to restore the social order.
- 7: During the process of Sula's scapegoating, the act of her communal dismemberment manifests itself in terms of violence, racism and accusations directed at her.

The above mentioned points outline the process of Sula's scapegoating in line with the Girardian hypothesis of the scapegoat. However, my argument diverges from Girard's concept of the scapegoat in the end. Girard observes that the function of the scapegoat is to restore order and peace after the scapegoat is sacrificed, but the communal violence erupts again after Sula's death. While Sula is present, she cements the social fabric. But there is a scene of social disarray

after Sula's demise, supporting my argument that Sula serves a permanent psychic need for the community to have a scapegoat to provide an outlet for their aggression and violence. Now, I foreground my discussion of the motif of scapegoating by drawing a distinction between Morrison, the author, as a commenter on her work, and the third-person narrator in *Sula*. The role of the narrator is more sympathetic towards Sula as it bears witness to her scapegoating at the hands of the community. Compared to the narrator, Morrison perpetuates the effect of scapegoating by validating the community's treatment of Sula in her numerous statements and interviews, as will be observed.

Between the Author and the Narrator in *Sula*

The figure of Morrison as the celebrated author, her extra-textual intervention and authorial influence work as a principle of ambiguity in novels like *Sula* and *A Mercy*. According to Seán Burke, the authorial influence, or what he terms as "the author-function, the signature effects, the proper name in general," involves the risk of "overdetermination" and "textual enclosure" (Burke 191). With a view to Morrison's extra-textual influence, Jennifer E. Dunn makes the following observation: "One of the most interesting and complicated issues in Morrison criticism is the figure of Morrison herself" (Dunn 62). Dunn considers that the figure of Morrison as the author and commenter on her works makes the process of critical assessment complicated (Dunn 62). In her opinion, Morrison as a public figure of eminence discussing her works in various interviews makes it "tempting" to accept her opinion "as the final, authoritative word on her fiction" (Dunn 62). According to Dunn, critics have cautioned Morrison's readers against depending too much upon the author and her "public statements in analysing her fiction" (Dunn 63). For Dunn, the "issue of author's agency and role is a complicated one" (Dunn 63). According to Judlyn S. Ryan, "the role of the artist" is attached to "the habit of exercising interpretive agency" (Ryan 151). This carries the benefit of motivating

and enlightening the reader but also the risk of confusing “the narrative project” and the reader’s “understanding of Toni Morrison’s choice of narrative techniques” (Ryan 151). This also highlights that the reader should create a distinction between the narrator, who is intradiegetic, and the extradiegetic influence that Morrison exercises as an author and commenter on her books. The reader needs to establish some middle ground between authorial interpretation and the textual analysis that *Sula* demands from him/her as the reader. According to Lynne Tirrell, “The distinction between first and third-person perspectives has epistemological consequences for both the teller and the listener” (Tirrell 10). Tirrell further adds that first-person narrators evolve “like characters within their own stories” and “are usually limited to a fallible human perspective on the events of the story” (Tirrell 10), as is the case with the unreliable narrator in *Jazz*. However, compared to the first-person narrator, “A third-person narrator often takes the epistemic privilege of omniscience” (Tirrell 10), as is the case with the narrators in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, who become a source of intimacy for the reader. Unlike the unreliable first-person narrator in *Jazz*, the third-person narrator in *Sula* becomes “the source of relevance to moral agency” (Tirrell). In the opinion of Pelagia Goulimari, the third-person narrator exposes the process of Sula’s scapegoating (Goulimari 53).

A reading of *Sula* from the third-person narrative perspective conflicts with Morrison’s authorial intentions as stated in her numerous interviews and essays where she defends the community’s treatment of Sula. I present some of Morrison’s extra-textual statements which perpetuate the scapegoat effect in *Sula*. In her interviews, Morrison endorses Sula’s treatment at the hands of the community who participate in her scapegoating. This is partly because she personally shares the community’s set of values or their aesthetics. Morrison’s practice of investing the characters with a personalised version of philosophy seems to contradict her theory. She considers it “irresponsible” to associate the author’s point of view with “the thoughts of his characters” (*Playing* 85). In her essay “The Site of Memory,” she talks about the “illusion” created by the author-narrator who hides herself/himself behind a persona. In her opinion, “the character’s point of view” is, in fact, that of the narrator “who is there but who doesn’t make herself (in my case) known in that role” (“Site” 79). This exonerates the author

from the realm of fictive responsibility, for the meaning conveyed inside the text cannot be directly associated with the author himself/herself but only with the characters' point of view. Morrison the author cannot be held accountable for her characters' point of view. However, in discussion of *Sula*, she endorses the community's treatment of Sula.

Sula, as a character, is a scapegoat not only at the hands of the community but also at the hands of her creator-author. As a prose writer, Morrison is conscious that she can manipulate the characters and her readers' responses. She learnt "giving up of control" from her experience of writing her first play *Dreaming Emmett*. Working in the theatre was a world of entirely different learning for the author. What she learnt in the theatre was the opposite to her experience of writing in prose, which permitted a greater degree or sense of control over the characters' lives or behaviour. Morrison mentions this in one of her interviews with Margaret Croyden. Croyden quotes the comment Morrison made prior to the stage enactment of *Dreaming Emmett* at the Market Theatre of Albany:

The play is both more or less. It's less in the setting of a mood and in manipulating readers. In the novel one has control of everything. Giving up that control in a play is not pleasant for me... After giving up control, you see the manifestation of the work through somebody else's mind...When you hear the actresses and actors read they give new meanings to the lines and so the texture of the play changes. But in a novel, I only hear it one way, through my voice. ("Toni Morrison Tries" 222)

In her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison finds it interesting to study, "The treatment of the artists by the people for whom they speak" ("Rootedness" 62). This implies that "the writer is one of them, when the voice is not separate...but an implied "we" in a narration" ("Rootedness" 62). The role of the community, in *Sula*, embodies the voice of the author. As an artist, she is not, to borrow her expression, "in confrontation with (her) own

(fictive) society” (“Rootedness” 62). In fact, she endorses their values. She believes that Sula is not destroyed by society. On the contrary, she is nourished by society. Morrison also maintains that “(Sula) would have been destroyed by any other place; she was permitted to “be” only in that context, and no one stoned her or killed her or threw her out” (“Rootedness” 63). Morrison, the author, attempts to convince the reader to read the story from her perspective. She adds a final comment to her argument: “And it’s difficult to see who the winners are if you are not looking at it from that point of view” (“Rootedness” 63). Morrison’s comments reveal a desire to convince the audience from *her* point of view rather than the narrator’s point of view. According to Ryan’s observation, Morrison “frequently constructs an audience that is teachable” (Ryan 156). In her opinion, the audience is “positioned to accept the narrator’s knowledge, intellectual and ethical judgements, in sum, her discursive authority” (Ryan 156). To use the textual expression of “rapport” defined by Barbara Johnson as “the dynamics of connectedness,” (Johnson 9) the reader of *Sula* develops a rapport with the narrator rather than the author. If we read *Sula* from the author’s point of view, the crowd emerges victorious and Sula seems to rightfully deserve her punishment. Morrison’s identification (as the author) with the community stands in an asymmetrical relationship to the position of the narrator, who empathizes with the victim of the story—Sula. According to Philip Page, the “noticeably omniscient” narrator has access “not only to many characters’ thoughts but also to the collective feelings of the community” and can expose their double standards, narrow lives and hidden motives (Page 64). The third person narrator purports to be less subjective than the first-person narrator. The reader, as Lynne Tirrell observes, tends to adopt the objective perspective of this narrator whom “the reader comes to know more or less intimately” (Tirrell 10). Tirrell also points out that the intimacy developed by the narrator is the main source of the “moral agency” of the reader. The narrator in *Sula* is not like the unreliable narrator of *Jazz*, whose credibility the reader should not accept without challenging. The narrator bears witness to Sula’s trial and her persecution at the hands of the community. The narrator exposes the community’s treatment of Sula in terms of “the most significant hatred they had ever known” (173). It is through the narrator’s third-person omniscient perspective that the reader can see the collective hatred of

Sula spread like an infection and transform into “spite that galloped all over the Bottom” (171). The narrator draws the reader into a narrative of call and response which views the persecution of Sula from the victim’s point of view and brings the case against the community. This observation that Sula is an object of the author’s scapegoating relates to Morrison’s professional life too. Morrison befriended and worked with members and writers of the Black Arts Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She also edited the works of Amiri Baraka, one of the founders of the movement. She was clearly under the influence of the Black Arts Movement when she published her novel, *Sula* in 1973. Larry Neal, who himself contributed to the Black Arts Movement, defines the aesthetic of the movement as “radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community” (Neal 448). Morrison seems to validate the aesthetic of the Black Arts Movement by drawing Sula in the role of a rebel artist. Quoting Jill Matus, Ágnes Surányi observes that *Sula* was published “at a time when the Black Aesthetic movement called for positive representations and role models” (Matus qtd. in Surányi 20). She further submits, “As a consequence, Sula, a young black woman without any attachments or feelings of responsibility, could hardly be expected to receive a favourable reception” (Surányi 20).

Studying the motif of the scapegoat versus the community highlights the inherent paradoxes and inconsistencies in Morrison’s treatment of this subject (as an author and commenter on her works). Morrison defends the community in her interviews and other statements she makes on *Sula* in essays like “Speaking the Unspeakable,” “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” and “The Site of Memory.” However, the impression *Sula* leaves on the reader is of a character being scapegoated. The theme of the scapegoat is obvious in *Sula*, which contradicts the sense intended by the author that the community does no physical “harm” to Sula. It is the narrator of the story who reveals the principle of scapegoating that Morrison the author tries to conceal, for example when the community “band together against the devil in their midst,” they try to project their own weaknesses and evil onto Sula (Bousoon 68, *Sula* 117-8). This conflicts with Morrison’s intentions as stated in her interviews.

The view of “legitimate” black violence is discredited by the narrator in *Sula*, who does not share the same perspective as the mob or the author. Instead of attributing all the responsibility for violent behaviour to Sula, the narrator places the onus of ethical irresponsibility on the community—the real persecutors of a single victim—for not rehabilitating Sula by providing her with some constructive means of engagement and elder supervision. Their act of passive acceptance, passive witnessing and accusations embodies their collective guilt. The narrator also exposes Nel’s conventional morality after she conforms to the communal morality and “that was the terrible part, the effort not to look” (94). Thus, the narrator reveals the communal gathering around Sula as mere imitation or mimicry, lacking substance or evidence. It holds the community together in a negative sense by demonstrating their moral apathy and indifference. In her interview with A. J. Verdelle, Morrison herself regrets this attitude of moral disengagement: “People today are very busy *not* getting involved in other people’s affairs” (“Loose Magic” 167-8). What Morrison critiques is the communal indifference and disinterest in rectifying the behaviour of their children, which she considers irresponsible. Morrison regrets the absence of a nurturing society providing the basis for a network of care and concern. She experienced the nurturing kind of relationship from her childhood experiences in Lorain, Ohio, where the whole community was interested in the upbringing and welfare of the children and felt personally responsible for them.

Morrison describes the role of the narrator in her interviews as like a Greek chorus commenting upon the action as the narrative events unfold. Morrison’s narrator is usually unreliable, like the protean narrator in *Jazz*, a highly elusive figure in her fiction. In *Sula*, the narrator is third-person omniscient, giving insights into the characters’ lives from various perspectives. Unlike Morrison, who does not acknowledge the scapegoating process in *Sula*, the narrator, by empathizing with Sula, lays bare the truth behind her scapegoating, for example, when the men accuse Sula of sleeping with white men, they themselves are equally willing to sleep with white women and commit acts of racial transgression and miscegenation (113). Thus, the narrator’s voice reveals the ambivalent relationship between the scapegoat and the

community, exposing the violence, the hidden hypocrisy of the community and their double standards towards a member of their own community.

In one of her interviews with Claudia Tate, Morrison comments upon “several levels of pariah figure” in her writing (Interview 168). She points out that the black community exists in a pariah relationship vis-à-vis the other American communities. In fact, there are several pariah figures within the black community itself. Communities in *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* treat one of their own kind as a pariah figure and subject him/her to persecution. Studying the motif of the scapegoat versus the community demonstrates the fact that the members of a race can be racist towards a member of their own community and direct their abuse upon the member as a result of internalised racism. In *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, black violence is the outcome of the racism the characters internalise as self-hatred and deflect onto their own people.

The narrator in *Sula* presents the scene of persecution from the standpoint of both the persecutor and the victim.¹ Unlike Morrison in interview, the narrator does not solely present the persecution of Sula from the standpoint of the persecutor/community. This makes Morrison the author and commenter on her works at odds with the narrator of her works. In fact, the impact conveyed by the narrator is that of Sula’s successful persecution at the hands of the mob. In the opinion of Reddy, Sula does not tempt her own fate by seeking ultimate freedom and self-fulfilment; the members of the community “seem to will her death” (Reddy 4). The motif of the scapegoat versus the community exposes the contradiction that exists between Morrison’s art of narrative-writing and her expostulation about her art: how her practice differs from her stated intention. For example, while elaborating the call and response relationship that exists between the narrator and the reader, Morrison draws the reader, the narrator and the community into a circle of complicity whereby each shares the other’s point of view through exposure, contact and “privileged information”:

The reader as narrator asks the questions the community asks, and both reader and “voice” stand among the crowd, within it, with privileged intimacy and contact, but without any more privileged information than the crowd has. (“Unspeakable” 157)

Although the essay “Unspeakable” comes a lot later than *Sula* and Morrison’s practice has evolved, it does reflect her desire to involve the reader, the narrator and the community in a communal relationship. But the relationship between the author as the commenter on her works and her audience is even more intimate. Morrison attempts to win the reader’s sympathy by counting on his/her complicity in the condemnation of Sula’s behaviour through what she describes as metonymic displacement, one of “the common strategies employed in fiction to engage the serious consequence of blacks” (*Playing* 67). Some of the serious consequences that Morrison talks about in *Playing* involve the use of a figure of blackness as a foil for the moral growth of not only the white community but the black community as well. The black community use Sula (her blackness symbolising her anarchy and deviance) for their own moral elevation by subjecting her to the rituals of scapegoating.

In *Sula*, the reader is more prone to ask questions from the narrator’s point of view rather than that of the community (or the author for that matter). The reader shares the narrator’s preoccupation with the fate of three central characters—Shadrack, Sula and Nel—and their relationship with the community. The community consider the behaviour of Shadrack and Sula as deviant. Both characters exist on the margins of the society because of their behaviour, which is considered “aberrant” by the community. The community, in fact, fails to integrate them or they do so only symbolically or partially. It is the narrator who seems to valorise Sula’s efforts for the freedom, independence and self-expression necessary for moral and individual development. The narrator (like some critics and readers devoted to the ideal of self-realisation) celebrates Sula’s attempts at self-realisation, seeing her in the role of a survivor challenging the self-righteous values of her community, including those of her best friend, Nel, for example. The narrator highlights the importance of shared vision behind the character development in the

early friendship between Sula and Nel: “In the safe harbour of each other’s company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things” (47). The narrator points out how, by moving away from depending upon other people, Nel and Sula develop their individuality by trusting their own perceptions.

The prototypical community in Morrison’s fictive projects deflects its violence on a victim chosen primarily because of his/her signs of victimhood, which seem to seal his/her fate. In *Sula*, the victim temporarily re-establishes social order and a semblance of social harmony after the community displaces its internal violence upon the victim. However, soon after the killing or disappearance of the victim from the scene, the public resort to their old habits. Chaos ensues after Sula disappears from the communal scene. This is the real dénouement of the novel. It shows that the community is wrong in assuming Sula a “lost” person who rightfully deserves her punishment. This answers one of the fundamental questions: If the community is right in justifying the treatment of Sula, why do they seem to meet a divine punishment in the end?

As the community seeks a new outlet to release their violence, it lays bare the fact that violence is inherent in the social structure and has its roots in social inequities, including unemployment, for “coloured folks,” or their lack of any other meaningful preoccupation. In *Song of Solomon*, violence finds a more aggressive expression in the form of reprisal and an urge to take an eye for an eye. The lives of three male characters—Smith, Porter and Guitar—belonging to the cult of Seven Days in *Song of Solomon*, are motivated by this kind of violence. Pilate—the female protagonist of *Song of Solomon*—bears the brunt of communal violence as Sula does. However, unlike Sula, she manages to survive the violence because of the “nurturing” relationship she enjoys with her ancestors, the strength of her character and her spiritual qualities such as self-less love, hospitality, generosity, compassion and above all, her respect for the ancestors.

Scapegoating in *Sula*

Sula's initial scapegoating is in line with the Girardian hypothesis of the scapegoat process. The community enact Sula's scapegoating, especially after her return to Medallion in the second part of the novel, the focus of my discussion here. They establish her identification as the scapegoat because of her status as an outsider. Sula's birthmark, like Pilate's lack of a navel, becomes a mark of her victimisation, which sets off the process of scapegoating. For the community, Sula's birthmark is a manifestation of her "otherworldliness" and they use it "to turn her into a witch" (Harris 113). Each member of the community interprets Sula's birthmark according to his/her proclivity. The description of Sula's birthmark is evocative of Hawthorne's description of Georgiana's birthmark in his short-story "The Birth-mark." The significance of Georgiana's birth-mark changes "according to the difference of temperament in the beholders" ("The Birth-mark" 765). Georgiana becomes the victim of her husband, Dr. Aylmer's experimentation because of her birth-mark. Similarly, Sula too becomes a victim because of her birthmark, which serves to confirm Sula's evil influence. In order to protect themselves from Sula's evil, the community members adopt various protective measures. The apparently harmless but apotropaic acts/rituals of laying broomsticks across the doorsteps and sprinkling salt on porch steps does no physical harm to Sula, but symbolically, she is cut off from the rest of the community (113). The ceremonies are aimed at warding off the evil influence of Sula whom the community want to ostracise in an attempt to exclude/disown her as a part of their own identity. They even "fantasise elaborate torture" to counter the degenerate behaviour of Sula (113). It is because of their taboos and prohibitions that Sula becomes an *untouchable* within her own society:

But it was the men who gave her the final label, who *fingerprinted her for all time*. They were the ones who said she was guilty of the unforgivable thing—the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion. The route from which there was

no way back, the dirt that could not ever be washed away. They said that Sula slept with white men. It may not have been true, but it certainly could have been. She was obviously capable of it. (Emphasis added, 112-3)

The narrator seems to challenge the veracity of the community's allegations of Sula's crimes. The men accuse her of sexual transgression without any concrete evidence, solely on the basis of her being "capable of it." Sula becomes a "pariah" in the community after her guilt is established. She upsets their moral code with her supposed acts of racial transgression. In the eyes of the men, she sullies the black community by doing one of the worst things imaginable—sleeping with white men: "They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable" (113). Sula's act of racial transgression violates the public belief that a black woman's body should be the property solely of black men (Reddy 12). The irony is that there is no concrete evidence of Sula's behaviour. The third-person narrator not only exposes the community's hypocrisy but also the baseless allegations underlying their attempts to demonise Sula: "Their evidence against Sula was contrived" (118). Sula, in fact, questions the racial identity and prejudices of the community, who deny the brute reality of mixed blood in their own families. The fear of racial contamination and (im)pure blood haunts their minds, while the members of both black and white communities secretly lust after their counterparts. The community is equally guilty of the sexual crimes they accuse Sula of to justify their accusations and her persecution.

I now examine a long passage of symbolic import taken from the middle of the text. The passage is about Sula's relationship with her friend, Nel, vis-à-vis the community. The passage employs a central textual metaphor—that of the web—lodged in the heart of the text. It also implies one of Morrison's favourite motifs of flight and its tragic consequences. The passage carves out the trajectory of Sula's flight in a quick sequence of images. It gives the reader a glimpse of Sula's "surrender to the downward flight" into "the snake's breath" which is the consequence of her "free fall" (120). According to Jan Furman, the recurrent motif of flight and

free flight celebrates the spirit of “freedom, independence, unconventionality and self-knowledge” (Furman 203) in Morrison’s fiction like *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*. Morrison extols the presence of this enterprising spirit in the lives of people regardless of their gender. She considers flying as “one of the most attractive features about the black male life.... It’s part of that whole business of breaking ground, doing the other thing” (“Intimate Things” 26). For Susan Neal Mayberry, the metaphor of flight in African American literature in general “takes on the connotation of beyond the mere thought of escape or freedom, suggesting physical, moral, or spiritual heights and symbolising intellect, imagination or sexual potency” (*Can’t I Love* 72). Other than that, the metaphor also carries the notion of “basic survival” (*Can’t I Love* 72). The passage also contrasts Sula’s flight with Nel, who manages to escape a similar fate to that of Sula because she is well integrated into communal ways of living and successfully treads the design of the web. I quote the passage in full:

One of the spiders whose only thought was the next rung of the web, who dangled in the dark dry places suspended by their own spittle, more terrified of the free fall than the snake’s breath below. Their eyes so intent on the wayward stranger who trips into their net, they were blind to the cobalt on their own backs, the moonshine shining to pierce their corners. If they were touched by the snake’s breath, however fatal, they were merely victims and knew how to behave in that role (just as Nel knew how to behave as the wronged wife). But the free fall, oh no, that required—demanded—invention: a thing to do with the wings, a way of holding the legs and most of all a full surrender to the downward flight if they wished to taste their tongues or stay alive. But alive was what they, and now Nel, did not want to be. Too dangerous. Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them, and the flick of their tongues would drive her back into her little dry corner where she would cling to her own spittle high above the breath of the snake and the fall. (120)

The community knit a vast spider web to entice “the wayward stranger” (120), not fully integrated into the community, and enact the fate of a hapless victim caught and suspended by the snake’s breath, which represents the community. The web reveals not only the appropriation of the victim but also defines the inside-outside relationship (the symbolic realm) of the scapegoat mechanism. The victim is from both the inside and outside of the community, depending on whether he/she belongs to the community or not. So deeply entangled is adult life that no one can break free from the contagious influence of its mimetic violence. First, the community domesticate and banalize Nel’s imagination by driving it underground; afterwards Nel becomes *one of them*.

The Dionysiac aspect of a community focuses on the elimination of differences between individuals who are physically, emotionally or psychologically distinct, so perpetuating a state of undifferentiation, leading to a sacrificial crisis. Nel, who shared with Sula the characteristics of a mobile and creative life, is inevitably caught like the rest of community, unable to perceive their potential beyond the conventional domestic life. Nel, a victim of mimetic desire, yields to the monotony of everything being eternally the same (107-8). She does not even challenge the tight network of conformity within which she finds herself. Sula’s refusal to conform distinguishes her from others. She revolts against the conventional norms and invents her own morality. She frees herself from the cobweb in order to know “the free fall” and surrenders herself to the “the downward flight” (120). Morrison describes the importance of experiencing autonomy, self-control and transcendence in terms of surrender, leap and the leitmotiv of flight which denote human freedom in terms of riding the elements. Melvin Dixon interprets this as setting oneself free “from the confining boundaries of conventional morality and selfishness to the thrill of self-creation” (Dixon 101).

The picture of this adult life entangled in the web of mimetic desire is in sharp contrast to the imitation of its contagious influence by the children in the story. The trio of deweys, whose identical behaviour and appearance is itself a comment in miniature on the harmful effects of mimetic behaviour and conformity, are not immune to the contagious influence of the

community. Whereas the community exercises control and restraint over their mimetic violence through prohibitions and rituals, the children mimic and participate spontaneously in the adult lives by scandalizing and stoning the victim:

“Cocksucker!” they screamed, and she leaped out of the bed naked as a yard dog. She caught the redheaded dewey by his shirt and held him by the heels over the banister until he wet his pants. The other dewey was joined by the third, and they delved into their pockets for stones, which they threw at her. Sula ducking and tottering with laughter, carried the wet dewey to the bed room and when the other two followed her, deprived of all weapons except their teeth. (129)

Another example of literal and metaphorical stoning takes place when Sula returns to Medallion. Sula’s return is aptly heralded by a plague of robins. The plague foreshadows the event of social disorder. It is a metaphor for a process of (un)differentiation and reciprocal violence that brings in its wake the destruction of specificities/differences. The process starts by “exciting very small children away from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning” (89).

Sula as a Destroyer of Differences

The female as the source of evil is an ideal sacrificial victim. Sula becomes an ideal cultural scapegoat after she violates the sanctity of the conjugal relationship by sleeping with her closest friend, Nel’s husband. She is also alleged to have slept with white men, breaking a taboo. According to Carolyn Jones, Sula, like Sethe, is both victim and victimizer (C. Jones 140) at the tender age of twelve, when her identity is in the initial stages of development. Two events feature most significantly in the radical displacement of her personality at that time. First, Sula overhears her mother confess that while she loves her daughter, she does not like her. The casual remark made by her mother alienates Sula. The impact of this knowledge upon Sula is evident from the second playful event, which has dire consequences. This incident involves

Sula, Nel and their friend, Chicken Little, whom Sula happens to inadvertently drop to his death as he slips out of her hands and drowns in the water (60-1). Jones thinks these events are the determining factors of Sula's character: "The rejection by her mother and the death of Chicken, the events that Sula cannot rememory, makes Sula what she is" (C. Jones 141):

As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life—ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the middle. The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow. (118-9)

In other words, Sula has no "other" self to define herself against. She had no role model or guidance and she could not rely upon anyone else either. According to Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek, Morrison identifies the above mentioned events as "the two most formative events" which set Sula off on the path of self-destruction (Gillespie and Kubitschek 82). Hortense Spillers also points out the importance of the episode involving the death of Chicken Little: "To pin the entire revelation of the source of Sula's later character development on this single episode would be a fallacy of overdetermination, but its strategic location in the text suggests that its function is crucial to the unfolding of events to come, to the way that Sula responds to them, and to the manner in which we interpret her responses" ("A Hateful Passion" 71-2). The text mentions another event of pivotal importance which circles around the friendship between Sula and Nel. According to Stephanie Demetrakopulous, this event "symbolizes the psychic significance of female bondedness" like no other "biological relationship" (Demetrakopulous 91). The same event is rememored by Sula during her last moments when she lies sick on her bed contemplating some of the most significant moments of her friendship with Nel: "The one time she tried to protect Nel, she had cut off her own fingertip

and earned not Nel's gratitude but her disgust. *From then on she had let her emotions dictate her behaviour*" (emphasis added, 141).

The dire consequences of the first event, the inadvertent death of Chicken Little, take place at too early a stage for Sula to realise the moral implications of her accountability. But the repercussions of this event become clearer during a later episode in her life when she watches her mother, Hannah, being burned. She watches her burn to death like a spectator with a cool indifference and an air of curiosity rather than simple detachment. This episode is a comment upon Sula's growing (in)difference, which the community terms as "evil." After this the community start indicting Sula for evils bedevilling the community itself from within. In shunning responsibility for their own actions, the residents of the Bottom create an unhealthy environment. As Karen Carmean observes, "the extended neglect of children throughout the novel is a recurring reminder of communal dereliction" (Carmean 159). Sula is a victim of communal neglect. She grows up in a stultifying environment. In her interview with Donald Suggs, Morrison points out the need for the entire community to play a constructive role in the upbringing of children:

...I do know that no one parent can raise a child completely. But it is also true that two parents can't do it either. You need everybody. You need the whole community to raise a child. And one parent can get that community. You have to work at it. You have to decide... Nobody can deliver that much. The parent can't and the child can't, so you need these people around you. You need a tribe. I don't care what you call it, extended family, large family. That's what one needs. (Interview 36)

Sula remains a "communal orphan" all her life. Upon her return to her community, after a period of ten years, the scapegoating mechanism begins to operate with all its force. Girard describes the scapegoating process as a mechanism because it is mimetic and operates in a non-volitional, spontaneous manner. Sula's return is heralded by "a plague of robins" and an onset of "evil days." The community welcomes Sula with "precautions" in order to "protect

themselves” (89). It is significant to note that the (black) people let evil run its course rather than avoid it, annihilate it, or prevent it from taking place. They accept and welcome evil persons like Sula the same way (90). Morrison makes a similar statement during a conversation between herself, the playwright Alice Childress and the co-editors of the Black Creation Annual in 1974. She remarks on the question of her preoccupation with evil:

I know evil preoccupied me in *Sula* and perhaps other writers are preoccupied with it also. It never occurs to those people in the novel to kill Sula. Black people never annihilate evil. They don’t run it out of their neighbourhoods, chop it up, or burn it up. They don’t have witch hangings. They accept it. It’s almost like a fourth dimension in their lives. They try to protect themselves from evil, of course, but they don’t have that puritanical thing which says if you see a witch, then burn it, or if you see something, then kill it. (Conversation 8)

Childress finds it difficult to separate the notion of evil and violence. She does not find black people immune to violence and she seems to disagree with Morrison on this point: “I happen to disagree a bit here with you, Toni. Look at how black people are destroying each other in the Black community, and hurting and harming each other” (Conversation 8). Morrison reiterates her point by adding: “I’m *not* saying that black people don’t kill each other. I’m talking about the way they *perceive* evil and how they act upon that perception. They don’t destroy evil” (Conversation 8). It is important to note here the writer’s comments that the black people or the community in her novel(s) do not *mob kill* or *annihilate* the victims of scapegoating. Black people’s perception of evil entails a way of “manipulating” evil to their advantage rather than destroying it. To acknowledge responsibility for the evil of scapegoating is tantamount to acknowledging the violent or arbitrary nature of cultural institutions and society itself. As long as people can rid themselves of their own violence by displacing it on the external agency of the scapegoat, they can play innocent and pretend to be nonviolent or nonaggressive. One way of

disposing of (inherent) violence within is not to acknowledge its presence. Girard observes men's capacity to "dispose of their violence more efficiently if they regard the process not as something emanating from within themselves, but as a necessity imposed from without" (*Violence* 14). Scapegoating suggests a symbolic displacement of misfortunes, weaknesses for which society causes victims to be pushed to the limits, but not completely expelled from society because their function as a scapegoat is constantly required for the very existence of that society as are the sins (dirt) of the object or person who is supposed to carry them. Morrison's notion of the scapegoat being allowed to live rather than persecuted points to a constant/permanent need. The community does not pursue scapegoating to the point of destruction. If the community establishes itself by subjecting the victim to *sparagmos* (tearing a victim to pieces) in the literal sense of the term, then it risks destroying itself right from the outset. Girard observes, "As long as violence does not cross a certain threshold of intensity, it remains sacrificial and defines an inner circle of non-violence essential to the function of basic social functions—that is, to the survival of the society" (*Violence* 154).

The community needs a scapegoat, a victim or pariah figure in order to release their aggressive tendencies. The community does not "mob kill" Sula precisely because she becomes, for them, the focus for the discharge of their aggressive instincts. The moment she is gone from the community—"The tension was gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made" (153). After Sula's death, there is a scene of social disintegration. The community is deprived of an enemy that restored tranquillity by draining their hostilities. It is the communal enacted aggression which brings the community together against Sula. The *sparagmos* channels the concentration of collective aggression against the designated communal scapegoat without necessarily developing into a violent form of appropriative gesture or ritual of dismemberment where the victim is literally torn to pieces. The community in Morrison's fiction has the semblance of nonviolence, which keeps the effect of *sparagmos* hidden from the eyes of the beholder. The *sparagmos* manifests itself in the hostile speeches and (moral) exhortations of friends, family and society at large. Nel's final meeting with Sula demonstrates the logic of this principle. She does not merely give vent to her resentment or her sense of betrayal after Sula has

had sex with her husband, Jude. Her expressions embody her sociomoral disgust. She imports the metaphor of dirt from the sociomoral vocabulary of her community. The notion of dirt not only identifies the source of Sula's pollution but also regulates the collective disgust over Sula's moral failings: "You laying there in that bed without a dime or a friend to your name having done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you?" (145). This kind of *sparagmos* is an image of collective violence which aims to subject the victim to verbal "dismemberment" or a *sparagmos* of mind/psyche, not dismemberment of the body but of the self.

In her interview with Tate in which she reaffirms some of the comments she made in her conversation with Childress, Morrison not only comments upon the role of the pariah figure in her writing, the relationship that exists between the pariah and the community, but also black people's cosmological point of good and evil. I quote at length a long but helpful excerpt from that interview:

When I was writing about good and evil, I really wasn't writing about them in Western terms. It was interesting to me that black people at one time seemed not to respond to evil in the ways other people did, but that they thought evil had a natural place in the universe; they did not wish to eradicate it. They just wished to protect themselves from it, maybe even manipulate it, but they never wanted to kill it.... It's because they're not terrified by evil, by difference.... A woman who wrote a paper on *Sula* said she thought Sula's community was very unnurturing for her. That's very strange to me because I found that community to be very nurturing for Sula. There was no other place in the world she could have lived without being harmed. Whatever they think about Sula, however strange she is to them, however different, they won't harm her... Nobody's going to lynch her or call the police. They call her bad names and try to protect themselves from her evil; that's all. But they put her to very good use, which is a way of manipulating her. (Interview 168-9)

Morrison's comments reveal an interesting insight into the sacredness of violence. Her comments not only highlight the treatment of Sula at the hands of the community but also lay bare the hidden structural principle of scapegoating in the text as well. Morrison seems to offer justification of the culture and its violence in *Sula*. Her comments expose the ambiguous nature of the scapegoat effect in *Sula*. As a commenter, she seems to participate in the overall effect of the scapegoat by justifying the way the community *manipulates* Sula. She seems to give an account of Sula's persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor. Sula is justly treated by the community from that point of view. Morrison, the commenter, presents the convictions of the community as rational or just. In this sense, Morrison seems to endorse the communal point of view and sides with the crowd in perpetuating Sula's scapegoating. However, the text is controlled by an impulse to scapegoat, which it does not willingly acknowledge. From the perspective of the reader, the critic or even the narrator, the fate of Sula and her condemnation is unjust. The collective effect of Sula's persecution or condemnation creates the scapegoat effect, which is neither made explicit or nor acknowledged by the writer.

The culture and its violence are sacrificial in nature, concealing the senseless and primitive aspects of the violence that can bring all hostilities to an end. This generating aspect of violence is felt by those who earlier on defended themselves against Sula's malevolence by transforming it into beneficial violence or positive values which reinforce social harmony. The generative energy (behind the social cohesion) is violence but the mechanism is that of the sacred principle of scapegoating. The return to a calmer state of affairs and the normalization of relations confirms the public suspicion that Sula was responsible for the mimetic discord affecting the community. According to Girard, the deception is:

The community thinks itself as entirely passive vis-à-vis its own victim, whereas the latter appears, by contrast to be the only active and responsible agent in the matter. Once it is understood that the inversion of the real relation between victim and community occurs in the resolution of the crisis, it is possible to see why the victim is believed to be

sacred. The victim is held responsible for the renewed calm in the community and for the disorder that preceded that return. It (the victim) is even believed to have brought about its own death. (Girard *Things Hidden* 27)

This principle speaks in the text but seems to transcend the intention of the author and the culture because it wears the garb of restraint through the agency of generative unanimity and solidarity, a way of processing bad violence into stability and social cohesion. Morrison suggests the community put Sula to “very good use” by “manipulating” her. Sula is manipulated as a victim, a scapegoat or pharmakos of society. She is used as a kind of sponge to soak up the communal impurities. The crimes attributed to her also bespeak and expose the hidden desires of the community at large.² As the narrator observes, Sula’s act of sleeping with white men might be an act of miscegenation in the eyes of the community but: “The fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent to their bile. Nor was the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of white women a consideration that might lead them toward tolerance” (113).

Sula’s fate and ambivalent treatment at the hands of the community (and the author) is similar to what Morrison explores in the role of “the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler” (*Playing* 51). The Africanist character is an embodiment of the blackness which colours the entire literary and historical landscape of America. By blackness Morrison implies “a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence” (*Playing* 17). Blackness has played a pivotal role in elevating whiteness. In uplifting whiteness the Africanist persona (embodying blackness) served the “thinking about body, mind, chaos, kindness, love; (and) provided the occasion for exercises in the absence of restraint, the presence of restraint, the contemplation of freedom and of aggression” (*Playing* 47). However, the fabrication of this Africanist persona, as reiterated by Morrison, is also an exercise in (self-)reflection. It serves as a foil in uplifting the black community and their moral standards. In *Playing*, Morrison draws our attention to the “dynamics of Africanism’s self-

reflexive properties” (51). In her estimation, the organisation of American coherence was based around the principle of a distancing Africanism which was to become “the operative mode of a new cultural hegemony” (*Playing* 8). The Africanist presence was used and exploited in order to establish racial differences. The Africanist presence was convenient in every respect. Above all, it served as a tool for “self-definition” (*Playing* 45). Sula’s blackness, which embodies her anarchy and deviance, serves as a foil for the moral elevation of the black community and their social cohesion. Sula cements the societal relationships and reconciles the community members with each other. All the societal tensions and aggressions which tear the community apart are transferred to her. Finally, she puts an end to the dissatisfaction and disharmony afflicting the community.

The whole community, especially the men, who dominate the social hierarchy, band together in a spirit of unanimity against Sula as she irrevocably breaks the ultimate taboos in their eyes, especially sexual transgressions which signify the violent abolition of distinctions, one of the main causes behind social disintegration. Sula as a victim stands at the crossroads of various political and philosophical debates between right and wrong, good and evil, miscegenation and integration. Sula is at the heart of what Girard describes as the communal sacred that first of all concerns itself with the destruction of differences. The communal sacred organizes, perpetuates and presides over structure. Sula, on the other hand, violates, transforms and dissolves what the community hold sacred.

The community give various names to Sula’s evil, like rape, bestiality, and other nouns bordering on all types of abject behaviour synonymous with “dirt” and “filth.” They do nothing to harm her but sit and watch her behaviour. Sula starts polarising communal (non-)violence, resentment, hatred, fear, and disgust into positives and cements the relationship at familial and communal levels by symbolically restoring order, peace, harmony and love amongst the Bottom folks. The people undergo transformation. They start loving each other and become (re)united and polarized against a common enemy and direct all their animosity and hatred at her. Mothers and wives resume their responsibilities towards their children and husbands. They become more protective and caring for each other out of spite, hatred and disgust for Sula (122). Sula’s

notorious qualities find their manifestation in the “palpable” descriptions of her birthmark—the sign of her victimhood. The birthmark marks Sula as an outsider and sets the process of symbolization in train. It operates like the Logos. It brings together opposite entities. Hortense J. Spillers thinks Sula is Morrison’s deliberate hypothesis: “No Manichean analysis demanding a polarity of interest—black/white, male/female, good/bad—will work here” (“A Hateful Passion” 54).

Sula as an Agent of Transformation

The scapegoat’s power resides in his or her ability to transform, to coalesce the community by uniting them in harmony and preventing violence from spreading. Thus, the scapegoat gets deified and is considered to be part of the divine scheme of Providence. Sula is blamed for the breakdown of communal order and familial hierarchies and after her death, their reestablishment is attributed to divine justice/retribution. The news of Sula’s death is received along with the prospect of a better future and promise of employment denied to the black folks during her lifetime:

In any case, both the raw-spirited and the gentle who came—not to the white funeral parlor but to the colored part of the Beechnut Cemetery—felt that either because Sula was dead or just *after* she was dead a brighter day was dawning. *There were signs ...* of the mystery of God’s ways, His mighty thumb having been seen at Sula’s throat. (Emphasis added, 151)

Sula purges the community of their originary violent resentment contained in the Dionysiac rituals of *diasparagmos* or dismemberment, which is reflected in the process of scapegoating (Girard *Violence* 302). The last meeting between Nel and Sula is about the violent discharge of

resentment and the need to release rather than defer it lest it finds a more violent displacement and expends itself on a surrogate victim:

For the first time in three years she (Nel) would be looking at the stemmed rose that hung over the eye of her enemy. Moreover, she would be doing it with the taste of Jude's exit in her mouth, with the resentment and shame that even yet pressed for release in her stomach. She would be facing the black rose that Jude had kissed and looking at the nostrils of the woman who had twisted her love for her own children into something so thick and monstrous she was afraid to show it lest it break loose and smother them with its heavy paw. A cumbersome bear-love that, given any rein, would suck their breath away in its crying need for honey. (138)

The emphasis on animal imagery serves to highlight the impulsive nature of resentful human love desperate to find an outlet. Sula not only deflects Nel's resentment; but she also manages the hostilities and the internal dissensions of the larger group through the process of the *sparagmos* that Morrison depicts in terms of deferral rather than the violent expulsion of the victim. Girard quotes the customary examples and punishments doled out to the *pharmakoi*, who were ritually beaten, driven out and stoned by the Greeks and the Ephesians (Girard *Satan* 51). Sula's fate is drawn from similar customs and exemplary punishments. In order to avoid being contaminated by the violence of the scapegoat, the community tries not to be violent to the victim:

It is best, therefore, to arrange matters so that nobody, except perhaps the culprit himself, is directly responsible for his death, so that nobody is obliged to raise a finger against him. He may be abandoned without provisions in mid-ocean, or stranded on top of a mountain, or forced to hurl himself from a cliff. The custom of exposure, as a means of getting rid of malformed children seems to find its origin in this same fear. (Girard *Violence* 28)

The techniques of ritual murder like stoning or leaving the individual to his fate repeat historical acts of appropriation and communal irresponsibility by absolving individuals who inflict punishment or death on the victims of scapegoating:

The effect of the scapegoat is to reverse the relationship between persecutors and their victims, thereby producing the sacred, the founding ancestors and divinities. The victim, in reality, passive, becomes the only effective and omnipotent cause in the face of a group that believes itself to be passive....If the relationships at the heart of these groups can deteriorate and then be re-established by means of victims who are unanimously despised, obviously these groups will commemorate these social ills in conformance with the illusory belief that the scapegoat is omnipotent and facilitates the cure. (Girard *Scapegoat* 44)

A paradoxical reversal takes place after Sula's death. The community founded on violence returns to violence (Girard *Things Hidden* 126). During her lifetime, Sula processes bad violence into good violence. But after her death, the same violence that Sula polarised metaphorically returns in the form of social/familial resentment: "Now that Sula was dead and done with, they returned to a steeping resentment of the burdens of old people" (153-4). Sula's presence has been both benevolent and malevolent for the community. Her impact on the community is both positive and negative. She strengthens the fragile social fabric. In her presence, the whole community seem to assume their responsibilities toward each other. In the opinion of Karen Carmean, the motive behind their cherishing attitude toward each other is "generated more from spite than love" (Carmean 157). After Sula's death, the community revert to their old customs and habits. Sula was not the only source of evil. The source of Sula's evil seems to emanate from her birthmark which evokes her character and seals her fate as well. Jacques Lacan in his book *The Language of the Self* remarks on the tyranny of symbols which

arrest the growth of the subject and shape the “design of his destiny” from the moment he steps into this world (Lacan 42).

Sula is an “artist” without any art form or outlet for her energies and in her quest to “make herself,” she self-destructs (Nigro 20). To a great extent, the community is accountable for not providing a suitable form of engagement or employment for a character like Sula. She also lacked role models and felt unable to rely on anyone other than herself. The real source of evil comes from the community as well as the lack of meaningful employment or opportunity which the community, later on, projects on a public works project symbolised by the tunnel “that represented so many false promises to the town” (Harris 138). In the absence of Sula, the community “now had nothing to rub against” (153). Their violence takes the shape of a suicidal mob desperate to find an outlet:

Old and young, women and children, lame and hearty, they killed, as best as they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build. They didn’t mean to go in, to actually go down into the lip of the tunnel, but in their need to kill it all, all of it, to wipe from the face of the earth the work of the thinned-armed Virginia boys, the bull-necked Greeks and the knife-faced men who waved the leaf-dead promise, they went too deep, too far... (161-2)

This time the community projects their anger from Sula onto the tunnel which frustrated their real hope of meaningful employment. They march towards the tunnel with the conviction that Sula’s immolation has secured them the prospect of jobs denied to black men in the past. The irony is that the promise of work was still “leaf-dead” (161). In their rage, they attack the fragile site of half-done construction, employment on which is denied them. The construction collapses and “they expire in the womb of their genesis” (Baker 254). The tunnel episode presents a social critique. It draws attention to Sula as an expendable victim substituted for the lack of meaningful employment in the lives of the public and symbolised by the derelict tunnel that they truly desire to “kill” because they were barred from building it.

Sula as a Restorer of Social Order

As a community scapegoat, Sula is an agent of transformation. She transforms the community in a myriad of ways and disturbs the established differences between the good and the bad, order and disorder, before and after, and violence and *Peace*, which, ironically, is her last name. Sula is a destroyer of differences. She, in fact, recognises and deliberately inverts the differences between the good and bad and the pure and impure violence of her self-righteous community. Her hubris means she madly lays her hands on what the society considers inviolable. According to Patricia Hunt, Sula questions the “cultural categories of good and evil” (Hunt 169). The final meeting between Nel and Sula is a testimonial. Sula decries the communal scandal which Girard describes as “a kind of inability to see—an insurmountable self-blindness” (Girard *Satan* 126):

“Oh, they’ll love me all right. It will take time, but they’ll love me.” The sound of her voice was as soft and distant as the look in her eyes. “After all the old women have lain with the teen-agers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies... then there’ll be a little love left over for me. And I know just what it will feel like.”

She closed her eyes then and the thought of the wind pressing her dress between her legs as she ran up the bank of the river four leaf-locked trees and the digging of holes in the earth.

Embarrassed, irritable and a bit ashamed, Nel rose to go. “Goodbye, Sula. I don’t reckon I’ll be back.”

She opened the door and heard Sula’s low whisper.

“Hey, Girl.” Nel paused and turned her head but not enough to see her.

“How you know that?” Sula asked.

“Know what?” Nel still wouldn’t look at her.

“About who was good? How you know it was you?”

“What you mean?”

“I mean maybe it wasn’t you. Maybe it was me.” (146)

Sula challenges not only Nel’s notions of absolute good and evil but also the social constructions of these absolutes upon which the community is founded. Sula challenges, as it were, the whole system of social hierarchy and social differences within the community. The differences are those of social status, age, and sex which play a most significant/sacred role in human relationships. She trespasses and violates the sanctity of matrimony by making love with Nel’s husband, Jude, in an illicit relationship. Sula’s sexuality erases the line dividing the roles in human relationships on which the most fundamental differences of social order rest and becomes a source of communal disorder. Thus, Sula introduces a crisis of distinctions which effaces all other distinctions—distinctions of good and evil, right and wrong and moral and immoral. She is accused of bringing a plague of violence into the community. The community labels this violence as impure violence because it “divides, corrupts, disintegrates and undifferentiates” (Girard *Theatre* 214).

After Sula’s death, the community comes to see “the burial of the witch” and receives the news of her death as the second best thing “since the promise of work at the tunnel (150).” The scene of Sula’s funeral is “characterized by that abiding gentleness of spirit to which they themselves had arrived by the simple determination not to let anything—anything at all: not failed crops, not rednecks, lost jobs, sick children,... keep them from their God” (150). There is a scene of social disarray after Sula’s demise. When Sula was present, she cemented relationships and diffused the communal resentment as people could frame the hatred, disgust and anger they felt and thrust it upon their common enemy. Once Sula becomes unavailable, or after her disappearance from the scene, a movement of displacement occurs: “A falling away, a dislocation was taking place. Hard on the heels of the general relief that Sula’s death brought a

restless irritability took hold” (153). Sula polarized vanities and gave a cathartic outlet to the aggression of people. In her absence, the people could not find any way to release their pent-up emotions or unleash their fury rooted in a history of social violence and injustice. The unfulfilled promise of work at the tunnel is one of social injustices. It promised them hope in the form of meaningful engagement rather than dealing with “other people’s dirt”:

The same hope that kept them picking beans for other farmers; kept them knee-deep in other people’s dirt; kept them excited about other people’s wars; kept them solicitous of white people’s children; kept them convinced that some magic “government” was going to lift them up, out and away from that dirt, those beans, those wars. (160)

Just like Sula, whose creative impulses lack a form of expression, the community in the absence of any fulfilling employment find themselves busy with rumor-mongering and foisting their own failures, frustrations and guilt onto Sula. Sula’s scapegoating conceals an economic reality. According to Fanon, social and economic realities come to the fore when black people live through the mirror of race. The Bottom’s treatment of Sula is not only pathologically internalised racism but also reflects the external forces which have to do with social injustice, structural unemployment and lack of other opportunities. Karen Carmean reads larger historical, social and economic implications to be behind the process of scapegoating Sula:

Without Sula upon whom to focus the blame, the people of the Bottom shift to a tunnel, part of a local federally funded road project which has raised and then frustrated residents’ hope for employment. Here we find further examples of evil in the forms of sexism and racism. What may be concluded is that if the story indeed “considers the ways in which society denies women the possibility of autonomy and independence,” then the tunnel suggests the larger frame of how white Medallion (and by extension the United

States) denies the same to an entire race. Joining Shadrack on National Suicide Day, residents march to the tunnel and assault it with bricks and lumber. Of those who enter, many die as the tunnel collapses with Shadrack standing above "...ringing, ringing his bell." That the tunnel, which becomes a grave to so many, has been built by whites seems no accident. (Carmean 158)

The tunnel represents the dream of meaningful employment and economic prosperity. In the context of white oppression and social injustice, it stands for the community's frustrated aspirations. It gives an outlet to their social unrest, their spirit of revolt against the unfair system, which overtakes their resentment. Finally, the tunnel becomes a symbolic locus of communal violence and its ritual execution. And because the newly found peace and order is due to the banishment and the fate attributed to the victim, the disappearance of the victim from the cultural scene invokes the desire to reproduce the event in a more organised, selective and ritual way. It is only proper that the community vents their anger and grievances on the tunnel—the real cause of their unhappiness and social unrest—because it deprived them of real opportunities for work and meaningful employment, instead leaving them engaged in what the text describes as "other people's wars" (160). These wars are the main cause of the internalised racism of the Bottom community. They are inseparable from the violence of community, their resentment of and the hatred they foster for Sula. In the absence of meaningful employment, Sula, as a scapegoat, gives an outlet to their collective aggression. This again brings us back to Fanon who insists that the community needs to displace its internalised racism and violence in the form of a scapegoat in order to purge itself of those racist forces which seek to oppress black people. In "Racism and Culture," Fanon observes that racism is "only one element" behind the "the systemized oppression of a people" (33). He further adds that at the root of this oppression there is always "the shameless exploitation of one group...by another," which justifies their economic oppression (36-8). As a consequence of this internalized racism, "the racialized social group tries to imitate the oppressor," and displaces its violence upon a member of its own group

(38). Thus, racism for Fanon does not have to do with the physical and psychological violence alone; it has to do with the economic oppression and relations as well. In *Sula*, racism conceals itself under the guise of a larger system of exploitation based on a structure of exclusion whereby a dominant group dismembers the others and prevents them from being part of a constructive community. Therefore, Sula's scapegoating is also symptomatic of communal oppression and public outrage against the social injustice which deprives them of fair and democratic access to all opportunities, including education and employment.

After looking at aspects of racism to do with the historical, psychological and cultural dismemberment of African-Americans, the final chapter on Morrison's most recent novel, *Home*, looks at how African-Americans continue to survive and struggle to be at home in America in the wake of discrimination like the (mal)practices of eugenics in the realm of medicine and politics which seek to alienate African-Americans from their continued quest for a homeland.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Journey Through the Foreign in *Home*

Home in Morrison's and African American Literature

The quest for home is a pervasive theme in African American literature. It is ubiquitous in Toni Morrison's works. The metaphor of home pervades her entire oeuvre. Starting from her early novels like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *Paradise* to her most recent ones like *Love*, *A Mercy* and *Home*, the metaphors of home and what informs the meaning of home are a constant preoccupation for the author. In her essay "Home," Morrison contemplates the meaning of home. She draws "a radical distinction" between "the metaphor of house and the metaphor of home," which helps her "clarify (her) thoughts on racial construction" ("Home" 3). She posits various questions concerning the definition and meaning of home, which according to her own admission, "have troubled all of (her) work" ("Home" 5). Some of the questions she asks herself are:

How to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific and yet non-racist home. How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling? They are the questions of concept, of language, of trajectory, of habitation, of occupation, and, although my engagement with them has been fierce, fitful, and constantly (I think) evolving, they remain in my thoughts as aesthetically and politically unresolved. ("Home" 5)

She tries to resolve some of these questions in her new novel *Home*, the summation of her writing career. The novel is evocative of her continued longing for a place beyond oppression—a communal place of shared domestic comfort, peace and protection. She specifically questions the possibility of home and family life for African Americans in the context of medical (mal)practice and policies influenced by eugenically-minded racism. Eugenics is based upon the concept of racial purity, segregation and strict immigration policies because of the threat posed to America by the so-called inferior races, especially by individuals of African descent. This social dismemberment impinges on the concept of home, and what home represents. Morrison's questioning of what home is and means through her novel *Home* is firstly revealed by its confessional mode and first and third person narrators, which in themselves reflect another aspect of dismemberment—that of the self. Chapter Four's discussion and analyses proceed within the themes of home as a quest, an Odyssey, the Frankenstein myth and eugenics, guilt and redemption, and home as an epiphany to reflect the multi-dimensionality of Morrison's concept of home, a process of development, not a static condition, with both a past and hoped for future. I shall expand upon the themes of Frankenstein, eugenics, the need for proper burial as an act of home-coming by coming to terms with one's guilty conscience with the help of Hawthorne's short-stories such as "The Birth-mark" and "Roger Malvin's Burial". "The Birth-mark" relates to the central thematic concerns of eugenics in *Home*, whereas "Roger Malvin's Burial" emphasizes the need to bury one's fellows with proper rites. Morrison's critique of eugenics and the need to appease one's guilty conscience through the enactment of a truthful confession and performance of a proper burial will be examined through the lens of these two short-stories.

Morrison's narrative is an act of historical archaeology and excavation. She revives the dead by bringing them into the discourse. She revives the dis(re)membered in order to give them a proper burial. Therefore, her narrative becomes both an act of revival and burial (Rushdy *Remembering* 86). The theme of burial is all the more pertinent in relation to *Home* as Morrison composes her novel in the mode of a confessional story. Discussing the confessional mode in

the works of Tolstoy, J. M. Coetzee observes that “a fiction in confessional mode” provides the author with “a congenial and adequate vehicle for the literature of truth he want(s) to write—that is, a fiction centering on a crisis of illumination” (Coetzee 262). What Coetzee observes about the nature of confessional literature also holds true in Morrison’s confessional literature. Confessional literature is a mode of autobiographical literature “distinct from the memoir and apology, on the basis of an underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self” (Coetzee 252). In *Home* and most of her late literature like *Love, A Mercy*, and *Desdemona*, Morrison grapples with problems of truth-telling, self-recognition, concealment, risk of public exposure and shame, and the confession of sins, which all imply some sort of penitence, redemption, transgression, and absolution—what Coetzee describes as being the various “components” of confession (Coetzee 261).

Morrison delves into the inner most recesses of her characters’ minds in order to project their hidden thoughts and desires. Her characters strive for autonomy by accepting responsibility for their actions. She describes this drive towards autonomy as a journey from ignorance to knowledge and self-discovery. The journey defines Morrison’s aesthetic theory of epiphany. In *Home*, the protagonist, Frank Money, achieves his moments of epiphany through the medium of confession, one of Morrison’s favourite mediums of subjectivity since the publication of *A Mercy*. The first-person “I” is quite often the site of subjectivity in the mode of confessional story-telling. The first-person narrator, Frank, proffers his confessional interjections to the third-person narrator. Justine Baillie likens Frank’s journey home to the confessional mode of slave narrative where the listener to the narrative account is a white abolitionist (Baillie 199). According to Tessa Roynon, the role of the third-person narrator “may also perform a classically-informed role” (*Toni Morrison* 119). I would like to compare the “classically informed” role to the one between a confessor and confessant, which is not limited to the role of a white abolitionist. In *Home*, there is a dialogic relationship between the first-person narrator, Frank, and the third-person omniscient narrator. The matrix of this relationship implicates the third person confessor, the first person confessant and the reader in acts of complicity. According to Peter Brooks, “Confession implies a listener, however impersonal—an

interlocutor to whom the confessional discourse is proffered” (Brooks 95). The act of storytelling in *Home* implies the uncanny presence of a mysteriously silent interlocutor/narrator which also suggests his/her response, attitude, questions and authority as if he/she were conducting an interrogation by coercing the subject to confess. Like Dostoyevsky’s subject who is never alone, Morrison’s character can reveal himself/herself in the (virtual) presence of another. The character becomes authenticated through the discourse of truth and confession, which follows a Foucauldian formulation. According to Foucault, confession is a ritual that takes place within the dynamics of a power relationship. Foucault further defines confession as “the effect of a power that constrains us” (Foucault 60) which the speaking subject does not necessarily recognize so:

The confession is a ritual of discourse...that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or the virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes it and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (Foucault 61-2)

The confessional discourse in *Home* takes place in the presence of an interlocutor-narrator who is apparently the recipient of the character’s self-revelations, what Zora Neale Hurston describes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as “that oldest human longing” (Hurston 10). However, Morrison’s characters resist the authority of the narrator/confessor in a bid to assert

their own subjectivity and autonomy. The reader can observe in *Home* the protagonist's uneasiness in having to confess and the liberating moment of true confession which comes with the exercise of autonomous subjectivity. Torn between the compulsion to hide and the (psychic) need to confess, Morrison's character(s) successfully overcome the internal (and external) resistance to confess, which brings its own redemption. Surely, as home conjures a place of accountability, a dwelling place where the memory of the self resides, a (final) place to bury the dead (secrets), it is apt that Morrison applies the idiom of guilt and confession, finding an interlocutor—like the presumed presence of the narrator/confessor—to whom the confessant can confess in order to be at home in mind and body.

The Odyssean Quest for Home

In *Home*, the quest for home figures as an Odyssean journey through the foreign or the realm of unknown territory. In one of her interviews, Morrison talks about the theme of Ulysses (Latinised expression for Odyssey) in her works like *Sula* and especially with reference to *Song of Solomon*. She talks about the black men's quality of travelling, getting on trains and forsaking the domestic space and responsibility. The Ulysses theme is structured around a mythopoetic narrative where the hero responds to a summons/call that instructs him to either depart from home or make a homebound return. Narratives like Homer's *Odyssey* enact a threefold sequence or passage, of departure, initiation and return. *Home* follows a similar narrative structure as it sketches out the homecoming of a Korean War veteran, Frank Money. It is one of Morrison's novels which is not so much about the question of leave-taking as about the meaning of returning home or not being able to return home. The hero in question does not suffer from a nostalgic sense of homesickness.

Morrison's novel *Home* (or her fiction that deals with the thematics of home) is foregrounded in her essay of the same title. In the essay "Home," she reiterates that "matters of

race and matters of home are priorities in (her) work” (“Home” 4). The concept of home appears in her fiction not as a physical or geographical locale. It bears emotional, psychological and, above all, political/social connotations. In general, Morrison associates the concept of home with a social place offering the possibility of co-existence, a place where one can “iterate difference” (“Home” 12). Such a space exists “outside established boundaries of the racial imaginary” (“Home” 9). Her concept of home transcends racial and cultural boundaries and aspires to be a universal ideal, “a site clear of racist detritus; a place where race both matters and is rendered impotent” (“Home” 9). According to Gene Andrew Jarrett, such a place implies that “race does not overdetermine the concepts of human identity, relations, and culture” (*Deans* 186). In *Paradise*, Morrison broadens the subject of home in terms of “contemporary searches and yearnings for social space that is psychically and physically safe” (“Home” 10). The contemporary searches Morrison refers to are what Valerie Sweeney Prince describes in the introduction of her book *Burnin’ the House*: “The search for justice, opportunity, and liberty that characterized the twentieth century for African Americans can be described as a quest for home” (Prince 1). In her book *Yearning*, bell hooks “speak(s) about the importance of homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle” (43). For hooks, home is not only a place of nurturing, affirmation and remembrance; it is a site of political struggle against any form of racist oppression seeking to alienate people from each other (48). In her work, Morrison expresses nostalgia for the race-free home she “never had and would never know” (“Home” 4). She attempts to recreate a dwelling to see what it could be like to live in a race-free society. In *A Mercy*, she imaginatively recreates a society in which race is separate from slavery. She visualizes the possibility of “a world-in-which-race-does-not-matter”:

I prefer to think of a world-in-which-race-does-not-matter as something other than a theme park, or a failed or always failing dream, or as the father’s house of many rooms. I am thinking of it as home. “Home” seems a suitable term because, first, it lets me make a

radical distinction between the metaphor of house and the metaphor of home and helps me clarify my thoughts on racial construction. Second, the term domesticates the racial project, moves the job of unmaterring race away from pathetic yearning and futile desire; away from an impossible future or an irretrievable or probably nonexistent Eden to a manageable, doable, modern human activity. Third, because eliminating the potency of racist constructs in language is the work I can do. Also, matters of race and matters of home are priorities in my work and both have in one way or another initiated my search for the elusive sovereignty as well as my abandonment of the search once I recognized its disguise. ("Home" 3-4)

Morrison gives expansive expression to the metaphor of home. The concept of home for her embodies the Bachelardian notion of entire inhabited space. It does not merely signify the normative understanding of domestic comfort and family life. It encompasses the entire world and a deep rooted sense of responsibility in our human relationships. As Cynthia Dobbs observes, "Morrison moves the idea of home from one contained within the house to an explicitly gendered, open-borders communal space" (Dobbs 109-11). From its ideal state of being an open-space raceless world, home also embodies a more realistic portrayal of "a failed or always failing dream" ("Home" 3) grounded particularly in the notion of the American Dream which is one of the pivotal themes in American literature and cultural life. Susan Strehle points out that Morrison specifically questions "the failure of America as national homeland to open up a space for black citizens to be at home" (Strehle 31). When Morrison talks about home as a failed or always failing dream, it is because historically, African Americans were denied a home in the sense of both domestic comfort and in broader sense of a homeland. Home has been for African Americans an experience of alienation, displacement and violent separation/dismemberment, essentially dividing the consciousness of the self into a double (Du Bois) or triple consciousness (Fanon). Because African Americans were violently separated from their parents, families and motherland, the experience of life in the New World is an

experience of absurd existence, involuntary exile, homelessness and the brutal experience of being unfree, as she depicts it in her characterization of life under slavery. Roberta Rubenstein links longing for home and homesickness with “cultural mourning” that “results from cultural dislocation and loss of ways of life from which an individual feels historically severed or exiled” (Rubenstein 38). However, the experience of dislocation is double as it entails migration/diaspora and a sense of exile. John N. Duvall also links African displacement with diaspora. According to him, “African Americans who migrated from the South are doubly diasporic. First, as the descendants of slaves forced to leave their homeland, they constitute an African diaspora. But after generations of living in the American South, those blacks who participated in the Great Migration also experienced a more immediate and personal relation to diaspora” (*Race* 8). Characters like Violet and Joe in *Jazz* are part of this Great Migration as they seek to settle down to city life in the North in the hope of a better future. As a result of this migration, “The sense of home they carry with them to their new locations creates a second order historical rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging” (Gilroy 124).

The characters’ search for home is the quest for an idealized home place, always already lost or missing in their lives. The longing for the lost home takes on different meanings and expressions in Morrison. In *Jazz* and *Song of Solomon*, this longing is expressed through the medium of the blues. Sometimes the metaphor of city, the kitchen, the womb (a desire to return to origins), or a journey to the South and a return to the community impart knowledge about the African American sense of home. Tracing one’s genealogy or roots is like a quest for self-discovery. It offsets a quest for home. Sometimes the quest for a return to home reflects what Gaston Bachelard describes as “the maternal features of the house” (Bachelard 7). The quest for the home is the original quest for “the material paradise” where “the human beings were bathed in nourishment” (Bachelard 7). The quest is for the womb-like place which promises protection and the “original fullness of house’s being” (Bachelard 8). According to Bachelard, the genesis of life begins “enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (Bachelard 7). Above

all, the house is “an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory” (Bachelard 15). Beyond all the positive values of protection, the house remains imbued with dream values long after the house is gone (Bachelard 17). Morrison’s fiction evokes the picture/image of a similar dream-house that remains instilled in the consciousness.

The picture of such a dream house is evocative of an idyllic dwelling where people live peacefully without oppressing each other racially. Such an imaginary site rules out racial exclusion, which can probably transform the ideal of a “nonexistent Eden to a manageable, doable, modern human activity” (“Home” 4). The possibility of such a home place can perhaps make it possible “to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet non-racist home” (“Home” 8). In her introduction, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber envisages the outcome of a race-free society from the perspective of Toni Morrison: “In such a society, individual and communal racial identities could exist without the psychological burden of hatred, scapegoating or otherness” (Schreiber 1). According to Schreiber, home continues to provide shelter from the traumatic experiences of life (Schreiber 1). The traumas in the context of Morrison’s fiction are a result of “cultural dislocation, personal dispossession, and emotional (if not actual) dismemberment” (Rubenstein 112). They are also the result of the forcible separation when Africans were separated from their ancestors and motherland and transported to the States as slaves (Rubenstein 112). These traumas continue to persist in the collective memory of African Americans. It is in the context of slavery’s transplantation and its impact on the mind of its survivors that Morrison posits the question of their homelessness and rootlessness: “What is it to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What is it to live at the edge of the towns that cannot bear your company?” (*Lecture* 28-9). Morrison’s act of imagination tries to recover by way of remembering “the historical traces of actual and figurative dismemberment that persist as cultural mourning in the African American imagination” (Rubenstein 123).

Orlando Patterson sums up slavery as the ultimate experience of homelessness: “The slave, in short, is the quintessentially homeless person. Homelessness in the most fundamental sense of the term: kinless, rootless, a stranger forever, cut off not only from our ancestors but from descendants....The slave is absolutely alone, outside of history, outside of community”

(Patterson 162-3). Being cut off from ancestors and descendants is not only being disconnected from family members, but is also being cut off from any personal and collective memory. Morrison defines home as a place “where the memory of the self dwells” (qtd. in Schreiber 160). For Morrison, the institution of slavery destroyed such memory by disrupting families and tribes through forcible separations:

(Slaves) were not able to maintain tribal and language separations, because the worst thing you could have if you were going to have slavery is people who knew each other, and spoke the same language from before, so you mix that all up and people who had nothing to do with each other originally from the areas and tribes they came from were suddenly lumped and called black folks. (qtd. in Schreiber 160)

Morrison has always addressed issues of great social import. Racism is one of them and slavery is a legacy of racism which Morrison compares with the Holocaust of Africans in the New World. Patrice D. Rankine observes that the remnants of slavery still persist in the struggle of African Americans to gain full rights of citizenship and homeland. American institutions like the courts, police, schools and hospitals continue(d) to violate the norms of civility/citizenship instead of protecting/promulgating them (Rankine 133). American institutions, politics and policies (like the strict immigration control/restrictions) are still influenced by eugenics or those people who are eugenically minded. Modern wars and the Holocaust itself, as Steven Selden points out in his book *Inheriting Shame*, are “among other things the application of eugenic policies to ends so awful that it is recognised as unique in human history” (Selden 157). Morrison links race-inflected movements like eugenics with (the whole question of) slavery, wars and policies aimed at controlling “the mass movement of raced populations,” (“Home” 10)

so undermining their sense of security, identity, belonging by creating a state of (eternal) homelessness:

The overweening, defining event of the modern world is the mass movement of race populations, beginning with the largest forced transfer of people in the history of the world: slavery. The consequences of which transfer have determined all the wars following it as well as the current ones being waged on every continent. The contemporary world's work has become policing, halting, forming policy regarding, and trying to administer the movement of people. Nationhood—the very definition of citizenship—is constantly being demarcated and redemarcated in response to exiles, refugees, *Gastarbeiter*, immigrants, migrations, the displaced, the fleeing, and the besieged. The anxiety of belonging is entombed within the central metaphors in the discourse on globalism, transnationalism, nationalism, the break-up of federations, the rescheduling of alliances, and the fictions of sovereignty. Yet these figurations of nationhood and identity are frequently as raced themselves as the originating race house that defined them. When they are not raced, they are, as I mentioned earlier, imaginary landscapes, never inscape; Utopia, never home. (“Home” 10)

Morrison's essay “Home” is pivotal to the understanding of her novel *Home*. The essay foreshadows her thematic concerns in the novel, especially in its implicit critique of race-inflected death ideology like eugenics. The essay alludes to eugenics without making a direct reference. Eugenics formulated and pursued policies of racism in response to exiles, refugees and immigrants and became a source of (inter)national anxiety and mass disempowerment. Morrison's essay is as much concerned about the discourses of home as it is about the question of race as manifested in the racial ideology of eugenics which targeted immigrants, enacted a structure of exclusion, projected the image of non-whites as unassimilable abject foreign

persons, and undermined their sense of home by making their body (which Morrison defines as the consummate home) the object of ruthless experimentation:

home: an intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; forced and displaced labor in the destruction of home; dislocation of and alienation within ancestral home; creative responses to exile, devastations, pleasures, and imperatives of homelessness as it is manifested in discussions on feminism, globalism, the diaspora, migrations, hybridity, contingency, interventions, assimilations, exclusion. The estranged body, the legislated body, the violated, rejected, deprived body-the body as consummate home. In virtually all of these formations, whatever the terrain, race magnifies the matter that matters. ("Home" 5)

Morrison has articulated the plight of homelessness, dispossession and displacement of exiles and their need to find a home place on every platform. In her inaugural lecture for the exhibition at the Louvre entitled "The Foreigner's Home" on 6 November 2006, Morrison made this observation:

The promise and dread of displacement are major themes of early American literature. Along with the satisfaction of being reborn in a new country was the peril of somehow not belonging. The articulation of foreignness and dispossession, of utopianism and rootlessness, and claims of an infinite border, infinite frontier, became representations of the exiled's yearning, the isolate's despair. (qtd. in Schreiber 160)

Toni Morrison's new novel *Home* is mainly about the trauma of war and the (in)ability to return home. As Gurleen Grewal observes with reference to the theme of home in every single Morrison novel, *Home* is "also an exploration of what it means to be at home or not at home on American soil" (Grewal 44). It dramatizes the above mentioned sense of foreignness, dispossession and lack of belonging in the context of the Korean War¹ which "broke the pattern that armies go home at the end of the war" (Young 156). The novel opens with the description of horses on a stud farm which "had plenty of scary warning signs" (3). Amongst the signs are horses who "rose like men" and "Like men they stood" (30). The horses are like spectators. They look indifferent, with certain obliviousness, to the scene of death and the (human) fate around them. As precursors of conflict, death and the scene of an unceremonious burial, the horses relate to the theme of grief, loss, and mourning. The presence of the horses adds a supernatural/eerie dimension to the landscape as they appear to be at home in their surroundings. They look majestic and strike awe and terror in the hearts of young observers, Frank and his sister, Ycidra. The composure of the horses underlines their anxiety as they try to eschew a traumatic scene of violence physically inscribed in their childhood memories. The horses are defined as being at once "beautiful" and "brutal" (4). There is an aura of transcendence and autonomy about them which makes them appear prophetic and other worldly. Their indifference to the human condition and suffering makes them look apocalyptic/immortal. They know nothing of mourning and the rites of burial. There is something terrifying about their composure in the sense of being at home amidst the scene of the disturbing dumping of a human corpse without a proper burial. The child observing this scene forgets about the "burial" as he is so captivated by the sight of horses that he only remembers them (5). This initial scene with the horses is proleptic, carrying an invaluable insight into the memory of a childhood place. Valerie Smith considers the scene to be a defining moment in childhood memory as "it speaks volumes about the sense of danger and instability that is wrapped up in Frank's ideas of nature and of home" (V. Smith 133). The scene becomes the focus of the return to a place which embodies traumatic memory and allows commemoration. It serves as a prelude to the novel and its thematic concerns. The metaphor of the horses on the stud farm is thematically linked to

Morrison's implicit critique of eugenics, one of her central concerns in the novel. The propagandist literature on eugenics drew analogies with horses and used them as their stock metaphor.² The comparison between man and horse(s) was commonplace amongst eugenicists. What was true of horses, especially race horses in their race improvement and breeding, was equally true of human beings.

After the opening scene with the horses, the novel abruptly shifts focus to Frank as he contemplates his escape "from the nuthouse" (11) where he is given an "immobilizing shot" to help him into "a morphine sleep" (7). Frank is a war veteran returnee who fought in the Korean War. Like a traumatized survivor, he suffers from nightmares and flashbacks of scenes from the Korean War. Amongst some of his nightmares are "a dream dappled with body parts" (16) and a more recurrent hallucination of a zoot-suited man whom he interprets as a guide telling him something about his sister, as a sign of manhood and "a fashion statement to interest riot cops on each side" (34). The zoot-suited man is a by-product of his war-time trauma and his childhood experience of watching a stranger's body being dumped in the ground on the farm. In order to escape, he "would need something that stirred no feelings, encouraged no memory-sweet or shameful.... Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain" (7-8). He is haunted by the thoughts of his "homeboys", Stuff and Mike, who lost their lives during the war (8). He even considers suicide but for the urgent note he receives concerning the plight of his only sister who needs his help: "Come fast. She be dead if you tarry" (8). The letter alters the focus of his thoughts and action. Like a call of conscience, it awakens inside him a sense of responsiveness and responsibility. After the implausible escape from hospital, he finds himself facing many challenges on his way to hometown Lotus, Georgia. The reference to Lotus reminds the reader of Homer's *Odyssey*, an epic allegory of homecoming from war involving the homebound journey of Odysseus and the trials he faced. On his journey, Odysseus lands in the Land of Lotus Eaters, where lotus eating makes (Odysseus's) men forget their troubles and longing for home. Jonathan Shay, defining the meaning of lotus for Homer, thinks that the description of Lotus implies "lotus abuse", which makes the subject lose interest in coming

home (Shay 36). Shay compares the symbolic interpretation of lotus abuse to the modern day “path to destruction taken by a horrifyingly large number of Vietnam veterans” (Shay 36). The lotus abuse takes different forms like alcohol or drug abuse by veterans of all ages and wars. The lotus abuse makes the veterans forget about their homecoming by inducing forgetfulness or loss of memory (Shay 38). Frank procrastinates and delays his journey back home after his discharge from Fort Lawton. He resorts to alcohol to forget his traumatic memories. His “wandering” becomes aimless as he dreads the idea of returning home to the culture and values that Lotus offered him as a child and the memories he comes to associate with his childhood spent there. After his discharge, Frank’s journey becomes one of flight rather than a return home. In her interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison associates flight/mobility with “the Ulysses theme, the leaving home” (“Intimate Things” 26). Leave-taking is central to the experience of being black:

They are moving. Trains—you hear those men talk about trains like their first lover—the names of the trains, the times of the trains! And, boy, you know, they spread their seed all over the world. They are really moving! Perhaps it’s because they don’t have a land, they don’t have a dominion. You can trace that historically, and one never knows what that would have been the case if we’d never been tampered with at all. (“Intimate Things” 25-6)

Morrison links dispossession, lack of dominion or the state of homelessness/rootlessness with the aimless wandering of black men. What she considers objectionable in the whole myth of leave-taking in the manner of Ulysses is the sheer abandonment of domestic and familial responsibilities. For Morrison, Ulysses represents “a reality half in accusation and half in glory. For it symbolises men leaving the nest becoming complete humans....When that happens, someone always gets left behind” (“The Triumphant Song” 15-6). Morrison’s male characters

like Ajax, Milkman and his great-grandfather, Solomon, abandon their (domestic and familial) responsibility in their desire for self-fulfilment along the path of self-discovery and personal freedom. In her interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison talks about the experience of wandering as a process of individuation through which the black men discover/make themselves: “And in the process of finding, they are also making themselves” (“Intimate Things” 26). However, the two aspects of leaving the home make the whole enterprise of travelling both a commendable and deplorable enterprise. If the idea of a journey is important for self-realization, it should not be at the cost of others by making them struggle to survive. Morrison recognizes this complex paradox around the myth of Ulysses-like home-leaving: “Although in sociological terms that is described as a major failing of black men—they do not stay home and take care of their children, they are not there—that has been to me one of the most attractive features about black male life” (“Intimate Things” 26).

Like Milkman who leaves Hagar behind, Frank leaves his sister behind to fend for herself. He needs to remember home and make the homebound journey in order to take care of his sister and to recover himself. According to Laura Sloan Patterson, “Morrison’s characters, particularly her male characters, tend to succeed when they are able to recall and employ their roots within the home (the current domestic realm, including the relationships embodied there) and their roots within the Home (the original homeplace, with all its cultural traditions and folkways, usually set in the South)” (Patterson 153). Like Odysseus and Milkman, Frank encounters different people and places as he travels across America to his hometown in Georgia. He finds himself dependent upon the hospitality of people, one of several other themes that link *Home* as it does *Song of Solomon* to *The Odyssey*. His journey homeward depends upon the generosity of people like the Reverend John Locke, who runs the parsonage of AME Zion six blocks away from the hospital. He finds it difficult to explain his condition to Reverend John Locke (whose name is a reference to the philosopher John Locke) as he could truly remember nothing at all (15). Reverend John gives Frank seventeen dollars to help him get somewhere near Chicago. He refers him to Jessie Maynard of a Baptist Church for further help. Compared to Reverend John,

Frank finds Jessie Maynard's attitude "hostile" although he gives Frank some help and useful information for the next part of his journey. As he proceeds with his homebound journey, Frank is haunted not only by nightmarish visions but many unanswered and self-accusatory questions too: "Why didn't you hurry? If you had gotten there sooner you could have helped him. You could have pulled him behind the hill the way you did Mike. And all the killing you did afterward...Did it? Did it work? And the girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her?" (21-2). The girl mentioned here is a young Korean girl exploited and killed by "the relief guard." Frank witnesses the fate of this girl even before his friends are killed which brings out the killer instinct in him: "But before that, before the deaths of his homeys, he had witnessed the other one. The scavenging child clutching and orange, smiling, then saying, "Yum-yum," before the guard blows her head off" (99-100). Frank tries to ward off these self-accusatory questions as he travels to rescue his sister, Ycidra. He finds himself going colour-blind as his journey is constantly interrupted by images from the battlefield/frontline:

As he mused about what it might be like in those houses, he could imagine nothing at all. So, as was often the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them, to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-so-thin sheet of flesh. Against the black and white of that winter landscape, blood red took center stage. (19-20)

He finds his face dissolving and feels the need to contain himself. Like the shell-shocked and war traumatized Shadrack in *Sula*, Frank witnesses horrific scene of dismemberment on the battlefield and loses his sense of self and belonging. Shadrack cannot seem to exercise any

conscious control over his body and needs a Lacanian mirror to contain his body. However, the traumatic impact of war on Frank has the impact of a Lacanian mirror in reverse. The reflection he sees in the mirror spooks him. What he confronts in the mirror is not the wholesome image/gestalt of his body but that of an unidentifiable stranger: "When on the fourth day I caught my reflection in a store window I thought it was somebody else. Some dirty, pitiful-looking guy" (69). Whereas Shadrack establishes the annual ritual parade of "National Suicide Day" as a way of overcoming his existential fears and anxieties, Frank resorts to drinking to defend himself against the horrors of war. He also suffers from a loss of memory and a disruption of the self caused by his experience at the battlefield. Like Shadrack, the traumatic experience of war makes him lose a coherent pattern of memory and symbolization. On the battlefield, he learns the excitement of life with all its unpredictability. His reflections on war are reminiscent of War Literature like William Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* in which the war veterans reflect upon the reality of war: "In wartime one lives in to-day. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come" (Faulkner 173). Compared to the battlefield, where life beckons with all its uncertainties and excitement, Frank finds life in his hometown, Lotus, monotonous and predictable:

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)

There is no big contrast between the culture in which Frank grows up with his friends and the appeal they find for war. Their hometown in Georgia is portrayed as worse than any battlefield. There is no possibility of growth or prospects for the future. Home does not embody a sense of security; it imparts no such feelings to people. There is no sense of security as they do not find themselves legally protected. In fact, their rights of ownership/proprietorship are violated with impunity. In her essay "Home," Morrison evokes a sense of home with "the concrete thrill of borderlessness—a kind of out of doors safety where "a sleepless woman could rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road. No lamp and no fear" ("Home" 9). Notwithstanding the lack of "out of doors safety," Morrison's characters are not any more secure within the four-walled protection of their homes in the novel *Home*. They cannot imagine what she describes at the end of her essay as "safety without walls" ("Home" 12). In Morrison's fiction there is always the existential threat of being put "outdoors". People feel unprotected in their own homes. They are defined by their lack of legal protection and entitlement to home. In *Home*, people are forced out of their houses and properties. They live outdoors in a state of homelessness: "Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbours to pack up and move—with or without shoes" (9). In Chapter 2 on *Jazz*, I discuss the phenomena of phantoms, phantom limbs and experiences of dismemberment like amputation affecting the characters like Golden Gray, Joe and Violet Trace. These traumatizing experiences are the result of transgenerational hauntings and they arise from the traumatic unconscious of their ancestors. According to Abraham, the "phantom indicates the effects, on the descendants, of something that had inflicted...catastrophe on the parents" ("Notes on the Phantom" 174). In *A Mercy*, catastrophe befalls Florens and her mother in terms of their enslavement and, by and large, for all Africans after their skin colour becomes a signifying mark. In *Home*, catastrophe befalls Frank, his family and the rest of the fictive community in terms of their forced eviction from their homes and properties. Morrison's fiction is haunted by

the transgenerational and intertextual phantoms of forced evictions—the fear of “being put out and being outdoors” as in the case of the MacTeer family in *The Bluest Eye*. The narrator in *The Bluest Eye* defines the difference between two states of being homeless. In the first instance, the characters have somewhere to go even if it does not feel like home. In the second, characters like Frank are faced with the existential paradigm of having nowhere to go and nowhere to call home. Frank equates such a state of homelessness to aimless “loitering”. However, in his mind, he is haunted by the familial trauma of forced eviction and being driven out of his home without any legal protection. The loss of home and property in Morrison’s fiction like *Song of Solomon* and *Home* also represents the phantoms which come from the author’s own familial saga. We know from her numerous biographical accounts that her parents were forced to leave their home in the South in order to flee from violence, poverty and racism. In her interview with Morrison, Colette Dowling explains how “the iniquitous loss of family land to whites” inspired Morrison to become a writer. For example, Morrison creates “Lincoln’s Farm” in *Song of Solomon* based upon ancestral information. According to Morrison, her great-grandmother owned eighty-eight acres of land which “got legally entangled”. Her grandfather, who inherited the land, had to surrender it because of some debts he “didn’t know he owed” (“The Song of Toni Morrison” 50, 54). According to Leester Thomas, “Morrison makes an indictment against anything or anyone that denies one the right to have a place in society” (Thomas 229). As in *A Mercy*, Morrison makes a similar indictment in *Home* against all racist forces by portraying twentieth-century America as an *ad hoc country* which gives few rights of proprietorship and little legal protection to citizens. This consciousness of a war-like situation at home impels Frank and his friends to enlist for military service as an escape route from home. It is both Frank’s disillusionment with home and the prospect of a bleak future in his hometown which makes it a place to escape from and motivates him to join the army along with his two friends, Mike and Stuff. He tries to bridge the gap created by his experiences on the battlefield in his relationships with the others, especially the women who come into his life. He experiences a rupture in his domestic life with Lily whom he happens to meet at a cleaner’s (68). He tries to convince himself that his parting

from Lily is a “pause” in his life rather than a “breakup” (20). When he meets her for the first time, he feels as if he has come home (68). However, his relationship with Lily is affected by his experience of the war, which infiltrates and disrupts the domestic world he shares with her. War affects his ability to maintain domestic order and keep up with the domestic rituals of daily life. Frank does not take seriously “the small mechanics of life (which) needed attention” (75). He does not share with Lily “her yearning for her own house” (75). The war still haunts him (76). He is unable to stop the battlefield from encroaching on his private life and disrupting his domestic life. The domestic life he shares with Lily is indicative of his internal state of being. Home does not evoke any emotional response in him and the war affects his capacity to establish a domestic life, including his relationship with Lily. Kristina K. Groover observes that a lack of domestic rituals or the ability to perform them depicts disintegrating relationships and the spiritual dissolution behind the attempts to establish domestic life in Toni Morrison’s fiction (Groover 33). What Frank learns from war is mere *survival*. When Lily asks him about the future and what he wanted to do in his life, he gives her a brief answer, “Stay alive” (76). Frank’s “indifference, along with his combination of need and irresponsibility” shatters their interdependency (79). Lily feels “relieved at his departure” as she will not have to shoulder the burden of a “tilted man” (80). Frank feels the same if truth be told (107). He realizes the therapeutic effect his friendship with Lily has on him: “He was now convinced his attachment to her was medicinal, like swallowing aspirin. Effectively, whether she knew it or not, Lily displaced his disorder, his rage and his shame. The displacements had convinced him that the emotional wreckage no longer existed” (108).

Frank’s shame, his guilt and alienation are some of the reasons behind his homelessness and his reluctance to go home. Shame and guilt are two major strands which connect Morrison’s *Home* thematically and structurally with the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Covering up shame or facing shame through writing/narrating a story is a question of personal redemption. Guilt-ridden Frank shares affinities with the guilty characters in Hawthorne’s fiction who bury their secrets and put the blame on others. Richard D. Rust talks about the tension created in *The Scarlet Letter* “between concealing shame and revealing shame, between being put to shame

and taking shame. While the impulse to hide one's shame is very strong, the free-willed taking of shame is a most difficult yet necessary showing forth of truth" (Rust 213). However, what is liberating in Hawthorne's fiction, as in the case of Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, is "the need to reveal and confess, to accept blame or disgrace as merited, to acknowledge that one is at fault" (Rust 213). Frank's wandering, loitering and staying away from home "cover(s) his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies" (135). He suffers from survivor shame—the shame he feels for surviving the Korean War and for still being alive while his "homeboys" got killed and he could do little to rescue them from the brutalities of war. He feels guilty for his own existence. He marvels at the enigma of his own survival in the face of death. He did not want to go home without his buddies because he did not have enough courage to face their parents: "He was far too alive to stand before Mike's folks or Stuff's" (15). But Frank's unappeased sense of guilt also keeps him away from his sister, awaiting his return. The vision of his sister in need of his help and protection violates his sense of domestic responsibility and the core idea of home based upon caring human relationships. If he could not find a way of saving his friends from dying, he will act in a way that enables him to protect his sister as he always did when they were children. If part of his memory is attached to that of his friends and Lily, another part of his memory is equally attached to his childhood memories with his sister. The memories attached to his sister, in fact, serve as prompts for his homecoming. He can counterbalance his shame by being able to save the life of his sister. As Frank admits, his sister is his "original caring-for" and the reason behind his existence:

Maybe that was the reason no Russian-made bullet had blown his head off while everybody else he was close to died over there. Maybe his life had been preserved for Cee, which was only fair since she had been his original caring-for, a selflessness without gain and emotional profit. Even before she could walk he'd taken care of her. The first word she spoke was "Fwank." (34-5)

Frank finds himself deeply attached to the memory of his sister, who keeps him bound to home. He dreads the whole idea of going back home but “*Only my sister in trouble could force me to even think about going in that direction*” (84). The language he uses for his sister, Cee, is the language of homecoming/homekeeping, that of protecting, caring, nurturing and keeping someone safe or at home. In his book *Home*, Miles Kennedy suggests that the concept of (first) home is rooted in a relationship (Kennedy 117). Cee reminds Frank of the memory of home based upon a caring relationship. She represents for him a space for self-remembrance. She reminds him of childhood, attached to the memories of horses and “the burial of a stranger”, which sets him off to rescue his sister. Above all, Cee reminds him of all that is good, strong and noble in his heart: “*She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger*” (104). Frank finds himself beholden to those memories and his bonds of affiliation and attachment towards his sister are so strong that even Lily, who gave him home-like feelings, “*had no competition in my mind except for the horses, a man's foot, and Ycidra trembling under my arm*” (69).

The Myth of Frankenstein

Without the support of her brother, Cee finds herself “feeling adrift” and vulnerable (48). In the absence of her brother, she thinks she has “no defense” (48) and impetuously falls for a man named Principal. Later on, she learns that “Principal had married her for an automobile” (49). Principal who called himself Prince runs away with the car and leaves Cee on her own. Cee regrets marrying a *rat* like Prince and wishes her brother were there to guide and protect her “from a bad situation” as he always used to (51). Cee finds herself fragmented and “broken”: “Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts” (54).

Cee needs another job in order to survive and she ends up doing work as a “second” for Dr. Beauregard Scott who is described by his wife as “more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments” (60). The anachronism of the scientist brings forth a whole gallery of pseudo scientist-cum-doctors whose myth exists in a long established historical and literary tradition before the Morrisonian addition of Dr. Beau into their ranks. This includes the scientific school master in *Beloved* who measures the body of Sethe and her human and animal characteristics in terms of statistics. In this gallery, there are famous portrayals of Hawthorne’s mad scientists-cum-doctors like Dr. Rappaccini, Ethan Brand, Aylmer, Heidegger and Chillingworth amongst other archetypal figures who share a similar fascination and dispassionate interest in the field of their medical and scientific inquiries. Ethan Brand, from the story of the same title, in his allegorical search for the Unpardonable Sin makes a young girl “the subject of a psychological experiment, and wasted, absorbed, and perhaps annihilated her soul, in the process” (“Ethan Brand” 1060). However, in his short story “The Birth-mark,” Hawthorne anticipates the practice of eugenics and cautions us against its dangers. Ironically enough, the title of the story and its theme (of removing the defects one is born with) also comment upon the eugenics aiming to prevent births with defects. In the story, the scientist Aylmer wants to remove the birthmark of his wife Georgiana, which he considers as a flaw in her otherwise flawless beauty. He lays aside his desire to create human life but still makes his wife’s birthmark, which stands for her sexuality, the object of his scientific curiosity:

Here, too, at an earlier period, he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster Man, her masterpiece. The latter pursuit, however, Aylmer had long laid aside, in unwilling recognition of the truth, against which all seekers sooner or later stumble, that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine,

is yet careful to keep her own secrets, and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results. ("The Birth-mark" 769)

In his stubborn desire to remove what he considers to be a defect in Nature, he fails to learn the lesson from Nature which "keep(s) her own secrets." Aylmer proceeds with his experiment on his wife at the cost of her life. Similarly, the nature of Dr. Rappaccini's poisonous experiments on his daughter echoes the dispassionate scientific curiosity Dr. Beau brings rather than compassion and human sympathy for the objects of his experiments. Morrison expands upon Hawthorne's critique of such characters with their impersonal scientific curiosity regarding the bodies of their victims, especially the female ones. It is significant to observe that Dr. Beau's wife, at the time of the interview with Cee, also adds with reference to her husband: "He's no Dr. Frankenstein" (60). This expression is a befitting description of Dr. Beau. It offers insight into his characterization and pursuit of scientific and medical inquiries. Morrison admits her admiration for earlier authors and their literary creations in the beginning of her study *Playing in the Dark*. She finds herself "in awe of the authority of...Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" (*Playing* 4). Elizabeth Young in her book *Black Frankenstein* brings the metaphor of Frankenstein "into the orbit of Morrison's analysis" (E. Young 8). She compares it to Morrison's argument about the Africanist presence or persona in the American literary landscape: "Frankenstein responds to the terms of *Playing in the Dark*, while extending them to a work that is British in origin and manifestly unfocused on either blackness or whiteness" (E. Young 8). Dr. Beau is like Frankenstein, who desires to penetrate the secrets of life by exploring the secrets of the female womb.

Ludmilla Jordanova in her essay on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, entitled "Melancholy Reflection: Constructing Identity for Unveilers of Nature," observes that physiognomy and anatomy were two of Shelley's concerns (Jordanova 66). In her opinion, Shelley captures successfully some of the fantasies of the medical practitioners of her day, who like the novel's Dr. Frankenstein, were interested in: "Opening organic beings for inspection, and then using them, or parts of them, again" (Jordanova 66). Barbara Johnson finds the novel *Frankenstein*

dominated by the “description of a primal scene of creation...where do babies come from?” (qtd. in Hoeveler). Dr. Beau, like Dr. Frankenstein, shows both curiosity about and revulsion for newborn life. This is evident from the collection of books in his clinic and the interest he takes in the practice of eugenics, the science of selective and controlled breeding.³ As Yvette Christiansë observes, the collection of books and their authors “draws them into the doctor’s list of ideal theorists and thus the doctor’s worldview” (Christiansë 37). In Young’s opinion, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* “uses its male centered plots to explore questions about women, including female authorship, maternity, sexuality...” (E. Young 9). G.K. Chesterton in his book *Eugenics and Evil* aligns eugenics with the tyranny of science “to reach the secret and sacred places of personal freedom, where no sane man ever dreamed of seeing it; and especially the sanctuary of sex” (qtd. in Kevles 120). Eugenicists also concerned themselves with the reproductive qualities of women and their offspring which are generally associated with issues of maternal health. The concern of eugenics was mainly considered to be about the women, but Young observes: “The majority of the works in the black Frankenstein genealogy, that is, replicate Frankenstein’s focus on men without actively pursuing its critique of masculinity” (E. Young 9). By critique of masculinity, she implies the spectacle/specularization of masculinity, which carries with it the spectacle of misogyny because the plots of the stories focus on women being objects as they are “silenced, assaulted, and murdered in these texts” (E. Young 9). Young further traces the development of the Frankenstein tradition in antebellum America where “there was a fierce debate...about the dissection of bodies for medical purposes...” (E. Young 33). She gives examples from antebellum literature influenced by the Frankenstein theme. For example, she quotes John Hovey Robinson’s novel *Marietta*; or, *The Two Students: A Tale of the Dissecting Room and “Body Snatchers”* (1842), and George Lippard’s bestselling novel *The Quaker City*; or, *The Monks of the Monk Hall* which include scenes of female dissection/dismemberment. Young adds that there was “A widespread fascination with dissection...throughout antebellum American Literature” (E. Young 33). Cee becomes a victim of the experiments of Dr. Beau who, like Frankenstein, (and the rest of his forbears in history)

wants to dissect and unravel the mystery of the female womb. Her condition is very critical when Sarah sends the letter, whose dispatch is not entirely motivated by altruism, to Cee's brother Frank, asking him to come without delay:

She blamed herself as much as she blamed Dr. Beau. She knew he gave shots, had his patients drink medicines he made up himself, and occasionally performed abortions of society ladies. None of that bothered or alarmed her. What she didn't know was when he got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them. Improving the speculum. But when she noticed Cee's loss of weight, her fatigue, and how long her periods were lasting, she became frightened enough to write the only relative Cee had an address for. (112-3)

Eugenics, the Speculum, and Traditional Healing

The occasional abortions Dr. Beau performs on society ladies in the light of what eugenicists believed in can be read as the desire of Dr. Beau to get rid of what practitioners considered to be eugenically undesirable or defective births. The speculum is a concave mirror-like instrument used to examine the inside of (female) bodies for gynecological purposes. It penetrates the woman and turns her into an object of scientific/medical gaze. Dr. Beau uses the speculum as a tool for objectification. With the help of the speculum, he reduces the bodies of his black female patients to material objects that he can dissect and dismember by making repeated observations of their reproductive organs. Like Hawthorne's mad doctors, Dr. Beau violates the sanctity of the female body so profoundly that he dismembers the very thing he seeks to know. Morrison exposes the racial violence inherent in his eugenic minded practice on the helpless body of Cee. Cee as a young black girl is all the more vulnerable due to her innocence and lack of

knowledge. She is unable to comprehend a racially loaded medical discourse such as eugenics. Thus, she becomes easy prey in the hands of Dr. Beau, who dismembers her body with the help of the speculum he keeps on improvising to access the interior of her body. The harmful impact of his dismemberment erases the traces of her subjectivity to such an extent that he renders Cee infertile for the rest of her life.

The speculum is a substitute for the phallus or the phallic gaze. In Dr. Beau's case, the speculum can be seen as a prosthetic instrument which replaces his phallic penetration into the inner cavities of the female body, through which he satisfies his perverse sado-masochistic and scopophilic curiosity. Dr. Beau was passionate about "the value of the medical examinations" (121-2). The fact that he would use needles to put Cee to sleep comments upon the sadistic practices of both Dr. Beau and "the medical industry" (122) in general. He makes Cee believe that the psychologically traumatizing and physically debilitating experience of "the blood and pain that followed was a menstrual problem" (122). The fact that Dr. Beau administers self-made medicines to his patients, performs abortions and "got so interested in wombs in general" makes us wonder if his two daughters "who have great big heads" (63), which Sarah describes as symptomatic of Cephalitis, might have also been the results of his obnoxious experimentation. It is not sheer coincidence that Cee finds books of the likes of *Out of the Night*,⁴ *The Passing of the Great Race*⁵ and *Heredity, Race and Society*⁶ on the crowded bookshelves of his office (65). These books mainly deal with the theme of "eugenics" in addition to the themes obvious from the self-explanatory titles of the books. Cee makes her mind up to learn about eugenics as she is unable to understand its meaning because of her inadequate schooling.

During the first half of the twentieth century, which is also the historical context of the story and the Korean War, stigma, racism, marginalization and ostracism continued to flourish. At the same time, the eugenics movement also began to emerge. Susan Roos describes in the introduction of her book *Chronic Sorrow: A Living Loss* how the eugenics movement emerged in the United States and in Europe (Roos 11). In her opinion, "The objective was to limit

procreation so that only people of “good stock” could marry and have children” (Roos 11). This movement was deeply rooted in racism. Talking about the influence of racism, Daniel J. Kevles writes in his book *In the Name of Eugenics*, “Racism—in that era racial differences were identified with variations not only in skin color but in ethnic identity—was a feature of both British and America eugenics” (Kevles 74). Kevles also adds, “Anglo American eugenicists embraced the standard views of the day concerning the hereditarily biological inferiority of the blacks” (Kevles 75). Some people, like the biology professor Samuel J. Holmes, from University of California at Berkeley, considered miscegenation to be a fortunate means of racial improvement for black people who were considered to be racially inferior (qtd. in Kevles 74).

The eugenics movement was based on a flawed and biased approach. The aim of this movement was to eliminate inherited disorders (like birth-defects) in as many people and places as possible. Increased retention of pregnant women and their compulsory sterilization was widely practiced in the States, Canada and Europe. Part of the aim of eugenics was to prevent pregnancy in women who were likely to give birth to children with defects or disabilities. Dr. Beau’s performing of abortions on women reflects upon the influence and common practice of eugenics in the States. Eugenics has a modern-day relevance too, converging with other ideas and debates about abortion, (assisted) suicide, euthanasia, maternal or paternal filicide, sterilisation, racial discrimination, genocide and custom-designed child-birth. According to Nancy Ordover, eugenics also exercise(s) influence in promoting “anti-immigrant sentiment” and establishing “exclusionist legislation” (Ordover 55). Commenting upon the continuing influence of eugenics, Ordover adds, “While it may not command the power it once knew, eugenics continues to find its niche in “respectable” political circles. Its ongoing assault on immigrants, predicated on its service to, and recruitment of, nationalist and racist dogma, has been one of its trajectories” (Ordover 55). According to Morrison, racists are eugenic-minded as they always try to make minorities and immigrants the objects of their attack.

Dr. Beau’s interest in wombs and his examinations seek to exclude Cee from her maternal role. He devalorizes her desire to re-present herself as a woman right from the beginning when he interviews her for a job: “The first question he put to her was whether she had children or

had been with a man. Cee told him she had been married for a spell, but had not gotten pregnant. *He seemed pleased to hear that*” (my italics 64). Mrs. Beau’s interrogation of Cee mocks her Church affiliation if she had any. It betrays the rift and animosity that existed between the Church and eugenics. The Church was against the philosophy and practices of eugenics and emphasized the role of religious ethics in producing offspring rather than eugenic control. Traditional religion was one means of protection against the excesses of eugenics. Commenting on the role that religion played in the Deep South, Edward J. Larson observes, “religion acted more as a brake than a barrier to eugenics in the Deep South” (Larson 168).

Dr. Beau’s experimentations/examinations on Cee deprive her of her womb by making her infertile. Frank who rescues Cee just in time from the custody of Dr. Beau realizes that his sister “was fighting a fever that wouldn’t go down” (119). He takes her to Miss Ethel Fordham’s house in Lotus where, along with other neighborhood women, she takes turns “nursing Cee and each had a different recipe for her cure” (119). La Vinia Delois Jennings describes the role and healing practices of traditional religious specialists called *baganga* in her book *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa*. These specialist medicine women/priest(esse)s administer herbal and ritual treatments to cure the patients of their physical and psychological diseases. Jennings considers these baganga as: “African traditional specialists—the healers, mediums, diviners, and priests in Morrison’s fiction—are a cadre of communal practitioners who mobilize spiritual resources as well as material resources in practical and creative ways to address human physical and psychological dis-eases that assault individual, family, and tribal well-being” (Jennings 145). According to Denise Martin, writers like Morrison invoke the cultural memory of these medicine women to address issues of spirituality, healing and wholeness (Martin 59). The women cure and repair Cee with their traditional healing practices. They cannot regenerate her womb because of the irreparable damage done to it, but they do manage to heal Cee psychologically and spiritually: “The final stage of Cee’s healing had been, for her, the worst. She was to be sun-smacked, which meant spending at least one hour a day with her legs spread open to the blazing sun. Each woman agreed that that embrace would rid her of any remaining

womb sickness” (124). Part of her healing/recovery comes from “the demanding love of Ethel Fordham, which soothed and strengthened her the most” (125). It gives her the feeling that she is “back home,” in a place where she thinks she actually belongs (126). Fordham’s home, a place of feminine rites—like the Convent in Morrison’s *Paradise*—offers Cee “the emotional satisfactions of safety, community and belonging” (Strehle 8). It offers Cee a sense of belonging by accepting her into a family and kinship. Fordham’s household embodies the spirit of a home place which hooks defines as “that space where we return for renewal and self-discovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole” (hooks 49). It is a place where she feels free and nobody is obliged to “protect” or “save” her and where she can herself decide “who you are” (126). Fordham’s “house surrounded by those women with seen-it-all eyes” becomes a source of maternal nurturance and unconditional love as they inculcate in Cee self-belief and self-worth. Like Florens from *A Mercy*, Cee learns to discover inside her own self “the beloved—the part of the self that is you, and loves you, and is always there for you” (Schreiber 164). She used to blame her lack of schooling for her low self-esteem. She believed what the others said about her being “worthless” (129). Her brother “alone valued her. While his devotion shielded her, it did not strengthen her” (129). But the real source of strength lies within her own self(-respect), in her capacity to rescue her own self and think for herself. Assuring herself of her own worth, she restores her spiritual agency and subjectivity. Frank responds to the loss of his sister’s fecundity by “crying as he had not done since he was a toddler” (132). His inability to cry indicates that he has lost an integral part of himself due to the dehumanizing experiences of the war. Frank who, hitherto, lacked feelings of intimacy, mourning and empathy realizes, “His sister was gutted, infertile, but not beaten” (132).

Valerie Sweeny Smith, who borrows from Hortense J. Spillers, suggests that “African American identity is developed around the black ((Spillers) uses the word “captive”) womb” (V. S. Smith 5). She further adds that writers like Morrison and Gayle Jones “explicitly take issue with the logic that reduces the African American woman to her womb and demand—even to the point of dismemberment and murder—that black female subjectivity be understood as distinct from black womb” (V. S. Smith 5). African American identity is constructed around the primary

symbolic field of the mother/womb which was violated by institutions like slavery and medical science like eugenics. Dr. Beau's attempt to plunder Cee in the interest of medical science is also an attempt to deprive her of her subjectivity. Cee reinforces her female identity despite her infertility/barrenness. She further recuperates by weaving quilts. Despite being infertile: "She could know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting" (132).

Quilt-making is traditionally a feminine act of creativity and a way of achieving autonomy (although Morrison runs the risk of assigning a very traditional and stereotypical activity in the recuperation of her female protagonist in *Home*). Judy Elsley in her study *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting* talks about ways in which a woman tries to create space for herself by way of challenging patriarchal ways of living. She also observes that Alice Walker uses the metaphor of the quilt in her fiction *The Color Purple* to demonstrate her protagonist's "journey to self-empowerment" (Elsley 4). With reference to Alice Walker's work, Isabelle Van-Peteghem Trèard thinks that Walker uses the quilt "as a good metaphor for socialism" (Trèard 22).

In Morrison's *Home*, quilt-making becomes a medium of self-discovery for Cee. She overcomes her victimization and replaces it with the (re)generative act of creation and productivity. Adrienne Rich postulates in her book *Of Woman Born*, "The conversion of raw fibres into thread was connected with the power over life and death; the spider who spins thread out of her own body, Ariadne providing the clue to the labyrinth, the figures of Nates or Norns or old spinning women who cut the thread of life or spin it further, are all associated with this process" (101). In her essay "Aesthetics Inheritance: History Worked by Hand," bell hooks looks back at the quilt-making of her grandmother and finds in it an expression of "one's creative imagination" (hooks 118). She also reads in the quilt-making of her grandmother "an activity that gave harmony and balance to the psyche" (hooks 116). The process of creating quilts helps Cee overcome her physical sterility by enhancing her imaginative powers. It becomes a metaphor of self-affirmation or what Carme Manuel Cuenca describes, with reference to the Quilting poems of Lucille Clifton, as a means of "spiritual survival": "a new

construction of self and motherhood” (Cuenca 127). In Luce Irigaray’s opinion, “woman weaves to sustain the disavowal of her sex” (*Speculum* 116). Cee’s disavowal takes place after Dr. Beau’s anatomical “plunder” of her womb which “can’t never bear fruit” (128). The fact that Cee is infertile for the rest of her life prevents her from realizing her desire and subjectivity as a mother. But it does not prevent her from imagining and symbolizing her lost motherhood after the revelation dawns upon her: “I didn’t feel anything at first when Miss Ethel told me, but now I think about it all the time. It’s like there’s a baby girl down here waiting to be born. She’s somewhere close by in the air, in this house, and she picked me to be born to. And now she has to find some other mother” (131). Cee’s traumatic loss of motherhood haunts her in the form of the phantom baby girl waiting to be born and the toothless baby smiles she keeps seeing (132). Her barren womb clamors for children.

Her enaction of the loss of motherhood is one of the most emotionally charged and evocative expressions in the book. It lays bare a moment of personal truth but also exposes Frank to his moment of truth, guilt and confession. He can no longer proclaim his innocence by displacing his guilt and shame onto someone else. Only a truthful confession can bring him peace from self-accusation and a sense of self-loathing. He cannot feel at home in his mind/body unless he confesses freely and takes account of his actions, so censuring concealment. Like Cee, he needs to recover himself and confess his guilt and shame through articulation without hiding his inner world of guilt and shame. He has to literally become Frank meaning true and honest in his confession. He needs to tell the entire truth to and for himself, defined by J. M. Coetzee as the end of confession.

According to Coetzee, “True confession does not come from the sterile monologue of the self or from the dialogue of the self with its own self-doubt, but...from faith and grace” (Coetzee 252). Frank tries to repress and resist moments of truthful confession. He conceals a secret (from others), and he conceals it also from himself. The time to confess is taken up with the conflict between his endeavor to conceal the crime from himself and the need to admit it to himself. He needs to confess and articulate his guilt in order to redeem himself. He cannot be at

home until he confronts the source of his shameful act. He finds himself at home (in his conscience) after he relieves himself of his feelings of guilt by way of confession:

I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid it from me. I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame.

Then Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, in the clouds. It hit me. Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how. (133)

His confession is a plea for absolution, which Coetzee describes as “the indispensable goal of all confession” (Coetzee 252). Coetzee describes absolution as “the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter, liberation from the oppression of the memory” (Coetzee 252). Confession offers Frank what Theodore Reik describes in *The Compulsion to Confess* as “the best possibility for self-understanding and self-acceptance” (Reik 205). In his moment of confession, Frank embraces the worst aspect of his self in order to release himself from the burden of memory. However, what is difficult to judge is the moment of his confession itself. We cannot ascertain whether his confession is an act of his own free volition or a consequence of the domination Foucault describes as the constraining power of the other. Peter Brooks asserts that the dialogue between the confessor and the confessant is fateful as it forces the confessant to articulate his/her guilt. Brooks quotes Albert Camus’ protagonist—the self-styled judge-penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence from *The Fall*—as an example of a confessant who finds himself under the compulsion to confess to liberate himself from the stifling oppression which comes from the silent agency of the confessor who seems to urge the confessant to speak. The

basis of the confessional dialogue in *The Fall* is more obvious and reciprocal: “Say, now that you are going to talk to me about yourself, I shall find out whether or not one of the objectives of my absorbing confession is achieved” (146). After having confessed, the judge-penitent desires to establish the fallen condition of all mankind—the generalized guilt. He wants to make them recognize and admit that they are all guilty: “Moreover, we cannot assert the innocence of anyone, whereas we can state with certainty the guilt of all. Every man testifies to the crime of all others—that is my faith and my hope” (110). On another occasion, he even asks his narratee to do some soul-searching through confession (and this also implies the reader of the story): “Search your memory and perhaps you will find some similar story that you’ll tell me later on” (65). He even urges his “listener” to “go me one better” (139). By making a public avowal of his shame, guilt and sins, he can expose others to judge themselves:

Covered with ashes, tearing my hair, my face scored by clawing, but with piercing eyes, I stand before all humanity recapitulating my shames without losing sight of the effect I am producing, and saying: “I was the lowest of the low.” Then imperceptibly I pass from the “I” to the “we.” When I get to “This is what we are,” the trick has been played and I can tell them off. I am like them, to be sure; we are in the soup together. However, I have a superiority in that I know it and this gives me the right to speak, you see the advantage, I am sure. The more I accuse myself, the more I have the right to judge you. Even better, I provoke you into judging yourself, and this relieves me of that much of the burden. Ah, *mon cher*, we are odd, wretched creatures, and we merely look back over our lives, there’s no lack of occasions to amaze and horrify ourselves. Just try. I shall listen, you may be sure, to your own confession with a great feeling of fraternity. (140)

Clamence has the illusion of superiority as he can expose the others through confession and complicity. He also derives a sense of superiority/authority because of his right to speak.

Through confession he has a liberating access to language without realizing that not being able to remain silent, whether the inability comes from an internal or external compulsion to speak, is a consequence of domination. The uncanny silence on behalf of the listeners in *The Fall* and *Home* does not put them at a disadvantage. Their silence is indicative of their relationship to power since “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing” (Foucault 62). Silence on behalf of the listeners/narrators can also be a position and strategy of power, authority and domination as it can subject the other to speak and confess, by a way of constraining the other. Their silence can either be a sign of their moral cowardice indicative of their lack of courage to confess or it can be their silent alternative to confession. Unlike Clamence and Frank, who seem compelled to confess their wrong-doing, silence on behalf of the listeners demonstrates their freedom from coercion to speak. However, Morrison’s characters seem to speak without the fear of holding anything back. By letting her characters confess their hidden-most desires/crimes, she endorses her characters with the ideal of storytelling without fear. The characters overcome (internal) resistance (in the presence of a listening authority) and shame in order to tell the truth which makes the whole gesture of confession an emancipatory act of bravery. According to Adrian Jones, it is the dialogical and therapeutic nature of the relationship between the speaker/confessant and the listener/confessor which “grants the confession its healing power and redemptive potential” (A. Jones 95). For Morrison, the moment of redemption in itself is more important.

War, Rape, Guilt and Personal Redemption

As a survivor of the Korean War, Frank finds his soul tainted by guilt over his survival while his friends lost their lives. He is not only guilty of being late for his sister who was always

waiting for him, he feels guilty for all the atrocities of war, whether committed directly by him or not. As the narrator observes in the beginning: “Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before the trees—apologising to them for the acts he had never committed,” (15) but also because he has already killed that little girl who was waiting to be born to his sister in the shape of the Korean child he kills during the war. The guard who blows the head off the innocent girl is, in fact, one of Frank’s projections/aliases. The reader is able to decode the “fate of this girl” only in retrospect or the moment when Frank admits his ultimate guilt of being the real culprit behind the killing of this Korean girl. Frank keeps this knowledge hidden from the reader or the narrator of the story, whose limited knowledge of the war and its realities are constantly challenged by Frank himself, although, he keeps dropping encrypted hints about the identity of the girl (who shares striking similarities to his sister, Cee) as he tries to cover up his shame and guilt.

The war does its emotional and psychological damage to Frank by making him numb to the world around him and also to his own feelings. The trauma of war compels him to forget rather than remember and acknowledge the impersonal and dehumanizing act(s) of murder he commits during the war. He carries out “anonymous” murders to survive and avenge the deaths of his friends (102): “There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him” (98). Above all, he surrenders to temptations and sexually abuses the young Korean girl who scavenges around for living just like he does “from certain garbage cans” in order to survive (40). We have in the young Korean girl (like the “dead gooks or Chinks”) a stereotypical representation of the racially inferior “other” that scavenges and hangs around the bushes, then stops the soldier in his tracks, inciting desire and a lack of restraint. She perhaps also embodies the final moral test of a soldier’s manhood by exposing his weaknesses to temptation. The soldier can withstand temptation by avoiding physical contact with the native or he can surrender to temptation by penetrating and destroying her. She should be either overcome or destroyed rather than him risk exposure and transformation by her. The Korean child does exactly that. She exposes Frank to his temptation, just like *Beloved* exposes Paul D’s vulnerability by making herself irresistible to him in *Beloved*. Having touched *Beloved* deep

inside her body makes Paul D feel guilty and results in his running away from Sethe and her home. Because of his shame and guilt he finds himself unable to confront Sethe. Frank projects his own degradation onto the Korean child as an unclean temptress, and without any qualms about exploiting her sexually, he shoots her dead. He feels ashamed at his moral degradation and instead of acknowledging his guilt he safeguards it like Paul D does in *Beloved*. Paul D stores the traumatic memories of emasculation and inhuman treatment suffered at Sweet Home in a “tobacco tin lodged in his chest” (113), lest they erupt with all the impact of bodily, psychological and emotional pain as they do with Sethe, who at the sight of the Schoolteacher arriving to claim her and her children, murders one of her daughters in order to protect her. Frank adopts a similar defense mechanism of suppression to stop the traumatic memories of rape, incest and murder from re-visiting him. Like Paul D, he keeps his memories locked up with the force of the hook. Unlocking the tobacco tin is a metaphor for Paul D’s repressed feelings just as loosening the hook for Frank becomes a metaphor for coming to terms with guilt:

How he had covered his shame and guilt with big-time mourning for his dead buddies. Day and night he had held on to that suffering because it let him off the hook, kept the Korean child hidden. Now the hook was deep inside his chest and nothing would dislodge it. The best he could hope for was time to work it loose. (135)

It is worth mentioning here that “to be let off the hook” is a phrase meaning to avoid blame, which Frank has been doing till the moment of his confession. Frank achieves redemption when he comes to terms with his personal secrets and primal guilt through confession. Like Paul D, who is exposed to the unspeakable reality of the past he shares with Sethe, Frank undergoes transformation after listening to the story of Cee, who constantly envisions “a baby girl down

here waiting to be born” (131). After sharing his past with Sethe, Paul D finds: “His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that flowed freely and made him their play and prey” (*Beloved* 213). Similarly, after hearing about the vision of his sister, Frank feels “a fluttering in his chest,” (132) which seeks to find immediate release through verbal expression and makes it incumbent upon him to respond and speak for himself and on behalf of the girl he murders. Perhaps at this juncture, he takes home the message of the ageless wisdom of Morrison’s character Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, who instructs Milkman how to accept responsibility when she says that “if you take a life, then you own it. You responsible for it. You can’t rid of nobody by killing them. They still there and they yours now... you can’t take a life and walk off and leave it. Life is life. Precious. And the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you anyway, in your mind” (209). Pilate also teaches the traditional notion of propitiation or appeasement, which implies not only the notion that we should physically/properly bury those for whom we are responsible, but also that we should confess and take responsibility for our deeds and guilty secrets rather than harbour them. Such propitiation releases Frank from his self-accusation after he risks (public) exposure and comes to terms with his lying self by acknowledging his sense of guilt and responsibility for the murder of the Korean girl. Propitiation comes after the enactment/performance of a proper burial or confession. This is also the meaning behind Circe’s admonition to Milkman when she encourages him to *bury properly*: “The dead don’t like it if they are not buried. They don’t like it at all” (*Song* 245). The performative aspect of confession requires not merely a verbal confession but a practical one which Frank will enact symbolically by performing the burial rite after the act of confession.

Morrison’s definition of home as a site of security and comfort lodged in memory also includes the sense of being at home in mind and body as well as through language: “the language one dreams in, is home” (qtd. in Schreiber 160). Morrison’s concept of language as being the site of home is evocative of Heidegger’s notion of language as the “house” of being. What Morrison terms as the dwelling of the self is like Heidegger’s trope of being at home. Homecoming resides in our turning into language. Homelessness, a displacement of being, lies in self concealment, in disguising ourselves using language as subterfuge. Turning towards

home means unfolding the truth, the veiled reality kept hidden and concealed by language. Heidegger describes language as the house and home of being (qtd. in Mugerauer 356). It is the primordial home in which human beings can coexist and hold onto each other by being honest: “This abode first yields something we can hold on to. The truth of being offers a hold for all conduct” (Mugerauer 204). Homelessness, which is a displacement/loss of the home or self, comes with the displacement/loss of language. To come home is to be at home in language. To liberate one’s subjectivity and conscience with the help of language is to come home. Morrison describes language as the medium of the self. Frank, who moves between physical and psychic landscapes, also moves within a linguistic landscape. He is not at home with language as he lies constantly and tries to conceal reality. He tries to control and manipulate his account of the story. Perhaps Morrison poses the concept of home contrasting with Frank’s constant efforts for the control and manipulation of facts, hiding reality from the readers and narrator of the story. Examples of his (not) being at home, in language which allows him to participate in acts of concealment, emerge from the scenes of war and when he becomes a guest at Billy’s house after making friends with at Booker’s Diner. Billy invites Frank to stay at his place and introduces him to his wife, Arlene, and his son, Thomas. Frank notices that Thomas’ right arm is “sagging at his side” (30). Frank asks Billy what happened to his son. Billy tells Frank how “Some redneck rookie thought that his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops,” shot Thomas in a display of unwarranted manhood (31). Frank’s surprised exclamation of “You just can’t shoot a kid,” (31) belies the moral agency he himself used in indiscriminate killing on the battlefield. He further enacts concealment as he tries to safeguard himself behind language in response to Thomas’ questions about his war activities:

“Were you in the war?”

“I was.”

“Did you kill anyone?”

“Had to.”

“How did it feel?”

“Bad. Real bad.”

“That’s good. That it made you feel bad. I’m glad.”

“How come?”

“It means you’re not a liar.” (32)

On another occasion, Mike is fatally wounded in the line of fire. Frank finds “Mike in his arms...thrashing, jerking,” he yells at him: Stay here, man. Come on. Stay with me.” Then whispering, “Please, please.” When Mike opens his mouth to speak, Frank leans in close and hears his friend say, “Smart, Smart. Don’t tell Mama.” Later on, when Stuff asks Frank about what Mike said, he lies. ‘He said, “kill the fuckers (97).’” Above all, he keeps the truth about the Korean girl hidden from the reader/listener. There is a real lack of congruence between what he avows and what he feels. Frank’s concealment of the facts begins to lose its disguise during the course of the action and appears as concealment as his fear of exposure and the disclosure of truth forces him to constantly belie the truth. Morrison always drops a subtle hint to watch out for deception, as she cautions in *Love* to watch “the face behind the face...the words hiding behind talk” (*Love* 24). There is always some concealment of the truth behind the words. The moment of truth comes after Frank acknowledges his guilt and responsibility. Like Florens in *A Mercy*, who achieves her subjectivity “through her ability to tell her story,” (Morrison qtd. in Goulimari 258) Frank needs to give a truthful account of his crime. In acknowledging the murder, he overcomes his guilt and shame, which he accrues due to his silence and constant self-denial through deceitful lies and false representation. After coming to terms with his guilty side, Frank psychologically buries the secret trauma he kept within himself. But the memory of

the little Korean girl raped stays alive. Like *Beloved*, she wants be part of the discourse of those who have suffered the traumas of rape, incest and physical assault. Frank is guilty of guarding the child's story of rape/incest just as the whole nation is guilty of collective amnesia in forgetting the Korean War (which is occasionally dubbed the Forgotten War) or the story of *Beloved* and the sixty million souls who lost their lives during the Middle Passage. Frank creates deliberate smokescreens for the readers to protect himself from exposure to the unspeakable. He tries to relocate his shame by blaming it on others. He displaces his shame/guilt by blaming his "relief guard" for the murder, creating ambiguity and implicating the hearer/reader as also responsible for decoding the story behind the story. Frank's displacement and withholding the truth and knowledge of his own culpability from the reader/listener creates what Jen Shelton describes in relation to her study of incest in Virginia Woolf's fiction *Speaking Incest in Voyage Out* as a strategy which "mirror(s) the incest narrative dynamic, generating a text that simultaneously speaks the unspeakable and prevents direct communication" (Shelton 241). Behind Frank's account of the rape by his alleged "relief-guard" is Frank himself, the perpetrator hiding his shame and guilt and unwilling to come to terms with what he has done to the Korean girl. The girl-child he rapes and murders bears striking similarities with his sister Cee. Her teeth remind the reader of Cee: "Two of her baby teeth...hidden in the kitchen matchbox along with his lucky marbles and the broken watch they had found on the river bank" (35). In fact, he kills the young Korean girl "in order to destroy that part of him that was tempted to respond to (his sister) sexually" (V. Smith. 135). Hortense J. Spillers, who discusses the role of woman as surrogate mother, daughter and sister in the fiction of Alice Walker, talks about Walker's child who "reinscribes the surrogate subject of a man who wishes to sleep with his sister" (*Black, White* 244). Frank's encounter with the Korean child enacts the Freudian dream content of this desire that leads to her murder after the rape as she reminds him of his sister: "As long 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" (95). His criminal deed of murdering the girl takes on a different hue. It becomes a substitute action for the incest

that takes place in his unconscious, and which he is not willing to acknowledge because of his self-denial. As Spillers remarks, “Under the auspices of denial, incest becomes the measure of an absolute negativity, the paradigm of an outright assertion *against*—the resounding no. But on the level of the symbolic, at which point the “metaevent” is sovereign, incest translates into the unsayable which is all the more sayable by virtue of one’s muteness before it” (*Black, White* 231).

As long as Frank denies his responsibility, he finds himself at a loss. Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok describe such “loss” or moments of self-denial in terms of “endocryptic identification” whereby the subject attempts to cope with the reality of painful memories. The subject tries to psychologically bury the “memory of an idyll...that for some reason has become unspeakable, a memory thus entombed in a fast secure place, await(s) its resurrection” (Abraham 141). The idyll they describe as being denied and preserved refers to Freud’s famous study of the Wolf Man, dealing with the theme of incest, the seduction of the Wolf Man by his sister. Unlike the overt theme of incest in *The Bluest Eye* and the covert theme of incest in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, an identical case of endocryptic identification exists between *Love* and *Home* (at the intertextual level). Both *Love* and *Home* project the incestuous desires of male figureheads and their enactments towards the female members. As Laura Sloan Patterson suggests in her book *Stirring the Pot*, Christine is the victim of her grandfather’s hidden incestuous desires even if he does not express them as he does in the case of Heed (Patterson 192). But Morrison makes her implicit meaning clear:

It wasn’t the arousals, not altogether unpleasant, that the girls could not talk about. It was the other thing. The thing that made each believe, without knowing why, that this particular shame was different and could not tolerate speech—not even in the language they had invented for secrets....Would the inside dirtiness leak? (*Love*192)

The “inside dirtiness” needs the courage of tongue/expression. Hence the emphasis Morrison places on “how precious the tongue is” in *Love, Home* and in her re-writing of Shakespeare’s play *Othello* entitled *Desdemona*. Morrison seems to posit the same question in *Home* as she does in *Love*. The question hinges on the forbidden desire of incest.

Home as a Site of Epiphany and the Burial of a Stranger

Finally, coming home is a matter of finding a proper place in relation to the earth and the mysteries of life and death. For Frank, the memory of home is a site of childhood epiphany. He has to bury the memory of his own “idyll” to complete the trajectory of his homecoming. This idyll is attached to the memory of horses and the “burial of a stranger” he witnessed in the company of his sister when they were just children. Frank’s quest to lay claim to his homeland—by ceremoniously burying the stranger he watches being dumped at a farm in his childhood—is reminiscent of another Hawthorne story entitled “Roger Malvin’s Burial.” This allegorical tale is about the nature of primordial guilt and the need to bury fellow beings. The tale is about two wounded soldiers, Roger Malvin and Reuben Bourne. Roger Malvin is an old soldier who gets seriously wounded during the war and whose life is fast ebbing away. He persuades the young Reuben Bourne to leave him to his fate, save his own life and marry his daughter, Dorcas. The relationship between Roger and Reuben is portrayed as that of a father and son. They are in the middle of a forest with inadequate provisions to survive. There is also no likely help for rescue in sight. Reuben leaves the old man, Roger, to his fate. He promises to come back and bury Roger according to his will. On facing Dorcas, he is unable to tell her the whole truth. He tells her a lie for fear of losing her and losing his face. In order to appear good and win her love, he convinces her that he performed the rites of burial for her father. Reuben feels guilty about concealing the truth and “concealment had imparted to a justifiable act, much

of the secret effect of guilt..." (98). Blessed with one son named Cyrus, Reuben lives a normal married life. But "the secret effect of guilt" keeps haunting his conscience. Soon his circumstances take a different direction and he has to move to the wilderness to start a new life. Without realizing it, his steps take him to the same place, the final resting place of Roger. Here distracted by the sound of what his hunter's instinct informs him is game, he fires his gun only to discover that he has killed his son exactly on the final resting place of Roger. Roger's burial takes place in the sepulchre of (Reuben's) heart where he buries the secret trauma of his guilt. Whereas Reuben fails to make atonement till the fatal moment of killing his son, Frank comes to terms with his guilt by way of confession and acknowledgement. Unlike Reuben, he returns to the place where he witnessed the man being dumped on the farmland to perform the final rites. As a young child barely four years of age, he is so enraptured and distracted by the sight of the horses that he completely forgets about the burial. Robert Pogue Harrison argues in his book *The Dominion of the Dead* that one way of asserting the right over one's place or homeland is by performing the rites of burial for the dead. According to Harrison: "The surest way to take possession of a place and secure it as one's own is to bury one's dead in it" (Harrison 24). A proper ceremonial burial lays the dead to rest in peace. In Morrison's *Beloved* the souls of the dead folks, who were left "unaccounted for and disremembered" by the living, become incarnate (in the figure of Beloved) and haunt the living till the souls of the dead people, who lost their lives during the Middle Passage and Slavery, are properly mourned and buried by the living. Morrison describes, in her interview with Gloria Naylor, the whole project of writing *Beloved* in terms of invoking all those people who are "unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried" and her desire to "properly, artistically, burying them" ("A Conversation" 209). Ashraf H. A. Rushdy states that the purpose of burial is to bring the dead folks "back into 'living life'" (Rushdy "Daughters" 117). He also adds with reference to the theme of burial in *Beloved*, "This tension between need to bury the past as well as needing to revive it, exists in both the author and her narrative" (Rushdy "Daughters" 117). In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate preserves the remains of a dead body to express her respect and piety for the dead she could not bury with proper commemoration. However, the remains of the dead body are actually those of her father and

Milkman's grandfather. It is Circe (another namesake from Homer's *Odyssey*) who directs Milkman to the dead and helps him identify the remains. She also emphasizes the need to give the bones a proper burial. Both Milkman and Pilate return to their native homeland to bury the remains of their ancestors by performing a proper burial.

Frank's revisiting of the scene "at the slaughter that went on in the world" (143) in the company of Cee not only institutes his past but also asserts his sense of belonging through the proper burial of the dead he witnessed being dumped unceremoniously in the ground. Ingrained in his memory—amongst others—is also the vivid memory of the community burial of Mr. Crawford, who resisted forced eviction and "got beaten to death with pipes and rifle butts and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the country—the one that grew in his own yard...In the dark of night, some of the fleeing neighbours snuck back to untie him and bury beneath his beloved magnolia" (10). Frank's performing of the burial expresses his solidarity with the community to which he belongs. In a final gesture to assert his sense of belonging/solidarity, he goes to unearth with Cee the remains of the unidentified dead body which is actually that of Jerome's father, forced to fight his son in mortal combat. He places the remains of the dead body on the quilt embroidered by Cee which becomes "a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow and dark navy blue" (143). This ritual burial on behalf of Frank shows respect towards the dead body, which he carries like "the gentleman in his arms" (143) toward the stream where "they found the sweet bay tree—split down the middle, beheaded, undead—spreading its arms, one to the right, one to the left. There at its base Frank placed the bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin" (144). Cee hands Frank the shovel to dig the grave: "When finally it was done a welcome breeze rose. Brother and sister slid the crayon-colored coffin into the perpendicular grave" (144). To mark the grave of the dead, Frank nails a wooden epitaph on the tree painted with the words: "Here Stands A Man" (145). The epitaph not only indicates Frank has achieved manhood but also serves as a monument and memorial for the unburied victim of violence. The epitaph reminds the reader of Morrison's desire to serve her novel *Beloved* as a memorial to pay respect to those who lost their lives during the Middle Passage. In *A Bench by the Road*, Morrison

regrets the lack of monument to memorialize millions of Africans who suffered under slavery. She thus justifies the need for her book *Beloved* and its dedication to sixty million people who lost their souls to serve as a monument that honours the dead.

Frank's tending of the dead body and his commemorative mortuary services whereby he puts the remains of the body together for the burial embodies gestures of respect to memorialize the dead. The tree beneath which Frank buries the remains with the epitaph on top marks the grave. It becomes the final resting place—the *sepulcrum*, if you like, which comes from the Latin word *sepelire* meaning “to bury” (Harrison 28). The same word with its Indo-European root means “to render honour” (Harrison 28). No living being should die without a funeral, without mourning and without being buried properly. Funeral is a ritual observed by the survivors, the family, the tribe and society at large to make sure the dead one is actually dead and that they are not treated as living dead. This embodies the belief of some cultures and societies that the dead will not return to haunt the living if they are given due burial. Something akin to this belief applies to the communal beliefs and values in Morrison's fiction. Pilate emphasizes the importance of the belief that the landscape has to receive the bones of the dead in the place where they die to mark their ancestral presence. The ritual of burying one's dead marks not only the proprietary claims but also claims of belonging and home as a place where one can bury his/her dead folks. As Derrida reminds us, “the departed must on no account disappear without leaving a trace” (*The Beast* 145). Derrida's comment not only emphasizes the importance of giving proper burial to the dead but also keeping them alive by way of remembering them. Burial is a familial and communal act of commemoration. According to Ashraf Rushdy, “Burial is the first act the family undertakes in its attempt to make the deceased an addition to the community of the dead and yet a member of the community of the survivors” (Rushdy 73). In *Home*, burial marks not only the departed's journey home, but also Frank's (symbolic) journey home as well.

Conclusion

Morrison defines the experience of racism as a visceral experience. Like Fanon, she lays bare the anomalies of racism and its debilitating effects on the psyche of her characters. She agrees with Fanon as she demonstrates in her fiction and numerous interviews that psychoanalysis alone cannot explain the lived reality of the black by explaining it psychoanalytically. There are historical and social factors which affect the psychic formation of her characters. Therefore, a purely psychoanalytic approach needs to be complemented with a critical model which encompasses the historical and social realities, especially from the perspectives of the colonized and racially oppressed people (who cope with experiences of dismemberment in the wake of multiple forms of racism). My study takes into account the assembly of historical and social forces which make the black experience multiple and psychologically complex. Fanon highlights the importance of combining historical and social forces vis-à-vis Lacan's Mirror Theory. According to Fanon, the advent of race at the mirror stage brings in its wake larger historical and socio-political realities. Like Fanon, Morrison combines psychoanalysis with the historical and social realities of the lived experience of black people. For Morrison, racism has its roots in the historical, social, cultural and political conditions. The trauma of racism subjects her characters to all kinds of experiences of dismemberment. The effects of racism and slavery leave psychosomatic marks on the body and psyche of Morrison's characters. It is in the historical context of the seventeenth-century American South that Florens in *A Mercy* finds herself dismembered by slavery and racism which creates "the withering inside" and leads to her epidermalisation as a result of the racial interpellation/alienation which shatters her subject position. In *Jazz*, I focus on the transgenerational impact of slavery and racism on the protagonists like Violet and Joe Trace, who also suffer from "inside nothing" as they try to accommodate the specters of their racial past. I demonstrate how slavery, miscegenation and racism can transfer the intergenerational traumas to the characters as experiences of phantom limbs, amputation, multiple consciousness

and loss of self. In *Sula*, I explore the impact of internalized racism within the black community which causes them to scapegoat a member of their own community. The causes of internalized racism are linked to social injustices, but their transference to the marginalized characters like Sula cut them off from the rest of the community. Because of the hidden force of violence behind the victimization or social ostracism of such characters, I refer to the process of their scapegoating as cultural dismemberment. My final chapter looks at how African Americans have continued to struggle in the context of multiple forms of racism in the Americas and endeavoured to find a home place for themselves which can offer them refuge from historical, psychological and social oppression.

Fanon's theory of race and its debilitating effects on the psyche of the black and the colonized people provides me with the critical apparatus which takes into account the historical, the psychological and social factors affecting the lived reality of black people. It helps me to combine other literary discourses like Abraham and Torok's concept of transgenerational hauntings, Irigaray's poetics of touch, and the motif of scapegoating. The Fanonian model helps me to read racism and slavery as historically determined phenomena while other theories help me to understand how the past continues to affect the present and future (generations) psychologically and culturally. The originary experience of racism and the concomitant dismemberment continues to have both a psychological and social impact on contemporary and future progeny. Throughout his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon emphasizes the close interaction between the historical and social forces that can affect the psychological well-being of an individual. Fanon is concerned with the racializing processes and the effects they can have on the racialized in terms of their lived experience. The lived reality of African Americans in Toni Morrison's fiction is marked by slavery and racism. Morrison's views on racism are in harmony with those of Fanon. Both agree that the lived experience of being black results in experiences of dismemberment. Fanon talks about moments of dismemberment after the body schema is attacked at several points. The body schema is replaced by a racial epidermal schema which reduces the consciousness of the body not only in the third person but in a triple person (*Black Skin* 84). Morrison also portrays the concrete experience of racism in terms of the

dismemberment and splitting of black identity. Both writers demonstrate how racial alienation is a multiple process requiring the immediate recognition of various historical, psychological and social factors. Morrison fights institutionalized racism by exposing its pernicious effects, which should be addressed at all levels. Reducing Morrison's work to a purely formal psychoanalytical interpretation forecloses the possibilities of other historical and social issues, the most subversive aspects of her work. There are several levels of Negro experience in Fanon as there are several levels of African American experience in Morrison's fiction. These demand an analysis of the historical, psychological and social determinants which affect the subjects' positions in both Fanon and Morrison. Both writers address the visceral problems of racism on multiple levels. Like Fanon, the issue of racism for Morrison invites an overall analysis of historical, psychological and socio-genic problems. Morrison's fiction presents an aesthetic and artistic challenge to address the harmful impact of institutionalized racism by taking into account the wider processes that bring them about. My study invites the reader to consider how these historical, psychological and social effects of slavery and racism continue to affect the lives of Morrison's characters. By adopting this multiple-faceted approach including the historical and social realities, I aim to broaden the discussion of race and the dismemberment it entails by going beyond the Lacanian paradigm of the "mirror stage." Like Fanon's work, I hope to inaugurate a discourse of race and the concomitant dismemberment by proposing a multifaceted lens of historical, psychological, social and related factors through which to study Morrison's fiction.

Notes

Chapter: 1

1: In her study on *A Mercy*, Cathy Covell Wagner distorts historical reality when she compares the relative freedom of the indentured Europeans and Africans. According to her, “The whites seem as unfree as Africans, indeed less free than Florens herself” (Wagner 102). She overlooks Morrison’s observation in her interview with Michelle Norris that “the only difference between African slaves and European or British slaves was that the latter could run away and melt into the population, but if you were black you were noticeable” (“Toni Morrison Finds”). Morrison’s astute observation itself alludes to the distinction that Frantz Fanon makes in *White Skins, Black Masks* between a Jew and a black man. Unlike a black man, the Jew can go unnoticed as long as he is not identified by others. In the case of a black man, his colour betrays him. Wagner erroneously draws this difference between the Natives and “imported Africans”. See Wagner, 102, 104. See also Morrison’s interviews with Charles Ruas, Elissa Schappell, and Pam Houston, in *Conversations*, on skin colour as a “signifying mark” which made assimilation impossible for black people.

2: Morrison refutes “the accusation that it was Blacks who helped Whites make people slaves” as “a little simplified notion of the past” in her interview with Salman Rushdie. See Interview 58.

3: According to Julian Barr, “Gender essentially defined the institutionalisation of African American slavery under Anglo-American colonial law—it was a status legally inherited through one’s mother, thus making slavery a matrilineal system in the midst of a patriarchal society” (See Barr 564).

4: According to Cesare Cuttica, “(Patriarchism) is traditionally employed in the theological sphere where references are made to biblical patriarchs” (Cuttica 3). He further defines its application in social theory as indicative of “a pre-modern societal organisation at the centre of

which stood the absolute authority of the male landowner over a large familial unit” (Cuttica 3). Since the male figurehead exercises “absolute dominion over the members of his family,” feminists envision it “as the quintessence of women’s subjugation to men and their consequent oppression under a rigorous system made of duties and no rights, obedience and no liberties” (Cuttica 4).

5: Many historians, like Mark M. Smith, find Eugene D. Genovese “the single most influential historian of the Old South and southern slavery” (Smith 16). The importance of Genovese’s work is such that “his work must be addressed and explored in some detail in any discussion of antebellum southern slavery” (Smith 16).

6: Kolchin gives 1619 as the arrival date of the first Africans in Virginia (Kolchin 10). However, Hendrick records the earliest arrival of Africans in Virginia as 1620 (Hendrick 17).

7: Yvette Christiansë comes closer to my understanding of the word “minha mãe.” According to her, “Someone who speaks Portuguese would understand the strict lexical meaning of minha mãe as “my mother,” but not its specific meaning in Florens’ explanation, or the particular formulation in which it appears as a category of person or presence when she refers to “a minha mãe” or “the tua mãe.” The phrase renders the mother as a definite noun but not a possessive one, and thus a categorical term rather than a designator of singularity....This further cumulative effect makes the mother figure possibly anonymous. The mother could be anyone’s mother and not exclusively hers” (Christiansë 191).

8: As Morrison observes in *The Playing in the Dark*, “The flight from the Old World to the New World is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility...” (Morrison *Playing* 34). However, according to David Z. Wehner, “this flight applies to this new white man; for blacks, the trip from the Old World to the New, the Middle Passage, represented the antithesis: a trip from freedom and possibility to oppression and bondage” (Wehner 75).

Chapter: 2

1: Freud defines uncanny in terms of a haunting experience that “arises from a conflation of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, often referred to in terms of the “familiar” and the “unfamiliar”; but the direct reference in the terms is to that which is “at home” and that which is “not at home” (See Punter 83).

Chapter: 3

1: The use of the term “victim” in relation to Morrison’s fiction is more in the sense of a deritualised extension of the term “scapegoat”, especially in *Sula*.

2: For Justine Baillie, the hidden desires of the community embody their desire for the “racial “uplift”” (See Baillie 78-9).

Chapter: 4

1: According to Charles S. Young, the Korean War is “remembered as the forgotten war” (157). It was one of America’s most expensive and least successful wars. Young quotes Republican leader Senator Robert A. Taft who called “Truman’s war” a “useless and expensive waste” (Young 157). Young also considers the war as national amnesia. He adds “With Korea, amnesia began during the conflict itself. At least by the fall 1951, the media had already dubbed it “the forgotten War” (Young C 157).

2: See Edward J. Larson (p.2) and Steven Selden (p.49) for references to analogies between man and the horse that appeared in literature on eugenics.

3: Francis Galton proposed the science of selective breeding by 1860 and was, later on, known as the father of eugenics. He was the second cousin of Charles Darwin. He had developed the

term of “eugenics” by the early 1880s basing it upon the Greek root meaning of “good/noble in birth.” It was understandable that Galton applied Darwinian principles of natural selection to his analysis of human society.

4: *Out of Night* by Hermann Muller was published in the United States in 1935. In this book, Muller advanced his ideas about eugenics via the application of euteleogenesis or artificial insemination. See Kevles 190.

5: *The Passing of Great Race* was written by Madison Grant in 1921. The book was a popular text “read at the very highest levels of American Society.” As part of the curriculum, it popularised eugenics in the college classroom of 1920s. According to Selden the book is “a classic example of racist tract.” It was filled with racial and gender stereotyping. The book proposes the elimination of social inferiors through segregation and sterilisation. Selden quotes a review from the 1921 edition, which recommends it as one of the “books every American should read if he wished to understand the full gravity of our present immigration problem.” Another review reads that “Americans should be grateful to (Grant) for writing it” and the reviewer in this case was Theodore Roosevelt, who along with Grant, “tout(ed) the benefits of eugenics to the general public”. (See Selden 56-7)

6: *Heredity, Race and Society* was written by Leslie Clarence Dunn and T. Dobzhanski. According to Christiansö, Dunn and Dobzhanski shared Muller’s conviction that “heredity or biology determined intellectual faculties and physical prowess” and that “Not all were endowed with the same faculties, and eugenics had a vital role to play in mankind’s future” (See Christiansö 37).

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