

MIDWESTERN
MISCELLANY XXIV

*being a variety of essays on
the works of Toni Morrison
by members of*

The Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

guest edited by
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in honor of
David D. Anderson
who encourages creativity in one's own time
and one's own space

PREFACE

It is only proper that a Nobel Prize winner be honored in her own region. The essays we are publishing here represent the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature's high esteem for Toni Morrison as a contemporary literary artist. I am proud to be guest editor of this issue. The Society has been publishing our thoughts about Toni Morrison's work for almost two decades and we expect to keep it up for a long time: one never finishes with a Toni Morrison book, one just studies it from a new angle.

Born in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison's first landscapes, first understanding of human nature with all its beauty and horror, came from this region. Whether Morrison sets her novel in the Caribbean or in New York City, the Midwest is there, sometimes literally, but always in terms of interior space. It is in the Midwest that Morrison first learned what it felt like to be landlocked, what it felt like to yearn for escape; and it was in the Midwest that she had her first taste of seasons, of lakes, of tunnels and industry, of the pleasures and pains of living on this earth.

Morrison's characters, like Morrison, often understand the significance of place. In *Song of Solomon*, Guitar Bains demonstrates this when he offers Milkman tea. Milkman has stopped at Guitar's home and requested a drink, but along with the drink he gets a geography lesson: "Bet you thought tea grew in little bags.... Like Louisiana cotton. Except the blackman picking it wears diapers and turbans. All over India that's all you see. Bushes with little bitsy white tea bags blossoming, right?" Milkman asks for tea without geography, but Guitar will not relent: "No geography? Okay, no geography. How about some history in you tea? or some sociopolitics—No. That's still geography, Goddam Milk, I do believe my whole life's geography" (114). And so all these essays are in some way geographical, as in some fashion, no matter how much Toni Morrison belongs to the world, she is always a Midwesterner from Lorain, Ohio.

I dedicated this issue to David D. Anderson, another wonderful Midwesterner, the creator of this society and this journal, whose name belongs in an issue honoring Toni Morrison, because he, too, is an Ohioan, marked by the region, who dreams of place and studies it, and like Morrison, makes life on this earth a bit more finely textured and a bit more meaningful.

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BEAUTY, VIRTUE AND DISCIPLINARY POWER:
A FOUCAULDIAN READING OF TONI MORRISON'S
THE BLUEST EYE

LYNN SCOTT

In that young and growing Ohio town whose side streets, even, were paved with concrete, which sat on the edge of a calm blue lake, which boasted an affinity with Oberlin, the underground railroad station, just thirteen miles away, this melting pot on the lip of America facing the cold but receptive Canada—What could go wrong?

(The Bluest Eye, 93)

Set in a small, industrialized, Midwestern town on the eve of World War I, *The Bluest Eye* explores the relationship of a variety of black families and individuals to each other as well as to the larger white community from which they are marginalized by racism. The locale is important. Neither the rural south, nor a large northern ghetto, Lorain, Ohio affords an intimate microcosm of caste and class, both within and without the black community. The narrator's question, "what could go wrong?", is both rhetorical and ironic.

The population of Lorain is described as ethnically disparate and fluid. While segregation is still legal, blacks are not allowed in Lake Shore Park, much of the community is integrated. Black and white children attend the same school, frequent the same stores, and even live next door to each other. Yet the "integration" of this Midwestern community does not result in the cultural mixing implied by the metaphor of a "melting pot." The term "melting pot," like so many names and labels in Morrison's work, ironically belies the characters' experience. In fact, the community is marked by sharp social stratification, fragmentation, and radical instability for its most marginal members. Claudia MacTeer, whose first person narration frames the novel, uses a different metaphor to describe the social relations of her world; it is a "garment" rather than a "pot" and her position in this gar-

ment is the "hem," the struggling periphery of life. Claudia's perspective, especially her resistance to oppression, is linked to her position in the social fabric, a fabric held together by an externally imposed cultural ideal; an ideal that her narrative deconstructs.

Michel Foucault's analysis of the link between power and knowledge is useful in engaging the analysis of racism that Toni Morrison develops in this novel. In particular his concepts of "genealogy," "discourse" and "disciplinary power" are relevant to questions of method and theme in *The Bluest Eye*. "Genealogy" is the term Foucault used to describe his historical method. Unlike traditional approaches, genealogy does not set forth a developmental or progressive view of history, nor does it view events as historically inevitable. Foucault used this method to reveal the relationship between discourses and the disciplinary structures employed by social institutions to control bodies and actions. Paul Bove summarizes Foucault's concept of discourse as "an institutionalized system for the production of knowledge in regulated language" (53). In other words, knowledge and truth are constituted in discourse, and discourse is both constituted by and constituting of institutions. It is the function of genealogy to unmask discourse by showing its association with the subjugating effects of power.

...genealogy lets us confront how power constructs truth-producing systems in which propositions, concepts, and representations generally assign value and meaning to the objects of the various disciplines that treat them (Bove 57).

The Bluest Eye is suggestive of a genealogy in several respects. The novel affirms that events can't be traced back to single origins, that history is circuitous, and most importantly that the purpose of historical reflection is not to romanticize the past, or to justify the present, but to unmask structures of power. Like Foucault, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye* wishes to explore the how of her story, not the why. After the primer introduction, Claudia tells the ending of the story she is about to relate. By making the end known in the beginning, she directs the reader away from the suspense of what happens and away from the representation of events as a linear cause and effect sequence. Claudia concludes her introduction by claiming: "There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (9). The difficulties

of finding a determinate cause are put aside for a more functional description. Morrison's genealogical approach in *The Bluest Eye* is appropriate to her purpose of unmasking the claims to truth in the discourses of western beauty and bourgeoisie morality. The novel is an exploration of how images of physical beauty and moral virtue are disseminated through popular culture, the school, the family and the community, and how they *combine* to serve a system of racial and sexual oppression.

The Dick and Jane passage, which opens the novel and reappears in parts as chapter headings, represents, in Foucauldian terms, the norm or standard against which all subjects of a discipline are measured. By opening the novel with this passage Morrison links the two most important institutions that discipline young bodies, the family and the school. For young children literacy means acquiring a discourse that normalizes family relationships. Dick and Jane readers represented the American family as a white, middle class, harmonious unit. In the novel the three black families are distributed in a hierarchical relation to the story book family. The idea of the school as a disciplining institution whose effects are extended to the family is carried through in the characterization of Geraldine, whose orderly and beautiful house appears to place her family closest to the story book model. Geraldine, like others of her class, had learned "how to get rid of the funkiness" in "land-grant colleges" and "normal schools" (68). Her domestic skills were acquired in the Home Economics Department where she learned how to make souffles (70-71). Further down the pyramid are the MacTeers, who lack social status, but are successful in their struggle to survive the harsh climate and contingencies of life. The Breedloves in their disorder, violence and suffering are at the bottom and represent the greatest distance from the norm. While the Dick/Jane family may have little if anything to do with the characters' experience, it remains a powerful construct through which they learn to evaluate their lives. In showing literacy to be a force of subjugation, Morrison revises the slave narrative tradition that links literacy to freedom.

In the epigraph to the novel the Dick/Jane passage is repeated first without any punctuation and second without any space between letters. This dismembering of language has its corollary in Claudia's desire to dismember white baby dolls and little white girls in order to discover "the secret of the magic they weaved on others" (22). The

secret, however, is not to be found in the language, the object, or even the person that transmits the images of normalization. "Doll's we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts... ." Maureen Peal, a "high yellow dream child" screams at Claudia: "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly," and Claudia considers the "wisdom, accuracy, and relevance" of Maureen's words (61). Claudia realizes the "truth" of these words is a constructed truth, but its source of power eludes her.

And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful and not us. (62)

In Foucauldian terms the invisible "thing" that Claudia fears, the "thing" that includes some and excludes others, that ranks and classifies individuals, that creates asymmetries according to a standard of beauty is an entire disciplinary structure, a mode of power. The norms and hierarchies of disciplinary power are maintained by a continual surveillance, where "subjects are presented as objects to the observation of a power that [is] manifested only by its gaze" (*Discipline and Punish* 188). While power makes its subjects visible, it remains invisible:

Disciplinary power... is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (*Discipline and Punish* 187).

Maureen Peal may not be "the Enemy," but she manifests the gaze of an invisible power, a power that is implicit in the body of Shirley Temple, of white baby dolls, of Mary Jane Candy wrappers, of Jean Harlow and all the other symbols of western beauty that gaze on the characters of *The Bluest Eye*. Foucault describes surveillance as "an uninterrupted play of calculated gazes" that functions not only "from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally" (177). Thus surveillance is carried out by individuals who are themselves under surveillance and inscribed in the same disciplinary system as the objects of their surveillance. Maureen identifies blackness as the mark of visibility which makes Pecola, Claudia and Frieda

less than herself. The passage is just one instance in the novel where we see the normalizing gaze coming from within the black community. Maureen Peal provides an example of Foucault's analysis of the individual as produced by power. While Maureen uses her power to exclude and repress, she is ultimately a product of the same power she exercises. Because she identifies with the subject position created by the discourse of western beauty, one can see her as fabricated by power as well as exercising it.

The power of the gaze and the trap of visibility are important motifs throughout *The Bluest Eye*. The opening section "Autumn" is framed by two scenes where Claudia describes and resists the gaze of her white neighbor, Rosemary Villanucci. At the beginning of "Autumn" Rosemary is sitting in her father's Buick "eating bread and butter." She tells Claudia and Frieda that they can't come in. Claudia narrates, "We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that *wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes...*" (emphasis mine 12). The mixture of anger with jealous desire in Claudia's response suggests the difficulty of resistance; the desire for the other's place acknowledges the other's power. Rosemary's eyes reappear at the end of "Autumn" in the menstruation scene:

...I saw a pair of fascinated eyes in a dough-white face. Rosemary was watching us. I grabbed for her face and succeeded in scratching her nose. She screamed and jumped back.

"Mrs. MacTeer! Mrs. MacTeer!" Rosemary hollered. "Frieda and Claudia are out here playing nasty!..." (27).

Pecola experiences puberty under the surveillance of a white gaze that measures her distance from the norms of physical beauty and virtue and view her as an object of fascination. Under Rosemary's gaze the categories of blackness and sexuality are linked to moral corruption implied by the term, "nasty." Pecola becomes the object of a prurient interest. Rosemary's gaze constitutes a matrix of racial and sexual oppression that is repeated in the scene where the school boys, encircle Pecola and chant: "Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked" (55). The circle is the prison of a discourse that equates, blackness, ugliness and sin; Pecola, trapped within this circle becomes the visible expression of the boys' "exquisitely learned self-hatred" (55). Pecola "covers her eyes" in a gesture of shame and a characteristic attempt to protect herself from the violating gaze of others by "disappearing."

Yet, it is important to note that both of these scenes are followed by a temporary reprieve for Pecola. Once Mrs. MacTeer understands the situation, "her eyes were sorry," and she tells Rosemary to go home, "the show is over" (28). Pecola is taken into the bathroom to be washed; outside the door Claudia and Frieda can hear the restorative music of their mother's laughter. In the second episode Frieda comes to Pecola's rescue by hitting one of the boys over the head and breaking the circle. The progressive victimization of Pecola does not occur without interruption. Both the MacTeer family and the three prostitutes offer Pecola alternate spaces for development, yet, finally, these spaces are not adequate to save Pecola from madness. The pervasive tone of loss in the novel stems not from the lack of resistance, but from its failure to disrupt the system of power that can finally bend even the desire for love and the impulse for freedom to its own ends.

There is an evident similarity between Pecola's initiation into womanhood and her father, Cholly's initiation into manhood. At age fourteen Cholly's first sexual experience in a dark pine forest is interrupted by two white men who shine bright lights on the couple and force Cholly to perform at gun point: "Get on wid it, nigger... an make it good" (117). Under the gaze Cholly can only "simulate what had gone on before" (117). Powerless to resist the hunters and overcome by hatred and shame, Cholly transfers these emotions to the girl beneath him. The significance of a private sexual act is literally constructed under a public gaze. For both Pecola and her father the trap of visibility functions at the site of sexually formative experience; both are seen by white eyes who construct black bodies as objects of vicarious pleasure.

Cholly Breedlove's love for Pauline, however, is not determined by his adolescent humiliation. Initially, Cholly and Pauline are "young, loving and full of energy" (92). Their brief romance is another space in the novel where the gaze does not operate. While Morrison certainly does not idealize these characters' southern beginnings, it is not until they come to Lorain, in search of work and a better standard of living, that their personalities and their marriage disintegrate. The pressures they face are described in cultural and commercial terms. Pauline's isolation increases through the loss of community.

"I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed around before was something hateful, but they didn't come

around too much. I mean, we didn't have too much truck with them. Just now and then in the fields, or at the commissary. But they want all over us. Up north they was everywhere—next door, downstairs, all over the streets—and colored folks few and far between. Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was the loneliest time of my life" (93).

Pauline begins to straighten her hair, buy new clothes and wear make-up, hoping that other women will "cast favorable glances her way" (94). The couple begin, what is to become, a constant quarrel over money, so in order to pay for the expense of fashioning herself appropriately, Pauline turns her love for domestic labor into a cash benefit. She goes to work in white women's homes, neglecting her own. After their children are born, the Breedloves move into a converted store where the furnishings are "conceived, manufactured, shipped and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed and indifference" (31). The store/home symbolizes a conflation of commercial and domestic space revealing the extent to which the Breedlove's private lives have been thoroughly interpenetrated by market values. The mass-marketed furniture symbolizes the Breedlove's ethical and spiritual decline. The "ugly" Breedloves are on display in their store; created by the subjugating gaze of others, they are ironic products of their desire to assimilate into an alien community. In the south Cholly experiences the gaze of the white hunter as an abrupt and cruel rupture; in the north the gaze is diffuse, omnipresent and commercial.

While *The Bluest Eye* is about the power of gazes to subjugate, it is also about the necessity of re-visioning. Nowhere is this more clear than the climatic scene where Cholly rapes Pecola. The reader, who has been led to condemn the classifying and voyeuristic gazes of Maureen Peal, Rosemary Villanucci, Geraldine and the rest, is challenged to view Cholly's abhorrent act as a result of complex, tangled motivations, and to empathize with the father as well as the daughter. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Toni Morrison stated that she prepared her readers for this scene in order to get them to really *look at it*."

I tell you at the beginning of *The Bluest Eye*, on the very first page what happened, but now I want you to go with me and look at this, so when you get to the scene where the father rapes the daughter, which is as awful a thing, I suppose, as can be imagined, by the time you get there, it's almost irrelevant because I want you to *look at him and see*

his love for his daughter and his powerlessness to help her pain. By that time his embrace, the rape, is all the gift he has left (125).

In the very long paragraph that leads up to the rape Cholly is watching Pecola as she washes dishes with her back to him. This scene presents a sharp contrast to the previous and subsequent sightings of Pecola. When the store owner, Mr. Yacobowski's eyes encounter Pecola, there is a "vacuum... a total absence of human recognition" (42). When Geraldine looks at Pecola she sees an intruder, "a nasty little black bitch" who brings disorder to her home (75). In contrast to these other cursory and dismissive gazes, Cholly's gaze lingers; it discovers Pecola's sorrowful existence, her "whipped," unhappy look. Then his gaze turns back against itself forcing Cholly to look inward to experience his own failure. Feeling "revulsion, guilt, pity, then love" (127) as he looks at his daughter, Cholly experiences the anger and guilt of a father who has nothing to give a child. Pecola never turns around, but Cholly precedes to imagine his daughter's gaze upon him: "If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him—the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all?" (127) What finally triggers the rape, is Pecola's small gesture with her foot that reminds Cholly of his original love for Pauline and fills him with "softness... a tenderness, a protectiveness" (128). Because Pecola never turns around to meet her father's gaze, the reader must view the scene through the rapist's eyes alone and acknowledge that an act of destruction originated in an impulse of love. By constructing Cholly's motivations in this way, Morrison ironically reflects on Pecola's desire to be loved. Love is de-romanticized. Love can not transcend the disciplinary structures that subjugate bodies.

By constructing Cholly's motives as complex and by comparing his life to that of a blues musician, the novel also reflects on the link between discourse and power. Foucault discusses how the human sciences (sociology, psychology, etc.) use language to extend disciplinary methods. In feudal society the chronicle of a person's life "formed part of the rituals of his power" (*Discipline and Punish* 191). But in modern society individual lives are frequently described for the purpose of increasing social control and domination. Surveillance in modern disciplinary systems occurs in part through the documentation of people's lives in language (especially the lives of children, the

sick, and criminals).

This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection (*Discipline and Punish* 192)

To the extent that characters in many realistic and, especially, naturalistic novels often represent psychological or sociological types, such fiction is an adjacent literary discourse to the discourses of the human sciences. Morrison's departure from realistic technique and style, especially her mode of characterization, is instrumental to her purpose of exposing the way racism is perpetuated through a subjugating discourse.

Compare, for example, the difference between Morrison's description of Cholly and Richard Wright's description of Bigger Thomas. In the final section of *Native Son* the reader views Bigger through Max's lengthy Marxist analysis that explains Bigger's actions as a direct consequence of social forces over which he had no control. Bigger is analyzed as a case of psychopathology created by racism. Max's words create a mirror by which Bigger comes to know himself. While Wright, through Max, makes Bigger very describable in language, Morrison pointedly tells her readers that Cholly can *not* be described in language: "The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician" (125). Words, finally, can not fully express the paradoxes of Cholly's life, while music, particularly the blues, is a medium that might give form to the combination of joy and pain, love and hate that make up Cholly's character and experience. This distrust of language is consistent with a Foucauldian analysis of discourse. Morrison creates characters that resist psychological or sociological labels by employing a lyrical, non-realistic style that challenges her readers to view not only events and characters, but cultural values in unexpected ways.

By describing Cholly as a "free" man," the narrator de-romanticizes freedom in the same way she has de-romanticized love. Cholly is free simply because he is not bound to the moral codes of his community. He is neither the heroic individual who exposes social injustice by placing himself in opposition to society, nor is he the criminal whose actions threaten social destruction. In other words, Morrison breaks apart the opposition between society and freedom, the formula of so many narratives of emancipation. The discourse of "free-

dom" like that of "love" can not be detached from the lives of disciplined bodies. Cholly's "freedom" as well as the society's "morality" are *both* functions of social control, of the power that subjugates bodies. Cholly's status as outsider, his violation of the moral code, make him a delinquent in the eyes of the community. Foucault describes the production of delinquency and the moralization of the lower classes as the primary methods of de-politicizing crime, keeping the lower class divided among themselves and thus subjugated to power (*Discipline and Punish* 257–292). The ritualized violence of Pauline and Cholly's marriage suggest that "morality" and "freedom" are placed in opposition in a discourse that serves existing power relations. Pecola, rejected by her mother and raped by her father, is the victim of this opposition.

As just suggested, Pauline's position in the disciplinary structure is drawn in counterpoint to Cholly's. Her character clearly illustrates how the discourses of beauty and virtue create "intelligible" and "useful" bodies. Drawing from Foucault, Susan Bordo defines the "intelligible body" as our cultural and aesthetic conceptions of the body, and the "useful body" as the practice that is used to achieve these norms (25–26). Bordo stresses the importance of visual images in the creating of the intelligible feminine body: "With the advent of movies and television, the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through the deployment of standardized visual images." As a result femininity has become a matter of constructing an "appropriate surface presentation of the self" (Bordo 17). In *The Bluest Eye* Pauline receives her "education in the movies," where she learns "to equate physical beauty with virtue," and to assign every face she looks at a "category in the scale of absolute beauty" (97). Pauline, who from childhood liked to "arrange things" and "line things up in rows" (88), is one of Morrison's artists without an art form: "She missed—without knowing what she missed—paints and crayons" (89). Her education in the movies provides her with a culturally acceptable system of creativity. Pauline does her hair up like Jean Harlow and tries to, in Bordo's words, construct the "appropriate surface presentation of the self."

She fails. After losing a front tooth, Pauline "settled down to just being ugly" (98). But Pauline is characterized by her ability to make use of her "defects." She learns to wear her ugliness "as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of character, for support of a role she fre-

quently imagined was hers—martyrdom" (34–5). If she can't be beautiful, she will be virtuous. "She came into her own with the women who despised her, by being more moral than they" (100). Pauline is the consummate performer always able to find a role in the scheme of things, a place within the disciplinary system. As Foucault would say, she "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; [she] makes them play spontaneously upon [herself]; [she] inscribes in [herself] the power relation in which [she] simultaneously plays both roles; she becomes the principle of [her] own subjection" (*Discipline and Punish* 202–203). Pauline's position as the "ideal servant" in the white family represents her availability as an agent of and for power. "Power, praise and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she had never had—a nickname—Polly" (101). As Pauline rises in the esteem of the white family she works for, her own family disintegrates. Her daughter, Pecola is the victim of the Manichean dialectic of Pauline's double life. That Pecola comes to represent the blackness her mother detests is implied in one of the novel's most painful scenes where Pecola spills the pie of "blackish blueberries" (86) in the kitchen of the white family.

Pecola, not surprisingly, is named by her mother for a character in a movie, although she seems to be unaware of the origin of her name until Maureen Peal points it out. However, the dark Pecola does not resemble the "pretty...mulatto" girl in *An Imitation of Life* (57), and Mrs. Breedlove finds her daughter ugly from day one. Given a name which only serves to mark her distance from the norm of beauty, it is hardly surprising that Pecola blames her miserable home and school life on her own "ugliness." Pecola finds that teachers and other adults avoid looking at her. Underlying the absence or vacancy on their gaze is "distaste," a distaste she associates with her blackness, a distaste "lurking in the eyes of all white people" (42).

Pecola tries to escape the brutality of her life by making her body disappear. During her parents' fights she closes her eyes (as she did when surrounded by the school boys) and succeeds in making all her body parts fade away, except for her eyes. She comes to believe that the secret of "the ugliness that [makes] her ignored or despised" is in the eyes (39). Thus, Pecola prays to God for a miracle, for blue eyes:

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different (40).

Pecola's desire for blue eyes is doubly significant. It not only represents her wish to be loved by looking like the little white girls so prized in her culture, it also represents a tacit knowledge of how power works. Eyes are the organ of sight and Pecola, named, ironically, after an image on the silver screen, is the victim of a power that values and classifies bodies according to norms established and disseminated by visual images. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the "eye" comes to represent "I." Pecola believes that if she can change her eyes, she can change herself, or more importantly the way others perceive her with their eyes. Pecola's desire then reveals not only her culture's racism, it reveals her culture's *method* of perpetuating racism.

Soaphead Church, a West Indian Anglophile, a misanthrope revolted by the human body, and a man who likes to play God, transforms Pecola's desire into a pathological "reality." At the end of the novel Pecola's isolation from the community is complete. She lives in a fantasy world where she has blue eyes and spends her days in silent conversation with an imaginary "friend." Susan Bordo argues that "pathology as embodied protest" is a motif in feminist literature. Pecola's desire for blue eyes can be viewed as this type of "unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive" protest. Like the anorexics that Bordo describes, Pecola has pursued the ideals of her culture "to the point where their destructive potential is revealed for all to see" (Bordo 20-21). Pecola's fate is the logical extreme of the culture's values inscribed on the black body. Like the anorexics, Pecola's pursuit of her culture's image of the body beautiful is a way to seek power, but her experience of power is a self-destructive, dangerous illusion. Soaphead Church believes that his gift to Pecola will allow her to "live happily ever after" (143). The reader sees otherwise in the concluding section where Pecola in conversation with her "friend" agonizes over whether or not her eyes are blue enough. The normalizing gaze turned inward is relentless and Pecola has become thoroughly imprisoned by it.

Even Claudia, who wants Pecola's baby to live, who scratches Rosemary's eyes, and who disassembles white baby dolls, is not immune from worshipping whiteness. The retrospective point of view allows Claudia to describe both her resistance and the way in which it is folded back and made available for discipline. The attraction of Shirley Temple for both Frieda and Pecola eludes Claudia because she is younger than they. Claudia states that she "had not yet arrived

at the turning point in the development of [her] psyche which would allow [her] to love [Shirley Temple]" (19). The turning point comes when Claudia experiences shame over her own violence directed at little white girls.

When I learned how repulsive this disinterested violence was, that it was repulsive because it was disinterested, my shame floundered about for refuge. The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned that the change was adjustment without improvement" (22).

"Maturity" requires that Claudia adopt a discourse of virtue. Even though Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola and Claudia respond to power differently, at some point each is motivated by shame—shame over a lost tooth, shame over "blackness," shame over one's own violent response to the things and people that embody the norm. Shame inscribes each character in a discourse of virtue that reinforces cultural norms. Thus, Morrison clearly shows how closely associated the discourses of beauty and virtue really are and how they act together to reinforce one another.

The Bluest Eye exposes a power that classifies and subjugates bodies, that produces different subjectivities within its discourse, and that is disseminated by a normalizing gaze which turns its subjects into agents of power. In short, there is a close resemblance between Foucault's understanding of the workings of power in modern society and Morrison's understanding of racism. While both writers emphasize the difficulties involved in resisting power, they seem to suggest that an analysis of how power works is the first step toward change. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* Foucault writes:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (101)

Foucault goes on to describe how the discourses of the human sciences which increased social control over sexuality, also made possible the emergence of a "reverse discourse." He describes, specifically, how homosexuality "began to speak in its own behalf" by using the

same vocabulary and categories that had condemned it to demand its legitimacy (101).

Similarly, the black empowerment movement reversed the discourse of white supremacy: "Black Power" and "Black is Beautiful" became nationally heard slogans in the late sixties. Morrison stated that she wrote *The Bluest Eye* between 1965 and 1969 "during great social upheaval in the life of black people." Just as Claudia is telling a long kept secret, Morrison saw her novel as a "public exposure of a private confidence." ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 20). *The Bluest Eye* exposes a community enthralled by the value of whiteness, and the narrator's angry response. As such it not only critiques the past, but provides a genealogy for the reverse discourse on race that emerged in the sixties. Claudia's childhood resistance to a culture enamored by western models of beauty is more visceral than articulate, but it marks an opening for change. The existence of a reverse discourse in the culture that produced the novel informs the more sophisticated narrative voice that modulates Claudia's childhood memories. By setting the novel in Lorain, Ohio, a locale where the schools and some neighborhoods are racially mixed, and by writing the novel at a time after the legal battle against segregation had been won, Toni Morrison challenges her readers to reconsider the nature of racism. The traditional "protest novel" focuses on the injustice of race-based exclusion that results from legal or defacto segregation. Morrison has revised this text, by exploring racism less as a problem of exclusion, than as a problem of pressure to assimilate to destructive cultural values.

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AFFIRMING CHARACTERS, COMMUNITIES,
AND CHANGE:
DIALOGISM IN TONI MORRISON'S *SULA*

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In a 1979 interview with Toni Morrison, Robert B. Stepto says that he is struck by how *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* manage to combine two quite different visions of the African American community. On the one hand, Stepto observes, Morrison describes the communities in exquisite detail; on the other hand, each community as a whole "seems to perform different functions in the novels" (213). Morrison explains that in creating the Bottom she had two rather incompatible ideas working at the same time: the complexity of the people living in the community and also a sense of "cohesiveness" that exists in a community. Morrison says:

[W]hen I wrote *Sula* I was interested in making the town, the community, the neighborhood, as strong as a character as I could, without actually making it "The Town, they," because the most extraordinary thing about any group, and particularly our group, is the fantastic variety of people and things and behavior and so on. But nevertheless there was a cohesiveness there in my mind and it was true in my life. (214)

Morrison's life began in the Midwestern town of Lorain, Ohio, where she lived until she was seventeen. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison tells Stepto, she was "clearly pulling straight out of what autobiographical information I had" (213). But in *Sula*, Morrison says that she is concerned less with a specific region than this extraordinary idea of the community as a "character": "I felt a very strong sense of place, not in terms of the country or the state, but in terms of the details, the feeling, the mood of the community, the town." Indeed, the book opens by lamenting the loss of the wonderfully detailed places within a more or less closed community: The Time and a Half

Pool Hall, Irene's Palace of Cosmetology, and Reba's Grill, "where the owner cooked in her hat because she couldn't remember the ingredients without it" (3).

Yet the community is, as Morrison tells us, a divided character, displaying tensions between its "fantastic variety" of people and places, and, especially in relation to the character Sula, it is also a unified and oppressive "They," rising in one voice against Sula in response to her lawlessness—to the incomprehensibility of her character. As a unified "They," the community consolidates itself against its perceived enemy into definable, conventional roles of wife, husband, and mother, giving up its wonderful quality of variety for an oppressive sameness. Depending on how and especially where one looks at the community, then, it appears as both a "fantastic variety" and a "They," two characteristics which we cannot logically synthesize into a comprehensive whole, for there is no privileged perspective from which to say—with absolute determinacy—that the community is finally one or the other. In this same way, *Sula* questions the efficacy of closed readings of the community, characters, and the novel itself; indeed, *Sula* vigorously resists unified interpretations, thematizes their limitations, and instead offers as both necessary and valuable the irreducible complexities of character and place.

Indeed, even the name and origin of "the Bottom" emphasize the uncertain nature of this hill community. Cheated by "a good white farmer" who said the hills were the "bottom of heaven," a slave takes the hills in exchange for labor rather than fertile land in the valley. The result of this "nigger joke" is that the hills take on the peculiar name "The Bottom," "where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter" (5). From the perspective of the black farmer in the hills who cannot leave, the Bottom provides a very hard existence; and yet, from the perspective of a visiting hunter, the Bottom is a place of considerable beauty, where "heavy trees that sheltered the shacks up on the Bottom were wonderful to see." The narrator tells us: "And the hunters who went there sometimes wondered in private whether the white farmer was right after all. Maybe it was the bottom of heaven" (5-6). Depending on the context of different characters in the book, then, the Bottom is either an obstacle to one's very survival or a moment of aesthetic appreciation, two extremely different and incompatible interpretations of its meaning. And yet, the

Bottom is somehow both.

Interpretations of the Bottom vary not only among persons from quite different economic positions, but also from the time in history that they contemplate the Bottom. In its one-hundred-year history, from sometime before the Civil War to just before 1965, the Bottom changes from the worst land in an agrarian society, to the most expensive land in an industrial society. While the valley had become a city where "streets were hot and dusty with progress," the Bottom in 1965 is the place where "only rich white folks were building homes" (166) and the Medallion City Golf Course. Thus the value of the community in *Sula* depends upon both the perspective of the viewer and the time the viewer sees it: there is no absolute vantage point for making judgments about the value of the community. The Bottom is many and one; it is wondrous and harsh. Yet it is also a place or site where different people (themselves complex) come together and form a language and a culture, the meaning and value of which constantly change in relation to varying perspectives and the inexorable passage of time.

In other words, despite its illogical beginnings and its oppressive poverty, the Bottom provides a useful, valuable *place* (in Morrison's complex idea of the word)—with both positive and negative characteristics—in which people can live, communicate, and survive together. Consequently, while the death of the Bottom and the integration of its members into the town below are certainly welcome as a sign of social progress, its loss is, according to Nel, cause for profound sadness. Nel muses: "You could go downtown and see colored people working in the dime stores and behind counters, even handling money with cash register keys around their necks" (163). At the same time, though, Nel remembers the "fantastic variety" of people who occupied the Bottom, whose lives and values were substantial, material, making the Bottom "a real place" (164). While few would argue against this kind of social progress, *Sula* shows that even this does not possess unambiguous value, for it comes at the cost of the dissolution of the Bottom: people, friendships, the culture, each of contradictory value, none of which can be reproduced once it is gone.

Morrison says that she wanted to make the "neighborhood as strong a character" as she could. The Bottom—like the characters who live there—contains inconsistencies, paradoxes, and uncertainties; and any definite, unambiguous judgments about its value come

with a price since these judgments inevitably ignore some vital part of its complexity, its essential subjectivity. These judgments run counter to our ability to "hear," as M.M. Bakhtin says, the subjective, conflicting *voices* of others—a term Bakhtin uses to signify a unique site of ideology, personality, intellect, and everything else which makes up the total, yet incomprehensible effect of a subjective persona. The novel as a site or space where these conflicting voices converge is the "polyphonic novel"—a genre, Bakhtin tells us, which actually began in the works of writers such as Shakespeare and Rabelais, but which is most fully realized in the work of Dostoevsky. Of course, rich and complex characters have been essential to literature for a long time, but what distinguishes Dostoevsky's characters from traditional "round characters," Bakhtin argues, is that they do not exist in the service of the artist's conception of a whole: that is, they are not bound to the constraints of the author's own voice. Rather, they achieve an "astonishing internal independence" because Dostoevsky "was able, in an objective and artistic way, to visualize and portray personality as another, as someone else's personality, without making it lyrical or merging it with his own voice" (12–13). Bakhtin explains:

What unfolds in [Dostoevsky's] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (6)

When critics argue for a single meaning in a work of literature, they assume that each element in a work exists in the service of an overall authorial design, a critical perspective derived from the organic theory of poetry from the Romantics (especially Coleridge) to the New Critics. But the novels of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin tells us, resist this kind of interpretation: Dostoevsky's characters not only possess equal rights as independent sovereign consciousnesses, but also have a status which is equivalent to that of the author, existing "as free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even rebelling against him" (6).

The polyphonic novel, then, requires that Dostoevsky (as well as the critic) relinquish total or "monologic" control of his book, and also that he listen carefully to the nuances of his characters' conflicting subjectivities, a process which Bakhtin refers to as "dialogue." Not

only is dialogue the means by which Dostoevsky creates his characters, Bakhtin tells us, it is also the theme of his works. In Dostoevsky's novels, the "heroes suffer destruction because they cannot wholeheartedly affirm the other"; indeed, Bakhtin writes, the "[a]ffirmation (and nonaffirmation) of someone else's 'I' by the hero—this is the theme of Dostoevsky's work" (10). In the literature of Dostoevsky, then, everything depends on one's ability to "hear" the profoundly subjective "voices" of others, both for the characters and the creator of the polyphonic novel.

Likewise Sula asks readers to affirm what we do not always logically comprehend: the community and the people in the community, just as we might affirm our own contradictory communities, friends, and selves. Indeed, Sula provides an example of the heroic act of affirmation between Nel and Sula, who are in many ways different, yet who comprise by far the most positive relationship in the book. The narrator says: "Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes" (53). The novel suggests that their markedly different personalities are a result of their different upbringing, Nel having had her imagination driven underground and Sula having had little direction in the Peace household. Yet these differences are precisely what make Nel and Sula so compelling in one another. For instance, Sula "loved" to sit in what Nel considered to be an oppressively neat household, while Nel "preferred" Sula's "woolly" house, where the mother "never scolded nor gave directions" (29). Even before they met, Sula and Nel are open to difference, even compelled by it, dreaming of someone who fulfills complementary roles in an imagined, fairy-tale existence. Nel waits for a "fiery prince" while Sula dreams of galloping on a "gray-and-white horse, in full view of someone who shared both the taste and the speed" (52).

By "affirming" each other's differences, Sula and Nel create their own world, finding in their friendship a source of meaning and value within a community that ignores them, just as, in a more general sense, the people in the community find meaning and value with each other because the larger world discriminates against them. The narrator says: "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden them, they had set about creating something else to be" (52). And the same might be said about the community—that because the members are

not white, they too are denied full freedom and opportunity in the valley. Furthermore, like the community, the friendship between Sula and Nel contains a tension between their own "fantastic variety" and the intensity of their close friendship. Their friendship, in other words, does not assume the terms of a dialectic moving toward synthesis, with the connotation of absolute wholeness or unity, as Anna Shannon argues (10). It is, rather, a dialogue (again to Bakhtin), an always unfinished affirmation of otherness, requiring constant, active participation from both sides. For instance, even when they were quite close "girls together," Nel and Sula do not always understand the motives of the other. When Sula cuts off part of her finger to frighten neighborhood bullies, Nel believes that Sula's motivation was self-preservation: "Sula was so scared she had mutilated herself, to protect herself" (101). Sula's actual motivation was much different, for she was attempting to imitate Nel's calmness to protect her "When Sula imitated her, or tried to, those long years ago, it always ended up in some action noteworthy not for its coolness but mostly for its being bizarre. The one time she tried to protect Nel, she had cut off her own finger tip and earned not Nel's gratitude but her disgust" (141). Sula and Nel are not the same person; they are distinct people with different personalities who nevertheless manage to become like a single entity by accepting their differences. In short, like the Bottom, they constitute both a "fantastic variety" and a uniform "they."

Although their friendship constantly changes in relation to each other and to those around them, this lack of certainty in no way diminishes the friendship's meaning and value—rather the opposite. The intensity of their friendship emerges from both Nel's and Sula's profound desire to escape their isolation and also their ability to embrace each other's differences. This contradictory friendship, in fact, proves to be the most valuable experience in both their lives. According to Sula, "Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her" (119). Nel is, in other words, a Bakhtinian hero who "hears" Sula's subjectivity. Indeed, one reason why Nel and Sula's friendship has such power is that it negates neither the integrity nor the value of Nel and Sula as individual worlds—indeed depends on that difference for its power. The novel tells us: "Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personalities" (53). The friendship is a moment of balance between sameness and difference, where sameness is not,

for the most part, affirmed at the expense of difference, nor difference at the expense of sameness. In fact, we can see the two together in balance, like the community, as a kind of "character" who has different, perhaps contradictory sides of a personality. As Morrison tells Stepto: "And so I wanted to say, as much as I could say it without being overbearing, that there was a little bit of both in each of those two women, and that if they had been one person, I supposed they would have been a rather marvelous person" (216).

When Sula returns after a ten-year absence, their relationship has drastically changed. Sula soon discovers that Nel has accepted the ways of the community; likewise, Nel finds that Sula has lost all desire to be a part of her or anyone else's world. Their affirmation of one another as "girls together" is lost when Nel and Sula no longer "hear" each other, when they no longer accept what does not fit into their own world views. Rather than attempt to understand one another, Sula and Nel see each other's worlds as moral failings. Instead of a heroic affirmation of difference—worlds in dialogue—the relationship between Sula and Nel becomes one of worlds in collision.

Yet, as with the community, moral judgments about either Nel or Sula fall well short of articulating their complex, contradictory lives. As adults, both Nel and Sula are in some respects extremely positive characters; but at the same time, Morrison tells us, both possess a "fatal flaw" (Stepto 216). Thus, like the Bottom and their friendship, Nel and Sula as individuals constitute yet another contradictory site of meaning, where a lack of a single interpretation of them in no way detracts from the value of their lives. Morrison tells us that Nel is "a warm, conventional woman, one of those people you know are going to pay the gas bill and take care of the children" (215). Like the community (Morrison says, "Nel is the community"), Nel and others, such as Eva and Helen, create a place, a home, for their family to survive. Just as Eva appears to have sacrificed her leg for money, other women in the community sacrifice parts of their lives so that their children can carry forward. For this reason, Morrison tells us that Nel is "magnificent" (Stepto 255). At the same time, this willingness to sacrifice herself is Nel's "fatal flaw," for once she accepts the ways of the community, which emphasizes conformity against difference, Nel can no longer accept Sula's unconventional world view nor, indeed, any other kind of difference, but instead places any deviance from the community norms into the hierarchical context of morality.

In other words, Nel's vision of the community, her own small frame of reference, takes on the character of a universal philosophy, demanding sameness, using its own codes of behavior as the moral arbiter for all human endeavor. In short, Nel's sacrifice of her life to her family and her community is both a virtue and a blindness.

Upon Sula's return to the Bottom, she and Nel quickly rekindle the warmth of their friendship, and Nel feels "new, soft and new" (98), once again affirming someone so different from herself and the community. Yet Sula's sexual liaison with Nel's husband, Jude, foregrounds the deep-rooted differences that have grown in Sula's absence, and neither Sula nor Nel is able to understand the situation from the other's point of view. This conflict in fact becomes a defining moment for both Sula and Nel, Sula losing her contact with the community, and Nel losing the one person who could provide her with the means for a self-examined life, the one person who would keep her from completely accepting the ways of the community. Morrison says of persons like Nel, "living totally by the law and surrendering completely to it without questioning anything sometimes makes it impossible to know anything about yourself" (Stepto 216–217). After Jude leaves her, Nel, sick with pain and loss, wanders her house, looking for a "place to be...a small place" (107), and kneels down in the bathroom, an indication of the extent to which her life, both internal and externally, has become an enclosed box, a sequestered frame of reference. Like Eva, whose hate for Boy Boy shuts her up in her room, or Plum and Tar Baby whose personal demons place them in a small room, Nel also closes the door on the possibility of change and growth. Only a kind of blindness—the gray fur ball hanging just out of her vision, an emblem of her limited vision—allows Nel to emerge, metaphorically carrying the closed room within her, to life in the world.

In her enclosed frame of reference, Nel almost completely embraces the values of the community, forgoing the balance of sameness and different not only between herself and Sula but between herself and the community. Yet in the final chapter, after the passing away of decades and the Bottom, Nel realizes, in a general way, that there was something about her relationship with Sula which made her life extraordinary. Morrison comments: "Nel does not make that 'leap'—she doesn't know herself. Even at the end, she doesn't know. She's just beginning. She just barely grabs on at the end in those last lines"

(216). Nel is awakened to the significance of her relationship to Sula when Eva accuses her of killing Chicken Little. Shocked, Nel informs Eva that Sula killed him, to which Eva replies: "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you?" Indeed, the "difference" is everything to Nel. She conceives herself as fundamentally opposed to Sula, for she has embraced the closed structure of the community which has ostracized Sula. But because of Eva's comment, Nel, in a moment of rare introspection, re-examines her life with Sula when they were "girls together" and especially her role in Chicken Little's death, and discovers a sense of herself that bewilders her. When Chicken Little drowned, Nel recalls, she did not, as she had always believed, feel a sense of calm due to maturity, but instead she felt "the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation" (170). As Deborah McDowell says, "After years of repression, Nel must own her complicity in Chicken Little's drowning, a complicity that is both sign and symbol of the disowned piece of herself" (85). The combination of her inability to remember the pain of Jude's leaving, Eva's charge that she and Sula were the same person, and the general remembrance of solidarity at the moment of Chicken Little's death—together cause Nel to reconsider her difference with Sula (along with, perhaps, difference in general), to affirm what is different and perhaps incomprehensible, and to cry, "We was girls together" (174).

Similar to Nel's partial understanding of her, Sula is likewise unaware of the value of Nel's complex, contradictory adult life, seeing only Nel's fear of difference from the community, not her "magnificent" willingness to sustain communal codes which in turn ensure individual and cultural survival. Sula accurately views communal sites or structures as inherently inhibiting, but she does not acknowledge the community's ability to provide a home for the "fantastic variety" of people, including her grandmother Eva, Shadrack the insane war veteran, Ajax's mother (an "evil conjure women"), or China "the rambunctious whore." Indeed, Sula sees the entire world as a monolithic "they": "It had surprised her a little and saddened her a great deal when Nel behaved the way the others would have. Nel was one of the reasons she had drifted back to Medallion, that and the boredom she found in Nashville, Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Macon, and San Diego. All those cities held the same people, working the same mouths, sweating the same sweat" (120). It is difficult to imagine the Bottom, much less the rest of the world, as

consisting of a single person, yet from the logic of Sula's perspective, which abhors any structure which might restrict her freedom, the world is indeed the same person because, like the Bottom, all places depend on the cultural structure of repeated language and morals (in structuralist terms, "codes") to create meaning and value.

Against all forms of structure, Sula is (like Shadrack, who tips his hat to her) a kind of trickster figure, an example of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, undermining the cultural context (the codes, the oppositions) upon which the Bottom—or anyone else—depends upon for the production of meaning. The novel tells us that Sula has "no self," "no center," and "no ego" (119); consequently, her presence in the community has the disturbing effect of showing the contrived character, the ontological groundlessness, of cultural norms and values. As a result, Sula becomes a "pariah," a threat to the fundamental beliefs of the Bottom, causing the community to protect its values by embracing them ever stronger, consolidating itself into strictly defined conventional roles of wives, mothers, and husbands: "They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (117–118). Yet, the novel suggests, if the community is willing to listen to her, if it is willing to question its own values, then the infusion of a trickster or "carnivalesque" figure would be a healthy rejoinder to the law of the community—an infusion of chance and uncertainty into the community's often oppressive and restrictive codes of conduct. As Barbara Christian writes, "The insularity of the community is a contributing factor to its distinctiveness, but these traditions are seldom challenged and threaten to become obsolete" (67). Because Sula, like a trickster figure, questions all systems which create meaning, she would have made wonderful contributions to art, disciplines whose histories are a record of "tradition and transgression," "conservancy and iconoclasm," to use Robert Grant's terminology (91). The novel says: "Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous" (121).

Thus, Sula's genius is her ability and willingness to extricate herself from social structures and to lead an "experimental life," delving into all parts of her profound self. Yet like Nel, Eva, Tar Baby, and Plum,

Sula also ends up in a closed room, the windows boarded, an indication of the degree to which she has become isolated from others. As a kind of trickster figure, Sula acutely perceives and undermines the human desire for uniform codes of behavior and communication, in other words, for monoglossic clarity—a unitary, comfortable language which aids in the communication of already known and accepted meanings and values. But because she rejects the codes of the community, and because she no longer hears the voice of her friend Nel, she is fundamentally cut off from any form of communication with the community. Consequently, her genius, as Morrison tells us, is likewise her “fatal flaw,” for Sula “has trouble making a connection with other people and just feeling that lovely sense of accomplishment of being close in a very strong way” (217). In rejecting the terms by which the community makes sense of the world, by definition denying any possibility of bridging her difference with the community, Sula can no longer communicate her life in a way the community will ever understand. She and the community speak different and incompatible languages, and neither is willing or able to make the effort to learn the other—the mark, in Dostoevsky’s novels, of a hero’s failure.

When members of the community attempt to understand Sula, they use terms which are familiar and meaningful to them, but which are inadequate to Sula’s radical nature. In other words, they do not have a sufficient language to satisfactorily engage her complexity. For example, the community attempts to understand Sula by uncritically fitting her into the black/white dualism which was part and parcel of their lives. Yet, as Hortense Spillers says of Sula, “No Manichean analysis demanding a polarity of interest—black/white, male/female, good/bad—will work here” (296). For instance, they accused her of “the unforgivable thing,” saying that “Sula slept with white men” (112); but China, the “most rambunctious whore in town,” had a white son; and when she died, “everyone stopped what they were doing and turned out in numbers to put the fallen sister away” (172). Moreover, “the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of white women” does not cause them to reflect upon their inconsistent moral standards regarding men and women. Indeed, part of the difficulty in the community’s inability to understand Sula’s radicalness is that she is a woman. This is, her actions are neither different nor worse than those of Jude or Ajax, both of whom are easily accepted into the community. Thus the community—rather than accept either the possibil-

ity that it does not possess a universal language to understand the world or the possibility that Sula may provide a healthy infusion of new terms for understanding, especially involving gender—believes that its own world view is pure and true, a belief that prevents the possibility of self-criticism.

Like Nel, however, the community experiences the pain of being closed in, not as a result of having consolidated itself against Sula, but because of the weather. Soon after Sula’s death the community becomes physically shut in by a hard, disease-ridden freeze that lasts over two months. Its monologic, self-protective character is placed in an icy shell, and, without a mutual enemy, it now feels but cannot escape its own internal contradictions. Within the pressing “vice” of the freeze, the people in the community resume their old tensions: Teapot’s Mamma against motherhood; daughters against mothers-in-law, Canadian blacks against blacks born in Medallion. Like Eva’s hatred which causes her to shut herself in her room, Nel’s pain which causes her to seek a small room, or Sula who ends her life in a boarded room, opposed to the community, the people of the community are also frozen in with their own agony of pain and hatred. When warm weather does finally arrive to melt the ice, coinciding with Shadrack’s National Suicide day, the community forgets its own codes for behavior and gives itself to complete freedom from its closed off existence, even though it does not have the language to understand this new-found freedom. Consequently, no longer concerned about looking foolish, even before the people in the valley, many members of the community join Shadrack on his insane, carnivalesque death march—“just a brief moment, for once, of not feeling fear, of looking at death in the sunshine and being unafraid” (159).

The tragedy of the deaths that occurs from this march suggests that, like Nel and Sula’s friendship, a healthy community should strive for a balance between the extremes of communal law and chaos, between the magnificent qualities of Nel and the experimental life of Sula, between monoglossia and heteroglossia. Robert Grant argues that the “novel is one in which the relative social values of conservancy and iconoclasm are exquisitely balanced and readers are hard put to determine ‘where’ the author’s ultimate sympathies were directed” (91). I would argue, somewhat differently, that balance occurs only during the brief friendship between Sula and Nel; among other elements, such as individuals or in terms of racial division, the

novel demonstrates instead how imbalance leads to oppression and isolation. *Sula* furthermore demonstrates that we do not always possess a language which can cover all realms of discourse. As adults, neither Nel nor Sula have the language which allows them to comprehend one another; nor does the community have the language to understand Sula. Yet, the novel also suggests that it is always possible to adjust our languages so that we can respect and engage difference, or that we can learn new languages to understand difference, as Nel and Sula learn of each other when they were children, if we are willing to listen to the voices of others. *Sula* reminds us that we must be willing to accept the possibility that literary texts, people, and communities sometimes require new or different strategies for reading, which may not in fact equal the complexity of that which we wish to understand. The success of our strategies of reading depends upon our willingness to "listen" carefully to literary texts, to other cultures, to other people—just as we expect others to hear the terms by which we express our own complex lives.

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NOTE

¹For a detailed, insightful discussion of perspective in *Sula*, see Barbara Lounsbury and Grace Ann Hovet, "Principles of Perception in Toni Morrison's *Sula*," *Black American Literature Forum* 13 (1979): 126-129.

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ON A JET PLANE:
JADINE'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY THROUGH PLACE
IN TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY*¹

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Although the cover of the paperback edition of Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* refers to the novel's "extraordinary sense of place," the novel seems more about lack of *place* or home than the presence of it. In the novel Jadine Childs, like other female questers in modern American literature, journeys to locate a place where she can live comfortably, achieve identity in a male-dominated world, and define beauty in her own terms despite those established by the patriarchy. But Jadine's already arduous quest is complicated by her race. White women have difficulty enough seeking place and self hood in a white male world; African-American women find the task even more complex. Symbolizing the conflict, Morrison's quest hero is the protege of a wealthy white couple, Valerian and Margaret Street. He is a retired candy manufacturer from Philadelphia, she his younger lower-class wife from Maine whom he has purchased for her beauty. If, as Barbara Christian asserts (Review 66), Valerian is the wily farmer of the tar baby myth from which the novel gets its title, then his sticky tar baby (wealth, power, white social class) entraps his white wife even more firmly than it does Jadine. Margaret's pathetic attempts to revolt against her husband end in disaster. Though forced to make difficult choices, Jadine manages to journey through art toward freedom, eluding so far as possible Valerian Street's adhesive embrace. In the process, she turns placelessness—a seat in an airplane far above the sites on earth that would entrap her—into a home of sorts.

Readers first hear about Morrison's quest hero from Valerian, who describes Jadine as "honest as they come" (15). Niece to the Streets' longtime employees, Sydney and Ondine, Jadine is a model whose classic beauty is pleasing to the patriarchy. She is on the Isle des

Chevaliers, a mythical island located somewhere in the Caribbean, for a visit with her benefactors, the Streets, who have retired there, and her aunt and uncle. She plans to return soon to Paris. At first glance, Jadine seems to have everything: besides beauty, she possesses intelligence, a successful career, talent as an artist, a superior graduate education in art history, a sharp business sense and plans to open a gallery or boutique. Although her mother is dead, she has two "families" on Isle des Chevaliers who love her.

What motivates Jadine's journey? Unsettling dreams of women wearing large-brimmed hats "like Norma Shearer's and Mae West's and Jeanette MacDonald's" (37) and a trip to a grocery store. While shopping in Paris for a dinner party, Jadine is "transfixed" by a "vision" walking the store's aisles as if she owned the place. The woman is "much too tall" and wears a "long canary yellow dress" (38). She has, Jadine notes using the white patriarchal standards of beauty she has until now embraced, too much hip and breast. Nevertheless, Jadine is stunned by the woman's presence as she "walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down Vs were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gelee as yellow as her dress. The people in the aisles watched her without embarrassment, with full glances instead of sly ones" (38). The woman's movements are as stunning as her physical presence. She selects three eggs from a box of a dozen in the dairy case. "Then she put her right elbow into the palm of her left hand and held the eggs aloft between earlobe and shoulder. She looked up then and they saw something in her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes" (38). She carries the eggs to the cashier who is tongue-tied and can't tell her they must be bought by the dozen or half dozen. The woman places a ten-louis piece on the counter and walks away, "gold tracking the floor and leaving them all behind. Left arm folded over her waist, right hand holding three chalk-white eggs in the air" (37). Long accustomed to her own beauty, Jadine is shocked to be in awe of someone else's: "She would deny it now, but along with everybody else in the market, Jadine gasped. Just a little. Just a sudden intake of air. Just a quick snatch of breath before that woman's woman—that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty—took it all away" (37–38). While Jadine recovers her composure, the woman turns, looks back, and spits at her through clenched teeth.

Thus, Jadine quests out of a fascination with beauty, though now beauty has an ethnic component. The woman in yellow embodies dark beauty that disdains a white ideal. Because Jadine's intellect and spirit have been influenced by white standards, she experiences a moment of uncertainty and alienation, standing alone in the Parisian Supra Market. Suddenly she is isolated from everything she has formerly embraced. "[T]he woman made her feel lonely in a way. Lonely and inauthentic" (40). The future spinning out of focus, Jadine journeys to the Caribbean, to slow things down, to restore her former blissfully positive perspective.

On Isle des Chevaliers, Jadine's job of figuring out who she is and where she's going is complicated by family problems. The Streets—mainland, East Coast outsiders on the island—are caught up in a quiet but intense battle involving their son, Michael; besides, they are out of place themselves. Valerian Street spends much of his time recreating in a greenhouse on Isle des Chevaliers the environment and setting he has left behind in Pennsylvania. Ondine and Sydney, long accustomed to their role as servants to the white couple, are concerned more by old age than by questions of identity. What we learn of Michael, who is soon supposed to visit Isle des Chevaliers, suggests he'd also be little help to Jadine. Years earlier, he has tried to convince her, along with her aunt and uncle, to leave his parents to join a black artists' colony. Although Jadine recognized the absurdity of Michael's romantic and unrealistic idea, it made her feel guilty: "It [the black life] wasn't like what he thought: all grits and natural grace." Jadine concludes, however, that "he did make me want to apologize for what I was doing, what I felt. For liking 'Ave Maria' better than gospel music" (62). Finding someone on Isle des Chevaliers to discuss values and identity with would be difficult.

Enter Son who, like Jadine, is also on a journey; his, however, is to avoid an encounter with himself. Isle des Chevaliers with its magic, mythic horsemen and "placeless" residents is an excellent site to do just that. A stranger who has jumped ship at the beginning of the novel, he is black, "filthy as could be" (71), and is found hiding in the back of Margaret's closet. Only Jadine and Valerian find him anything but horrifying. Responding like a behavioral psychologist with a new mouse for his Skinner box, Valerian puts up the intruder in the guest bedroom after offering him a drink; Jadine visits with the man while he eats, but her fascination with the mysterious intruder is tempered

by uneasiness. Son seems too smart, too powerful. "As long as he burrowed in his plate like an animal, grunting in monosyllables, but not daring to look up, she was without fear. But when he smiled she saw small dark dogs galloping on silver feet" (80). This is the first time Jadine connects Son with a dark animal force, but not the last. And though readers may assume with Sydney that linking Jadine and Son is absurd, everyone is quickly doing just that. As Sydney says to Ondine, "You comparing Jadine to a...a...stinking ignorant swamp nigger? To a wild-eyed pervert who hides in women's closets?" (85-86). The answer is yes.

Because both for a time sense their identity resides not in place but in the other, Jadine and Son's first private encounter is a bombshell exploding in her bedroom. When Son enters, Jadine has been admiring herself in a new baby seal skin coat. An image of death, and, paradoxically, of white, male standards of opulence, the coat is a gift to Jadine from a white boyfriend. Jadine's response to Son is overpowering and contradictory. He is frightening but appealing. His smell hits her first, his eyes that are "as steady and clear as a thief's" second, and his hair third. Son's hair is "physically overpowering, like bundles of long whips or lashes that could grab her and beat her to jelly. And would. Wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail. Uncivilized, reform-school hair. Mau Mau, Attica, chain-gang hair" (97). Generally competent, calm, and over-confident, Jadine is struck dumb by his presence. She is struck not only by his blackness but by his effect on her sexually. Jadine is sure Son can see the prints of her nipples and thighs on the seal skin coat after she takes it off and throws it on the bed. She wants him to cover his body, which she notes is as black and shiny as the seal skin pelts.

Son's fascination with Jadine's "forbidding beauty" is as immediate and potent. He has heard her described around the house as the "copper Venus" (98). Spotting her photograph in a fashion magazine lying open in Jadine's room, he talks to her while dragging his finger along the edges of her blouse in the picture and asking Jadine to read the article's text to him. The article describes a "white" Jadine. She is a graduate, it says, of the Sorbonne, a student of art history, an expert in cloisonne, an American in Paris, and a film actress. In the photograph she is adorned by jewelry worth more than thirty-two thousand dollars, evidence that she has attained status in the white male world that trades in such valuable gems. No matter. Son's finger traces

Jadine's earrings in the photograph. In real-life "Jadine felt her earlobes prickle as she watched him" (100).

Although they are fascinated with one another's "otherness," it is Son who, in avoiding a search for identity, tries to change Jadine, not—at first—the reverse. In fact, changing Jadine is what Son has been trying to do during those early days before discovery, while lurking in the Streets' house. As Jadine slept, Son has tried to project an identity into her while reclining by her bed:

[and he] would lie still and dream steadily the dreams he wanted her to have about yellow houses with white doors which women opened and shouted Come on in, you honey you! and the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church and the white wet sheets flapping on a line..." (102)

Although Son doesn't immediately accomplish his goal of changing Jadine, he "breathe[s] into her the smell of tar and its shiny consistency" (102). Nevertheless, he fears that, awake, Jadine might have her own dreams to counter his, that she might "press her dreams of gold and cloisonne and honey-colored silk into him and then who would mind the pie table in the basement of the church?" (103).

Whereas Jadine is willing to seek her identity as a black through Son, he sees her world—all silk and gold—as bait to be avoided at any cost. Besides, Son's dreams have sexual as well as ethnic implications. Son doesn't seek an equal relationship with Jadine; rather, he would restore the utopia of his fantasies: an orderly world where his needs are met by nurturing black women who call him in from play or who serve up wedges of pie at church socials. He is profoundly threatened by and doesn't begin to perceive a place for himself in the powerful white patriarchy where Jadine moves with considerable, if uncomfortable, ease. Thus, in Jadine's bedroom, attraction quickly degenerates into verbal combat. Son threatens and demeans Jadine and her ethnic retort, "count on it, nigger. You good as dead right now" is answered by his sexual and ethnic one: "Why you little girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?" (103).

Jadine feels guilty about both the ethnic and sexual aspects of their exchange. The ethnic component later keeps her from telling Valerian about Son's aggressive behavior and, back in Paris, will prevent her from telling her friends how well Valerian, a white, treated Son, a black. The sexual component makes her feel shame, which she

ponders uneasily: "Maybe that was it. His smell. Other men had done worse to her and tried worse but she was always able to talk about it and think about it with appropriate disgust and amusement. But not this. He had jangled something in her that was so repulsive, so awful, and he had managed to make her feel that the thing that repelled her was not him, but in her" (105). Without realizing she has done so, Jadine has reached a truth. What repels her is not only ethnic but sexual guilt, and the guilt is not in the world but "in her." She feels guilty because she is African American and female, simultaneously wanting and rejecting the roles American society would impose on her because she is these things. She feels guilty when whites like Michael remind her of her black heritage. She feels guiltier when Son powerfully demonstrates the female aspect of that heritage. Son treats her like a "bitch" dog and, without understanding why, she lets him, "her back to him, not moving, but letting herself be sniffed" (106). This identity is troubling to Jadine because it is antithetical to the one she has created for herself in Europe (cool, collected, powerful beauty). In Paris, Jadine tries to be in control while playing the white male game, in part, by white male rules. Her bedroom exchange with Son reminds her of her vulnerability, her essential powerlessness despite the appearance of control. It explains her weakness in terms of both ethnicity and sex. To be black and female in America means control is an illusion, an impossibility; in Europe, Jadine's chances, because they are partly built on something ephemeral—physical beauty—are only slightly better. Still, in Europe she has a chance. Her physical beauty gives her power there, and Africans do not have a history of slavery in France.

And there is another aspect to Jadine's guilt, one that Barbara Christian briefly alludes to. Jadine feels guilty for having accepted aid from "the white enemy." Because white men have traditionally controlled money, and therefore power, only black women, because of (not using) their sex, have been able to escape from oppression with the white patriarchy's help. On some level aware of this fact, Jadine feels guilty for her success and wants to align herself with Son. She unconsciously senses in him, however, a psychopathology one might expect under the circumstances. Fearing he might lose what he's never had, Son would imprison Jadine in a black male patriarchy. If he can make her shuffle, sexless ("in white dresses") in a church basement, serving up pie, Jadine would no longer be a prize sought by

white men.

But Morrison doesn't allow readers to dismiss Son because his journey is to avoid identity rather than to establish it. Instead, Morrison hints at why Son tries to change Jadine rather than himself. Unlike Jadine's, Son's life has been dominated by deprivation and death. They are all he knows. Without a Valerian Street to finance him, Son has experienced a powerless potency that embodies that of many black males in America. He is a drifter who has seen much of the world but is excluded from that world. Exclusion has probably been to his advantage, since much of the white patriarchy seems deadly. Although there is much to value in Son—eyes and ears sensitive like Jadine's to beauty—he lacks strength to change even when he has a chance to do so.

The ethnic aspects of Son's and Jadine's attraction for each other are clear. In Jadine Son sees white power and lush beauty forever beyond him; in Son Jadine observes an attractive though blockaded street down which she might achieve knowledge of her black heritage. Jadine also connects her feelings for Son with the woman in yellow: "She should have known that bitch would be the kind to spit at somebody, and now this man with savannas in his eyes was distracting her. . . . She wanted to sketch him and get it over with, but when she thought of trying to lay down that space and get the eagle beak of his nose, she got annoyed with herself" (135-36). And annoyed, she reverts to asking herself the big questions for which she has no answers. "It was," she realizes "a silly age, twenty five; too old for teenaged dreaming, too young for settling down. Every corner was a possibility and a dead end" (136). Nevertheless, her attraction to Son, a "man without human rites: unbaptized, uncircumcised, minus puberty rites or the formal rites of manhood" deepens (136).

Jadine's quest, if it is to continue, must occur in Son's company. To say this is not to argue that Jadine is incapable of a solitary search for identity. She does not merge journeys with Son out of fear of being alone. Rather, she is convinced that who she wants to be (a fully developed human as comfortable with her blackness as she is with her brain) and who Son could become are compatible, and that an intimate union between them is possible. If she is to pursue her vision in yellow—learn of her identity as a black woman—she guesses Son is more likely to help her than anyone else she knows. Thus, Jadine has Son join her for the next stage of her journey, a trip to New York. New

York as place, however, proves as slippery as identity. Son quickly and completely despises New York, seeing in it a threat to black people: "The black girls... were crying and their men were looking neither to the right nor the left... Who did this to you? Who has done this thing to you? he wondered, as he walked down Columbus Avenue looking first to the right and then to the left" (185-86). Meanwhile, Jadine's response is the reverse. As Son sits dismal in their "tooth-white" room (187), Jadine arrives in New York and sees a place whose multiplicity forces her to be clear and glad about the life she wants to live. "New York made her feel like giggling, she was so happy to be back in the arms of that barfly with the busted teeth and armpit breath." For Jadine, "New York oiled her joints and she moved as though they were oiled. Her legs were longer here, her neck really connected her body to her head" (190-91). In New York Jadine realizes she will not find identity through Son.

But she tries, first in the City, then in a place more comfortable to Son: his Florida hometown, Eloë. In New York Jadine twines her legs around Son's hips the second she sees him. In New York she makes good money for them. In New York their "mutual adoration" (192) continues, but Son is unhappy. On a trip with Son to Eloë, Jadine struggles to get in touch with her blackness. If any place can make her feel ethnically connected, she reasons, Son's home, the source of his vision of an ideal life, should do it. Eloë, in its conservatism, however, is as alien to her as New York is to Son. The town, Jadine notes, looks like a city block in Queens. You can't even fly to Eloë; you must drive to Poncie, then "bum" a ride. More importantly, the people, values, and interests of Eloë are inaccessible. In the short time she's there, Jadine is stared at by the women, must abide what she perceives as the archaic sex roles of the town, and is refused introduction to Son's "Old Man." Stranded by Son who, returning home, is uncomfortably comfortable in familiar surroundings, Jadine photographs Eloë's inhabitants who "refused to smile and glared into her camera as though looking at hell with the lid off" (215).

Confirmation that Eloë and Son cannot generate an identity for Jadine comes when she convinces Son to sneak out of his father's house to sleep with her at his Aunt Rosa's. Having learned the reputation of Son's faithless, former wife—Cheyenne, "the best pussy in Florida" (221) Jadine is "thinking of her, whipped on by her" when

suddenly she has a second vision (221).

Cheyenne got in, and then the rest: Rosa and Therese and Son's dead mother and Sally Sarah Sadie Brown and Ondine and Soldier's wife and Ellen and Francine from the mental institution and her own dead mother and even the woman in yellow. All there crowding into the room. Some of them she did not know, recognize, but they were all there spoiling her love-making, taking away her sex like succubi, but not his... they poured out of the dark like ants out of a hive. (222)

Although Jadine's first vision, her call to adventure through the woman in yellow, might be described as positive, this experience is clearly negative. The women don't overtly express disapproval, but they stare. Under their surveillance Jadine feels guilty, as if she is doing something wrong. When, with a voice "half as loud as her heart," Jadine asks the crowd of silent watchers what they want, "They looked as though they had just been waiting for that question and they each pulled out a breast and showed it to her." For Jadine the dream is so real, she is convinced she isn't asleep. "Here she was wide-awake, but in total darkness looking at her own mother for God's sake and Nanadine!" Among the group confronting Jadine, however, the woman in yellow is an exception. She alone does not display her breasts. "She did something more shocking—she stretched out a long arm and showed Jadine her three big eggs. It scared her [Jadine] so, she began to cry" (222).

Convinced she and Son belong together and knowing she will never find identity within the constraints of Son's life, Jadine determines to "rescue" him from his blackness, incorrectly assuming it is like her own. When they fight she realizes she is fighting the night women: "[t]he mamas who had seduced him and were trying to lay claim to her. It would be the fight of their lives to get away from that conven that had nothing to show but breasts" (226). Jadine wants Son to get a job. She wants Son to go to school. She wants Son to become a lawyer. Son will have none of an education about "white" ways paid for in part by white money. Jadine defends her education and Valerian Street who gave it to her; Son with his fist knocks her cold and he dangles her by the heels out the window of their New York apartment.

This final fight with Son convinces Jadine to travel on alone, the narrative powerfully defining Jadine's and Son's conflicting points-of-view.

She [Jadine] thought she was rescuing him from the night women who wanted him for themselves, wanting him feeling superior in a cradle, deferring to him; wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building. He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning them, the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years had killed a world millions of years old. From Micronesia to Liverpool, from Kentucky to Dresden, they killed everything they touched including their own coastlines, their own hills and forests. And even when some of them built something nice and human, they grew vicious protecting it from their own predatory children, let alone an outsider. Each was pulling the other away from the maw of hell—its very ridge top. Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoilt black man, will you mature with me? Culturebearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing? (231–32)

While neither view is wholly right, Jadine's seems to me more "right" than Son's. Jadine would rescue Son not from the night women but for herself. She would have assumed a black identity if she could, but not an identity that is black and female. The roles prescribed for black women by the patriarchy of both races are even more narrow, unyielding, and full of self-sacrifice than those assigned to black men. In "saving" Son, Jadine seeks for him a crevice much like her own within white, patriarchal society. She acknowledges that places in the past cannot be changed (Eloe), but places in the future can. Jadine is on the verge of "renaming" her environment using Adrienne Rich's "common language" of females to do so. Having accepted the help of "some poor old white dude," she now has the opportunity to transform the oppressive society Valerian Street helped create, ironically, with help from him. Faced with multiple oppressions—because of her race, her sex, and by virtue of these, her social class—Jadine answers the question that Rich argues such women must: "With whom do you believe your lot is cast" (22–24)? She aligns herself, first with those of her sex and acts on that alignment. Jadine believes her efforts—and until Son nearly kills her, his—can lead to social change. She believes that, loose among white men who "killed everything they touched," she and Son (or, if necessary, she) can affirm life and life-affirming beauty.

As the end of their mutual journey draws near, Son tells Jadine the

story of the Tar Baby. As he forces her to hear how a white farmer entraps a rabbit—black—by planting a tar baby in his cabbage patch, Son makes a tar baby of Jadine by poking his body into hers. That the white farmer, Valerian, made the tar baby is Son's point; that Son accepts his patriarchally defined role as rabbit is clear. And though Jadine swears she'll kill Son when he frees her, she instead lies "gutted, not thinking of killing him. Thinking instead that it would soon be Thanksgiving and there was no *place* to go for dinner: (233 emphasis mine). For females, regardless of ethnic background, intimate communion and celebration with men too often elude them. Physically and emotionally raped by Son, Jadine is a case in point.

Jadine's quest has relieved her of guilt, yielded an identity—what she is not more than what she is—but has given her no satisfactory answers to her question.

The same sixteen answers to the question What went wrong? kicked like a chorus line. Having sixteen answers meant having none. So none it was Zero. She would go back to Paris and begin at Go. Let loose the dogs, tangle with the woman in yellow—with her and with all the night women who had looked at her. No more shoulders and limitless chests. No more dreams of safety. No more. Perhaps that was the thing—the thing Ondine was saying. A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams. She was the safety she longed for. (244)

Knowing she must make herself safe will help her become so.

And what of the beauty Jadine longed for so and sought through the vision of the woman in yellow? Jadine's first act on boarding a plane to Europe and settling into her first-class seat is to use an emery board to file down the jagged edge of one of her nails. "Two swift strokes and it was gone," Morrison states. Jadine's nail was "perfect again" (250). Jadine's perfect beauty, however, may not be selfish and may not be wholly defined by the patriarchy. Barbara Christian writes that Jadine's "major concern is 'making it'" (Review 67 and Class 78) in a white patriarchy. I'm convinced Morrison believes Jadine capable of far more. Further, I believe Jadine is seizing power in the very place men have denied it to her: her female body (Sichtermann). Although Jadine can't model forever given a white, male obsession with young flesh, she has given herself, ironically with Valerian's financial support, other options. Each involves beauty and each affords Jadine a chance to change patriarchal aesthetic standards. If Jadine opens a gallery she may select the "beauty" she displays on its walls

and floors. If Jadine chooses to become an art historian, she can teach an aesthetic different from the traditional one she herself was taught. During the rest of her modeling career, Jadine may even be able, as a result of her quest, to deal less guiltily with her interpretations of personal beauty. Maybe she will have confidence to incorporate something of the woman in yellow into her personal and professional aesthetic. Part of Morrison's art, of course, is to keep her novel's endings ambivalent. This ambivalence is perhaps best embodied by Jadine's hobby: cloisonne. Is Jadine's interest more accurately reflected in Medieval expressions of the form: precious, precise relics of a romantic (white) past? Or is Jadine captivated by earlier, pre-Christian cloisonne: colorful, lively, rough-hewn and pre-white—that of her black ancestors? Morrison doesn't say. In a 1981 *Vogue* interview, however, Morrison comments on beauty: "For me," she says, "beauty is exactly the opposite of glamour. It has something to do with one's habits, one's clarity about things, a repose out of which can come all sorts of wonderful emotions, aggression and feistiness and fire, but underneath there is this repose. And this clarity. And you see it in skin and hair and eyes and wrinkles and lines, and the imbalances in the face—too long a nose, too small eyes." That this interview occurred shortly after *Tar Baby's* publication suggests Morrison had beauty in mind when she created Jadine. It also demonstrates Morrison's conviction that beauty is dynamic, internal, lived as opposed to worn—the opposite of traditionally patriarchal views.

Finally, what will sustain this lonely female quest hero on her further journeys? Jadine's third vision while flying back to Paris reveals that work, instants of happiness, and imagination will help her and other females who are the

soldier ants [that] marched in formation. Straight ahead they marched, shamelessly single-minded, for soldier ants have no time for dreaming. Almost all of them are women and there is so much to do—the work is literally endless. . . . Bearing, hunting, eating, fighting, burying. No time for dreaming, although sometimes, late in life, somewhere between the thirtieth and fortieth generation she might get wind of a summer storm someday. The scent of it will invade her palace and she will recall the rush of wind on her belly—the stretch of fresh wings, the blinding anticipation and herself, there, airborne, suspended, open, trusting, frightened, determined, vulnerable—girl-ish, even, for an entire second and then another and another. (250–51)

This vision of the female soldier ant shows it "airborne" experiencing a moment of joy, of physical freedom, of trust, a moment in which its identity is fully self contained.

The same is true for Jadine. Personal beauty and faith in the integrity of hers—balancing white, male standards and her lonely aesthetic is what Jadine is left with on her flight back to Paris. And dreams, she has those beautiful but ephemeral extras that only humans have been gifted with. Imagination, visions of possibility and beauty are what make life, marching in a line, worth doing. Jadine's dream of Son, of black, male perfection, of beauty through intimate communion, is one worthy of her. Sadly, such dreams last only a short time, but in that still point, in that "placeless," airborne" moment, it is possible to feel "girl-ish, even, for an entire second and then another and another."

If Jadine had been born white, would the world have yielded other secrets, more readily to this quest hero? Probably not. The Margaret Streets, most women—black and white—don't quest in the first place. They remain imprisoned within the patriarchy, periodically directing their anger inward or striking out at weaker people. In Margaret Street's case, the "weaker" one is her infant son whom she prods with pins because she lacks the power to otherwise hurt her powerful and insensitive husband. For young women strong enough to journey toward identity, those like Jadine, "success" must be generously defined: measured in instants and potential. As paralleled in the parable of the soldier ants, Jadine has a brief vision of what life could be (equal union with Son; perfect comfort with her blackness). At quest's end she verges on important accomplishments, using the lessons she has learned on her journey.

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NOTE

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"THE SITE OF MEMORY":
NARRATIVE AND MEANING IN
TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

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In the winter of 1986, Toni Morrison gave a lecture at the New York Public Library which was part of a series on the art and craft of the memoir. Early in the lecture, entitled, "The Site of Memory," Morrison noted that, although she never had written what strictly could be considered memoir or autobiography, she did not believe her inclusion in the series was "entirely a misalliance" because her fiction was based in memory and occupied "the place where the two crafts [of fiction and memoir] embrace and where that embrace is symbiotic" (103). She further argued for the "authenticity" of her presence in the series because her own literary heritage is located in autobiography—in the slave narratives which are the point of origin of African-American literature. The slave narrative is one of the few written counters to what Henry Louis Gates has suggested is a result of a fusion of ethnocentrism and logocentrism in Western culture: the tendency to see blackness as "Absence" ("Criticism," 7). By denying slaves literacy—it was illegal in most places to educate slaves to read and write—the slaveholding society attempted to obliterate history by allowing the slave only that history contained in personal recollection and oral transmission. Slave narratives functioned largely to counter a great absence: to document the condition of slavery to a largely white, contemporary, northern audience which usually had not experienced the peculiar institution directly; and to preserve for posterity a record of the human reality of slavery.

While Morrison acknowledges the richness of that heritage as literary source and historical documentation, she also acknowledges its limitations, for

whatever the level of eloquence of the form, popular taste discour-

aged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience....Over and over, the writers pull the narrative up short with a phrase such as, "But let us drop the veil over these proceedings too terrible to relate." In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it [white abolitionists], they were silent about many things, and they "forgot" other things. (109–110)

While Morrison understands the historical necessity of the authors' Victorian reticence, she still mourns the way such excision distorts the truth of the slave experience. But even more important for Morrison is that in the slave narratives "there was no mention of the interior life" (110). She finds it disturbing, for instance, that, in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass must beg the reader's indulgence to spend a half page on what was probably his most profound personal loss: the death of his grandmother. She might also have mentioned the surprise which many readers of the *Narrative* feel when, only near the end and only in passing, Douglass mentions that he is betrothed. Apparently Douglass, certainly one of the most confident and accomplished of the slave narrative authors, could not fathom that such a deep personal loss or discovery of a loved one could deserve more than passing note. For Morrison, I would suggest, the "proceedings too terrible to relate" are both the actual physical and psychological abuse of slaves by their owners, and the resultant diminishment of a sense of self that impels the slave, or even the former slave, to apologize for having precisely those deep feeling which we consider most human, and which form the flesh and sinews of personal narration.

This is a devastating problem of African-American history: the enormous gaps and distortions in the historical record of the black experience in America. Morrison spoke of this dilemma in an interview, conducted in 1986 while she was at work on *Beloved*:

The reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. (Davis, 224–25)

And, although Morrison doesn't mention it directly here, such gaps not only dehumanize the past, but the present as well, exacerbating—perhaps creating—the tendency of white America to view the African-American experience as a jumble of sociological data, a paper trail of historical record which, for the most part, is itself horribly distorted because it was created by white racists. And, even more destructively, the same gaps can so tatter the fabric of cultural memory that they threaten to leave African-Americans, themselves, with a history that is overwhelmed by absence. Morrison suggests that

For me—a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century...a writer who is a black and a woman—the exercise is very different [from the authors of the slave narratives]. My job becomes [to find] how to rip that veil drawn over "proceedings too terrible to relate." the exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic. (110–111)

Morrison intends to go well beyond rip and show, however, when she suggests a method for dealing with the particular problems of African-American history:

Moving that veil aside requires...certain things. First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I also must depend on the recollections of others. Thus, memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin and in what I find significant...These "memories within: are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of the people. Only an act of the *imagination* can help me. (111; emphasis added)

Morrison called her method "a kind of literary archeology": on the basis of "some information and a little guesswork: she journeys "to a site to see what remains were left behind and to *reconstruct* the world that the remains imply" (112). Morrison is too modest in her description of the way this metaphor informs her artistic aims. If we elaborate just a bit more on the trope we can say that at a site an archeologist often finds the merest fragments of a civilization, perhaps just a few pottery shards. But, through painstaking uncovering and reconstruction of the little material that actually is there, combined with a thorough knowledge of culture and its artifacts, the archeologist can, in some cases, recreate the object, what it must have looked like, how it probably was used. And from that recreation, the archeol-

ogist hopes to be able to make one more imaginative leap: to imagine the lineaments of a culture which would have made and used such a piece of pottery, to recover the past, to make it palpable, through, in Morrison's words, "an act of the imagination."

Here we see that Morrison not only has posed what might be the most difficult problem of African-American history, but also has proposed a method for historical inquiry and understanding: to *reconstruct* the past through *an act of the imagination*. Such a method might sound unscientific, an affront to the Western rationalist tradition, and we might suppose that many professional historians would protest Morrison's methodology. What is interesting, however, is how similar Morrison's method is to the methods that, for instance, Clifford Geertz has used to cause a seachange in anthropological study; that Richard Rorty has suggested as a vehicle for philosophical inquiry into the past; and that Hayden White has offered as a historiographic remedy for the malaise of late-twentieth century historical study. What each of these eminent thinkers shares with Morrison is a belief that historical understanding is not merely a matter of some adaptation of the scientific method to social phenomena, but is a matter of nothing less than the reconstruction of historical meaning that must, by necessity, be situated in the context of the present, and must be a product of an act of the imagination.

For Morrison, this attempt to unearth the African-American past is naturally rooted in narrative, a historiographic narrative which attempts to understand the past while simultaneously forging a method for understanding. She attempts to use but go beyond the narrative power of the slave narratives which are her foundation stone. According to Gates:

The slave narratives, taken together, represent the attempt of blacks to *write themselves into being*... Accused of having no collective history by Hegel [and others], blacks effectively responded by publishing hundreds of individual histories which functioned as the part standing for the whole. As Ralph Ellison defined this relation, "We tell ourselves our individual stories so as to become aware of our *general* story." ("Writing," 57)

For Morrison, however, too much is still obscured in these Victorian narrations; she must journey to a site which is buried deeper—in the human heart. Pre-eminent of these narrative sites is *Beloved*.

Of course, the most terrible event from which Morrison must tear the veil in *Beloved* is Sethe's infanticide—her murder of the infant Beloved to prevent her from being taken back into slavery—and it is the central event with which all the characters of the novel must come to terms. It is an event, however, which Morrison wishes us to see within the entire context of slavery. While, in other contexts, we may normally condemn the murder of a child without reservation or hesitation, we must remember that Baby Suggs, the moral center of her community, can neither condemn nor condone the murder because she realizes that infanticide was not an unheard of response to slavery and was an act which became morally problematic within the context of slavery.¹ This ambiguity tears at Sethe. Although she justifies her act to the end, she cannot confront and examine its full meaning. She has lived her life since by a single rule: Morrison tells us that "to Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay. Even so, Sethe understands that, as Faulkner put it, in *The Sound and the Fury*, "There is no such thing as was, because the past is." Or, as Morrison has put it, "the gap between the past and the present does not exist" (Darling, 247). Thus, immediately after we are told of Sethe's attempt to keep the past at bay, we are told that "as for Denver [her daughter], the job Sethe had of keeping her from *the past that was still waiting* for her was all that mattered" (42; emphasis added). Morrison, herself, has said how difficult it was to confront the horrors of slavery because "it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember" (Angelo, 257). Ultimately, however, the novel suggests that the attempt to keep the past at bay, to keep the past from intruding on the present, not only is fruitless, but results in lives that are haunted—literally as well as figuratively. As Linda Krumholz has noted, in *Beloved*, "history-making becomes a healing process for the characters, the reader, and the author" (395). For Morrison, in *Beloved*, and elsewhere, the ability to confront and deal with the past is a requisite for mental health, contemplation of the past is a form of therapy. If her characters fight hard to resist coming to terms with that past it is because they realize, in the words of one of the novel's characters, "'anything coming back to life hurts'" (35).

It is the arrival of Paul D, Sethe's link to her past, to the world of slavery and to the context in which she committed her desperate act, that moves her toward a confrontation with her past and her first steps

toward regaining her mental health. Until now, the past has been, for Sethe, a "haint" in her house, a scar which she cannot feel, a shapeless force which she must hold at bay, a horror at which she will not look and from which she must protect her surviving daughter—whatever the cost. When Paul D drives out the formless spirit of the dead child who has been haunting Sethe's house, however, it returns in human form as the young woman, Beloved, whom Sethe *must* confront face-to-face. And much of the novel consists of characters, particularly Sethe, but also Paul D, Denver, and even Beloved, attempting to face the horror of the past.

Morrison implies that the process of confronting one's own history can essentially be seen as comprising three stages: the first is denial, the desire to keep the past at bay; the second is a tentative circling in the imagination of past events; and the final state is a direct confrontation of the past. Three representative scenes that are similar in significant respects can illustrate the three stages. In each scene, the past is portrayed as a problematic text, a particularly difficult interaction between an author/teller and a reader/listener. And, ultimately, the meaning of that past is revealed through the process of narration.

The first scene, or text, portraying denial, takes place between Stamp Paid, an ex-slave who assisted in Sethe's escape and has known her ever since, and Paul D. Paul D has much in his own life over which he wishes to drop the veil. His heart repeatedly is described as a tobacco tin which he has shut tight and which has rusted and can not be pried open. One result of his reunion with Sethe, however, is that the lid does slowly loosen. Until this time, he has kept himself from harm by not committing anything of himself to others and so has avoided the terrible hurt that others in the novel suffer when their loved ones die or are murdered or are sold or run away or just disappear. But as he begins to share Sethe's love and adversity, he, like her, begins slowly to confront his and their awful past. He falls back into his normal pattern of denial, however, when Stamp Paid shows him an old newspaper, the issue which carried the story of Sethe's crime. Although Paul D is illiterate, a picture of a black woman accompanies the article and Paul D knows who it is, but he refuses to recognize her, since

A whip of fear broke through the heart chambers as soon as you saw

a Negro's face in a paper, since the face was not there because the person had a healthy baby, or outran a street mob...[or] because the person had been killed or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated...It would have to be something out of the ordinary—something whitepeople would find interesting...worth a few minutes of teeth sucking if not gasps. (155-56)

"That ain't her mouth," he says, trying to fend off the truth, and he continues obsessively throughout the chapter: "But this ain't her mouth...This ain't it at all...Uh uh. No way. A little semblance around the forehead maybe, but this ain't her mouth" (156-58). Paul D shares with Sethe the unwillingness to confront the truth of the past and tries to deny it.

But the reunion of Paul D and Sethe has reawakened memories in both of them. And, most importantly, their shared love and sorrow has given them the strength to move closer to the truth of their lives, closer to the horror of their enslavement, even if they still cannot confront it. Paul D finally pushes Sethe to confront the darkness of her past, however, when he asks her about what he has learned from Stamp Paid and she must speak aloud of the act, presumably for the first time. It is a beautifully portrayed scene. As Paul D sits at the table, prodding Sethe to tell him the story from her own lips, she walks continually, nervously circling the room: "She was spinning. Round and round the room... Paul D sat at the table watching her drift into view and then disappear behind his back, turning like a slow but steady wheel" (159). Paul D recognizes that Sethe is "circling him the way she was circling the subject" (161). Sethe realizes it too: "Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she would never close in, pin it down" (163).

Ultimately, this scene does not end in resolution but disruption as Sethe insists that her murder of her daughter was right, Paul D insists that it was wrong, and nothing is resolved—except that he has incited her to imaginatively circle the past, to move around it, to articulate it even if she cannot yet fully confront it. Moreover, this scene is a model not only of the way Sethe must circle her past, but the way Morrison has structured her non-linear historical novel: circling back around a series of crucial events—the infanticide foremost among them—each orbit of her narration bringing us closer to a direct confrontation of the events, and ultimately the meaning, of the past. This

is even how we as readers come to know the past which is emerging in the novel: through bits of information which are introduced, often in fragmentary form, then seemingly abandoned. Later in the narrative these same pieces, bits, fragments—shards, let us say—are reintroduced but changed now due to repetition, slight variation, and the new context in which they reappear. Eventually, we, along with the characters, begin to understand from these shards what that piece of pottery must have looked like and been used for, and what that world, so far removed from us—potentially nothing more than an absence—must have meant to its inhabitants, and must mean to us.

If the avoidance and circling scenes are parts of a model for Morrison's narrative strategy, there is another important scene in which the characters enact the other crucial element of Morrison's strategy. Notice that in the two scenes described above, a character does not confront the past alone, but is prodded by another. Paul D is prodded by Stamp Paid, and, in turn, Sethe is prodded by Paul D. Ultimately, Morrison has argued, what the characters of *Beloved* come to realize is that "what was valuable was usually eleemosynary... usually something they were doing for someone else. Nobody in the novel, no adult Black person, survives by self-regard, narcissism, selfishness"; rather, they survive through affiliation with some kind of community (Washington, 235). There are a number of different communities in *Beloved*, but the most basic, most essential ones are usually those formed between two persons, one who needs to tell and one who needs to know; in effect, an author and a reader. In the interaction of the two, meaning is co-constructed.

This pattern is most eloquently repeated in the scene between Denver and Beloved in which Beloved, who, unlike the other members of the household, is in avid pursuit of the past of which she has been deprived, begs Denver to tell her stories of the past. In particular, Beloved wants to hear the story about how Denver was born in a boat bobbing in the Ohio River during her mother's escape from slavery. Although Denver protests that she has only learned the story in incomplete pieces from different sources, she becomes determined "to construct out of the strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved" (76). At first Beloved becomes impatient at the fairly sketchy story her sister is telling and she interrupts her with questions. Beloved's passion to know incites Denver to enter the story more deeply, to imagine it more fully. As a result, she experiences new pow-

ers of empathy and understanding:

Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions..., her downright craving to know, *Denver began to see what she was saying and not just hear it*: there was this nineteen-year-old slave girl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quick step. (77–78; emphasis added)

Urged on by Beloved, Denver's story ceases to be merely a recitation of incidents, a relatively dry enumeration of events. Instead, the story becomes hyper-vivid as Denver begins to perceive it sensually as well as intellectually. In doing so, she begins to be able to see through her mother's eyes, experience her mother's sensations as if they were her own. Denver, in effect, is beginning to construct a fully imagined narrative.

Indeed, she goes beyond both the intellectual and sensual for, we are told, "Denver was seeing it now *and feeling it*—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to be her mother. Seeing how it must have looked" (78; emphasis added). Denver has now begun to experience and relay the story in the combination of ways of knowing unique to narrative: through the intellect, the senses, and the emotions. And, as she does, the narrative "strings," the narrative shards—to use the archeologist's term—start to coalesce into a thoroughly imagined whole as she begins, in the novel's metaphor, to give "blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her—and a heart-beat" (78).

And she does not do it alone. Morrison is explicit that this narrative is co-constructed, a collaboration between one who had previously known only strings of the story and another who had known nothing of it at all. Morrison tells us that "the monologue became, in fact, a duet" (78). But they more than construct a story; they actually create the past. Just as Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon, in *Absalom, Absalom!* create a virtual history of the South in their cold Harvard dorm room despite a lack of full factual information, Denver and Beloved create the history of their mother's escape from slavery and Denver's birth: "Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the

two did the best they could *to create what really happened*, how it really was" (78, emphasis added). Both of these pairs of young people can assume these seemingly suprarational powers because they share a compelling, passionate need to know the past, and they share a community of two in which they can draw from and share with each other that which they need to know and which they do know. They have created a past of human proportions because they have been able to access, in Morrison's words, "the unwritten interior life" of their predecessors through a powerful, collaborative "act of the imagination." They have found that deepest, richest site: the human heart. And they have found it with one of the most evocative tools which we possess to dig in and sift through that site: the narrative.

It is appropriate that this scene between Denver and Beloved climaxes with the vividly imagined description of Denver's birth. Sethe is sprawled in a boat which is buffeted by the Ohio River. The stern of that boat is still in the sandy soil of slave Kentucky, but the bow points toward free Ohio. The birth is breached, however, and surely Sethe and her baby and all the memory that makes the story of Beloved would have died had she been alone. Fortunately, however, she has met up with a poor white girl, Amy, who helps Denver to be born. Frantically, Amy urges Sethe: "Push!" Sethe whispers with all her strength, "Pull," and Denver is born. In this whole remarkable scene we have a collapsing of the story being told with the tellers who construct it. Sethe and Denver—and Morrison too—must push life out of them, and Amy and Beloved—and we as readers—must be the midwives who pull. And this birthing image becomes the central metaphor for the way we imaginatively reconstruct the past. The past is a construction—something newly made, new life—but one cannot, the novel suggests, give birth alone. We need the other to make us push even as she pulls. Finally, after all the denial, all the circling, we must confront the painful and even dangerous moment of push and pull necessary to bring new life—perhaps new understanding—into the world. Or, as Morrison says, we must finally have the courage and strength to pull aside the veil that has hidden those things "too terrible to relate": the abominations of slavery and all that they wrought.

In a 1988 interview with *City Lights* magazine, Morrison reflected on how Americans tend to think of history:

We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the

innocent future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the slate is clean. The past is absent or it's romanticized. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past. (qtd. in Ferguson: 109)

Beloved represents Morrison's attempt to come to terms with the truth about the past of slavery and its terrible effects on the human heart. She does this through a fictional historical narrative which, in the individual "shards" of the lives of Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Beloved, and the rest, tells us much about life in mid-nineteenth-century America. It tells of the physical and psychological horrors of slavery, of the consequences of possessing a past too horrible to remember, but also of the power of community to aid us in the necessary task of ultimately coming to terms with that past. It is also a historiographic fiction which models as well as describes the power of telling, of communication, and particularly the power of narrative, which can help us not only to know what we did not know, but to experience what we had not experienced, i.e. to know in all the ways humans possibly can know. In the end, the novel suggests that we, as readers, must participate with Morrison in the excavation of the site, that we must be midwives to the past that is waiting to be born.

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NOTE

¹The historical reality of this problematic relationship to infanticide can be seen in the nineteenth century response to the case of Margaret Garner upon which Morrison based her novel. In 1856, Garner, like Sethe, had escaped with her four children across the Ohio River from slave Kentucky to free Ohio. When she was caught she murdered her youngest child by slitting her throat. Her case became a *cause celebre*. Noted suffragist and abolitionist Lucy Stone, who had come to Cincinnati as part of a speaking tour, met Garner in jail and testified as a character witness in her trial. Stone eloquently argued that the horrors of slavery were such as to justify infanticide. There has long been speculation that Harriet Beecher Stowe used Margaret Garner's case as an inspiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, particularly for Eliza's escape across the Ohio, but such speculation is erroneous. The Garner incident took place in 1856; Stowe moved from Cincinnati in 1850 and her novel was published in 1852. Still, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Garner's act and Stone's passionate defense of the act all suggest the ways in which the mother-child relationship was made monstrously, often violently problematic by slavery. For an excellent discussion of the Garner case, and its relationship to Stowe and Morrison, see Cynthia Griffin Wolff's "Margaret Garner: A Cincinnati Story." Of related interest is John N. Duvall's "Authentic Ghost Stories: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Absalom*, *Absalom!*, and *Beloved*."

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CRACKED PSYCHES AND VERBAL PUTTY:
GEOGRAPHY AND INTEGRITY IN
TONI MORRISON'S JAZZ

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In *Jazz*, Toni Morrison's sixth novel, Morrison uses geographical images to explore the psychological realities of her characters' lives, turning grotesque, cracked, characters into viable, potential ones, examining the internal geographic space within each human mind, spaces that can be made and remade. Her main characters, Violet and Joe Trace, middle aged, cracked, confused, torn, and guilty, find their way back to an integrity that is simultaneously romanticized and reasonable. The land in *The Bluest Eye* is unyielding; in *Sula*, it is ironic, unpredictable; in *Song of Solomon* one must transcend even the mountaintop to fly away home. By the time Morrison writes *Jazz* in 1992, the land is as mental as it is physical. Violet and Joe Trace never have to leave New York City to change the past into one that will help them function. Place becomes a stage for performance and can be set anywhere. More than in any of her earlier novels, in *Jazz*, Morrison uses language and music to create alternative landscapes, to reinvent geography and identity, to turn psychological dislocation into self-recreation: Sula can't find the right words and feels she sang all the songs (156), but Violet and Joe learn to use language and music to let themselves discover the multiplicity of perspectives needed for healing, for knowing and telling their whole stories. They retreat to regenerate, renewing their covenant with nature and language, securing a passage out of their wilderness. Even the cynical book itself, the narrator of Violet's and Joe's story, is surprised that language can so successfully function to change the fractured city where they live into a nurturing space. Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, carries a sack of human bones and a geography book, but Joe and Violet talk and listen to music to aid in their cure. Geography, in *Jazz*, is mobile, but it is also abstracted,

more flexible, in Violet's words: "What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?" (208). These are important words which give the reader insight into how, in *Jazz*, geography functions in relationship to healthy identity.

Melvin Dixon, in *Ride out the Wilderness* discusses the relationship between identity and geography in African American literature. He demonstrates how the wilderness, the underground, and the mountaintop are recurrent images in African American literature. Dixon examines shifting moral and physical geography in Toni Morrison's first three novels, concluding that by *Song of Solomon*. Morrison's characters have attempted, unsuccessfully to get out of the wilderness she examines first in *The Bluest Eye*. Many characters are destroyed by the underground in *Sula*, but by jumping off the mountain, flying home to Africa in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison has her characters complete the metaphoric journeys that many characters in African American literature take. As Dixon theorizes, Morrison makes her point in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*: one must ride out of the wilderness, as Pecola does not, in order to heal. One minor character, a prostitute named Marie, a woman with no status in her culture, has created an internal landscape richer than the town's and healthier: "From deep inside her laughter came the sound of many rivers, freely, deeply, muddily, heading for the room of an open sea" (45).

But basically, in Morrison's early novels, the land is duplicitous, particularly the land of the Midwest, which is landlocked (163): the St. Lawrence feeds the Great Lakes with memories of the sea. Nature is confused by its own past reality and destiny, and this confusion creates and is created by the parallel confusion in people, wanting to break from the area, wanting to be coastal people. In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate reminds her nephew that in 1910 they were not only landlocked, they were also locked out of the land.

Morrison's novels display displeasure with what geography has to offer African Americans. *Tar Baby's* geography is no less multi-layered, dangerous, perverse: nature does not set one free. In *Beloved*, geography controls the characters with memory, a past that clings to place, that demands attention and respect even after an event is over. Morrison allows place a type of control that by *Jazz*, she retrieves, giving it back to humans to remember and use as they choose, and as they need. In *Jazz*, Morrison still uses the wilderness, the underground, and flight that Dixon so perceptively examines in her first

three novels, but what seems to interest Morrison most in her last novel is the return of characters to mental health through their retracing the geography of the past and healing the mental fissures created from the trauma of environment, through their using music, imagination, human will, and words in a subjective, individualized way. By remapping with a difference, reclaiming and healing images of the well in which her mother jumps, Violet Trace takes back the life and choices lost to her; by remapping with a difference, reclaiming and reconfiguring images of the redwing and cave, Joe Trace escapes the rejection that landscape represents. In *Jazz*, Morrison is interested in a usable past, a usable geography, where people revision the implications of where they have been and create who they are and who they will become. Characters have more choice here to use geography and not be controlled by it. In *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison theorizes that when people don't know where they are, they have little chance of knowing who they are and if they confuse the time, they confuse the place which in turn confuses and endangers humanity physically and morally. Morrison plays with this concept in a post-modern way, respecting and reinventing in turn, as her characters' psychological health demands: if time and place can't change, perspectives of time and place can.

Not accidentally, *Jazz* begins with a preface taken from a section of the Gnostic Bible which is named for a place, a town in upper Egypt, The Nag Hammadi. This one section, a part of one of thirteen codices of the *Nag Hammadi* reads, "I am the name of the sound/and the sound of the name/I am the sign of the letter/and the designation of the division." There are two levels to this introductory quotation: the onomopoetic level, the name of the sound and the sound of the name, the music of the spheres to which horns and jazz relate; and the geographical level, the designation of the division and the sign of the letter, the writing and the physical mapping of reality. *Jazz* echoes the preface: it is a musical novel, mobile, filled with sound; and a geographical one filled with places and signs, that can be, and are, transfigured, when necessary, in the human mind.

With this hint from the *Nag Hammadi* that sound and geography are interrelated, one may turn to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* for further insight into what is happening on a psychological level in this wonderfully complex and geographical novel. Bachelard theorizes houses are both metaphors and images of our own psycho-

logical state and that in every dwelling, even the richest, the first task of the phenomenologist is to find the original shell, and he considers this shell part of what he later calls "felicitous space." In Morrison the original shell of her characters, characters who are driven and fragmented by racism, sexism, and classism in a geography which is itself confused, is often difficult to locate, and when found, cracked. The job of the character turned phenomenologist is to locate, glue, and transform this shell with imagination and the correct, because helpful, telling, in order to live. Geography and poetics are linked, challenging codes, challenging laws, and challenging memory. For instance, Violet Trace, haunted by the well in which her mother drowned herself, returns to that place, psychically, and studies herself, imagines herself back to health, turning the well into a "felicitous space."

In her introduction to Violet, the unreliable narrator tells the reader she "knows" Violet. Of course she doesn't. Violet is too fragmented to be known even to herself. It is winter when she enters the funeral service of her husband's young lover, tries to cut the girl's face, is thrown first to the floor and then out of the church. Violet is in crisis, while her mother, like a cat, but without the ability to catch herself, is thrown to the floor so that her chair could be repossessed, Violet is fighting to defile a dead girl. She is neither her mother, nor like her mother, but must learn this by returning psychically to her original shell. After the incident at the funeral home, Violet runs home through snow to free her birds to freeze or fly. She is deconstructing her home, letting the music exit her life so that her space reflects her own distortions, emptiness, and misery. Not accidentally, she leaves no footprints on the journey between funeral parlor and home: they are blown away by the snow and no one on Lenox Avenue knows where she lives. The original shell of Violet which exists before her Grandmother, True Belle, aids in her falling in love with a white looking child, Golden Gray, and devaluing the beauty of her own blackness even before her mother drowns herself in a well, is yet to be located and used.

Violet never adequately deals with her fractured youth so her New York city life begins to crack. Words appear where they don't belong (245); she sits in the middle of streets because she has lost her sense of place and unconsciously remembers her mother's, Rose Dear's, last chair being removed from under her (23); and warmed by an infant,

frustrated by her earlier fear of becoming a mother, and by her three miscarriages, she plans to take someone else's baby home as her own (19). Violet recognizes some of her problems, but she is at a loss as to how to fix them: she stops speaking in order to hide what she recognizes as cracks in her ability to choose appropriate words, but her silence further isolates her. By studying her way back through the geography of her life, she is able to move forward again, able to face her past, own her choices, create a functional identity and prevent herself from becoming what she is afraid to become: a suicide like her mother. Violet tells Felice, the best friend of her husband's now dead lover, that she wended her way back to health by killing the part of herself that loved Golden Gray, and then she killed the part of herself that was this murderer and what she was left with was a "me" that could love herself (209). She has psychologically carried the false part of her family home with her to New York City, and she needed to discard it in order to go forward past the place where her mother, Rose Dear, twistedly floated, in a well "so narrow, so dark it was pure, breathing relief" to see her mother stretched in a wooden box (101). First Violet must become localized in the spaces of her intimacy, and then she must sort out the usable. Bachelard is positive about paths, finding them dynamic and handsome, but Morrison's characters learn to be leery of them for many lead one in destructive, false directions. Violet finds her way back to owning and healing a parrot, a surrogate daughter, and a husband who has also found and healed his original shell; Violet transforms the well into a sunlit rim where down it is someone gathering gifts to be distributed (225).

Toni Morrison brilliantly builds the relationship between Violet's identity and her relationship to geography: she is inextricably tied to the well which represents her mother's rejection of life. The narrator tells us "the children of suicides are hard to please and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really here" (50). Violet is in that well with her mother, tortured by the vision. Her early relationship to Joe stops her obsession for a time. Time had stood still for her mother, floorboard closed and locked (100-1), but with her attempt to mar Dorcas, Violet meets her own floorboard (92). When Joe fell out of a walnut tree, she hoped never again to wake struggling against the pull of a narrow well, or watching first light with the sadness left over from finding her mother twisted in the tiny well (104). By the time she tries to steal the baby, she is searching for another fix

against that well. The narrator tells us that Violet remembered the incident as an outrage to her character; and simultaneously how the light skipped through her veins while holding the baby, "a brightness that could be carried in her arms. Distributed if need be, into places dark at the bottom of a well" (22). Violet needs protection from the mirror of her dead mother in the water, and she is, for a long time, unable to give this protection to herself, because she is "not really here" (4).

After the novel's crisis, after Violet attempts to slash Dorcas Manfred's face, and free her birds, she arrives at Alice Manfred's house looking, not accidentally, for a place to sit down (80). She is dangerously close to becoming her mother. A woman with many selves, Violet has a self who arranges furniture for comfort (13), and she knows, if unconsciously, that she must figure out how to heal her mental fissures, if she is to survive. Violet needs to accept that her mother's rejection of her does not need to mirror her own rejection of herself and that her infatuation with the Golden Gray of her grandmother's stories, a forty year old mistake, can be buried. The passivity that colors her early mental lapses, her feeling that nothing can be done about it (22), is a luxury her body will no longer let her take. Slashing Dorcas's face, meeting her wooden floor at the funeral, she can no longer find a place to sit. Like her mother's chair, her chair is also missing. She must find the chair or find herself at the bottom of a well.

For a while, keeping very busy helps Violet to remain marginally functional. Her sequences of errands, lists of tasks, kept her from waving her hands in the air or simply trembling. She may have rejected motherhood because she never wanted her children to see her as unable to cope and unable to help them (22), but she still must cope if she wants to end differently from her mother. Violet must risk the possibility of madness (97). Violet is orphaned, isolated, and driven. As Annis Pratt demonstrates in *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, characters like Violet are on the road to becoming female heroes. Morrison, with Violet, has created a female character who has come to a still point, a negative space where she must face the rage within her, take the risk of speaking, and either progress or regress further toward madness and death. Unlike Kate Chopin's development of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, Morrison has Violet progress.

Violet's mother, Rose Dear, left by her own mother, True Belle at

eight, cannot progress. Rose Dear is deserted by her husband, has no money and five children, and even after her own mother comes to help with the family is broken by the events of her life. Violet chooses another road: eventually, she takes responsibility. She communicates to her surrogate daughter, Felice, "I messed up my own life... Before I came North I made sense and so did the world.... Forgot it was mine. My life. I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else" (207-208).

In *Jazz*, Morrison demonstrates that heading a design is not enough—one needs to make the design. People cannot behave like records, cannot be pulled like a needle (120). When the tracks take over (130), one is in danger. Infants may cling to foamy caves (104), but even they must exit to live. When old combinations fail, one must create new ones. Joe tells Dorcas Manfred that she was the reason that Adam ate the apple and its core (133); but at her deathbed, Dorcas corrects his story: she tells him that there is only one red apple, implying that it is available to all of us and that we all bite into it, if we want to experience life (213). One's images and places, the redwings that haunt Joe in his search for a mother, Violet's well, must be taken back, made positive again. If there is only one red apple, if the novel ends in romance and felicity, it is the archetype of knowledge and the romance of survival: like *Beloved*, this is another Toni Morrison story to pass on. Violet thinks her problems through herself, not by herself, but as herself, as the central site of her universe and she ends up less cracked, able to speak, able to take pleasure from place and identity.

Joe Trace is another cracked character in *Jazz* who through the remapping of his physical and psychological worlds is able to heal, find words, enjoy music, continue living. Like Violet, he lacks a solid foundation and must imagine himself back to health. Joe, also desperate, violent, when the novel begins with the shooting of eighteen year old Dorcas Manfred, an orphan who watched her mother go up in smoke during East St. Louis riots, is able to find peace with himself, his wife, the ghost of Dorcas, and his mother whose failure to acknowledge him fills him with a "nothing" reawakened by Dorcas's rejection. He finds an identity separate from his mother's refusal to acknowledge his existence, to answer his words. Joe's eyes are too colored, modern, complex, dangerous, but he chooses not to further victimize himself; he chooses the life he can make in the world in which he lives. There

is only one apple, Dorcas offers him as a last gift and he bites into it again, this time with Violet, this time choosing her, and with the ghost of his mother in the form of a red winged bird outside of his window, blessing him with beauty, nature, and life.

Newspapers in *Jazz* turn your mind, streets confuse you, teach you or break your head, but Joe does not remain defenseless, nor a "snake-in-the-grass" thief. He changes so that he no longer has the beast's desire for its own filth: "The Beast did not do what was done to it, but what it wished done to itself: raped because it wanted to be raped itself. Slaughtered children because it yearned to be slaughtered children... Their enemies got what they wanted, became what they visited on others" (78).

As a child, Joe learned to be a hunter, to live in nature, to track with limits and respect. He can kill rabbit, deer, possum, pheasant. He knows not to kill weak, female animals. When he goes to the streets to hunt for Dorcas, he is searching for his mother a fourth time, again with a gun, this time not shooting a blank at a tree, as he did the last time his mother would not or could not respond, but shooting at an eighteen year old girl trying to fulfill the patterns of her own, hurt, life. Joe, like Dorcas, Violet, and the narrator, carries a light inside himself, but is not lit by it. Violet, when she meets him, sees him as a man that makes "anybody stand in cane in the middle of the night," makes "any woman dream about him in the daytime so hard she miss the rut and have to work hard to get the mules back on the track" (96), but he feels like "nothing" and that is what matters. He, like Violet, is connected to nature and geography, but cannot love himself because he was not acknowledged by his mother, Wild, as worthy of a response. Violet finds him under a "handsome black walnut tree" that grew at the edge of the woods bordering the acres of cotton. Joe is not the snake then, but the apple falling. With daylight, Violet sees only the bits of him: his smile and his wide watching eyes. Violet claims his body with its geographical planes and shafts and makes the pillow she needs.

But Joe is double eyed, hurt and running and he has not chosen Violet, yet. He marries her to escape the reality of his mother's rejection. He takes a steel car, drives down a road as long as there is road to escape the cave of rejection his mother represents. He gives away his fishing pole, skinning knife, every piece of his hunting gear but his gun, borrows a suitcase and trades the geography of the county for

the geography of the city. The narrator lets the reader know that Joe figures that if Booker T. Washington can eat chicken sandwiches at the President's house, that he, too, can make good in the urban world of New York City where money is plentiful and his mother's tree, his mother's cave, his mother's rejection, are far away. Joe forgets about the geography of the psyche, but without mental integrity, he cannot function long or well.

Music, stones, people melt together in this city that can hurt. The City may back and frame an individual, but one must know who one is or destruction is at hand. New York City reflects life. It is layered and complicated, easily misread and though its plans seems simply laid out on the surface, it is dangerous. The narrator speaks directly to the reader, "Word was that underneath the good times and the easy money something evil ran the streets and nothing was safe—not even the dead" (9). New York City, filled with Abyssinian Sunday school plays and art, also contains desperate people willing to do anything to keep certain feelings alive, to view themselves in certain lights.

The Traces' apartment is full of mirrors that reflect the emptiness of their unresolved issues. Violet's problems, her silence, enrage and frighten Joe, bringing him back to his first rejection, to his mother. This silence leads him to take Dorcas as a lover and then shoot her when she tries to free herself. The narrator tells the reader that he shoots her because he is afraid of forgetting her, afraid of losing his mother one more time. But Joe cannot sear Dorcas into his mind any more than he can control his mother, or his wife. Joe, like Violet, is scared to be still, and the train shivering toward New York (30), represents Joe's willingness to take a chance, to hear music and feel his feet dancing, to listen to a city which speaks to him, unlike his mother who turns silent at his approach. But Joe does not speak to the city, because Joe is not really in the city: because he is not an integrated self, he is bound for disaster. As Violet's false self disintegrates, so does Joe's. He is captured by art and architecture, and desire, and he thinks it is Dorcas he needs and not "some combination of curved stone," or a swinging high-heeled shoe, "moving in and out of sunlight," and centrally, essentially, the acknowledgement of his mother that he will never have.

In New York City, the artificial replaces the natural, but the motive is identical. The city sky becomes the heart of gold moving past his window, beautiful as an Iroquois (37), beautiful as his ideal-

ized and despised mother, beautiful as his own self which he cannot love because he remains unacknowledged by the one person to whom he hands his power. Joe travels with an inside nothing, and he has no one to tell it to, or is unwilling to tell it, until he meets Dorcas.

Dorcas, with "hooves tracing her cheekbones" represents the running away both she and Joe do. She seems to know better than people his own age what the inside of nothing is like. He does not yet know his wife's story, nor she his. Unlike Violet, Dorcas shares her story with him and her tears. She has lost her mother and clothes pin dolls in a fire set by the KKK. Earlier that same day, she lost her father in a Civil Rights riot. No fireman puts out the fire and no one cares that in a second, her life is extinguished except for a small cinder inside her which she thinks is sexuality, which she protects regardless of all her aunt's attempts to put that fire out.

With the character of Joe, Morrison layers her imagery of Eden with the exodus from Egypt. Joe, the favorite son, at least of Violet, is reminiscent of, though not identical to, the Biblical Joseph. No longer in Palestine, exiled in New York City, a symbolic Egypt, he seems to need to take a metaphoric journey home. Dorcas messes up her balancing act, chooses not to be taken to the hospital, not to try again, but Joe gets and takes another chance on this earth. He, like Violet, loves what is left to them. Joe had lived in Palestine, traveled like the Jews in the Diaspora to Vienna and Rome, has been refused ownership of land, thrown out and winds up like so many Jews, motherless and in New York City. Joe smells the stink of Mulberry Street and Little Africa and moves uptown, in 1917, where he is still not in his homeland, but rather almost beaten to death. Later, he heals and walks every step of the way with the Three Six Niners, celebrating with them the end of World War I. He is new eight times because his world fails him. Winding up with Dorcas, he thinks to himself, "You would have thought I was twenty, back in Palestine satisfying my appetite for the first time under a walnut tree" (129). Joe realizes that he was on a deceptive and dangerous track. Violet, sleeping with a doll, cracked, silent, pushes him toward this betrayal of Dorcas and himself, but the healthy Joe, like Violet, takes responsibility and sees himself as having made errors of judgment: "They say snakes go blind for a while before they shed skin for the last time." Joe needs Dorcas's tracks, he wants to find a trail and stay with it, but this trail to Dorcas is not one that can save him and this geography doesn't lead

to identity. Joe is desperate, illogical, misguided and, thinking through his behavior, knows it. The trail that speaks to him leads to a crowded room aiming a bullet at the heart of the young girl he loved.

Crazy people have reason in *Jazz*, and Joe's mother, Wild, has her reasons to refuse motherhood and hide. Joe tries many angles to return to her womb-like home risking drowning both psychologically, and geographically, in the river Treason. Joe returns several times to the cave and surrounding tree which he thinks is her home, once disgusted by a shit and honey smell, once astounded by the domestic smell of cooking oil, trying to make bargains with her, willing to accept even a silent gesture with no words, but she will not respond. Plead as he may, Joe gets nothing and this nothing drives and consumes him.

Joe is ashamed. Before his mother, Wild, became the healing red-wing outside his New York City window, before New York City as Egypt is transformed into New York city as Israel, Palestine, he sees his mother, Wild, as brain blasted, everywhere and no where. The woods seem full of her. During his last desperate visit to her, he shoots at the trees foreshadowing that he will shoot again, next time not at trees with a blank in his gun, but at his lover's shoulder with a real bullet, because like his mother, Dorcas will not bargain with him.

Joe is compulsively traveling back to that tree and his mother's rejection. He can not find the original if he wishes. Perhaps his adopted brother, his best childhood friend, Victory Williams, could have found his mother's tree, but he is not Victory, has not the memory, the identity, only the need of his mother's acknowledgement. Joe rides the train north away from Wild, and he rides another train back toward her as he stalks Dorcas. On his journey, he continually flashes back to Wild (183). He remembers the original tree: "Defiant and against logic its roots climbed. Toward leaves, light, wind. Below that tree was the river whites called Treason where fish raced to the line...to get there you risked treachery by the very ground you walked on...A step could swallow your foot or your whole self" (182).

Joe deceives himself by remembering the "sugar in the air" (122), or the domestic smell of the cave as he weaved back and forth through his past and present. He fantasizes his reunion with Dorcas who he associates with this sweetness and he hopes again to bargain for acceptance. He wants so much to be the chosen one: "Nobody but me." Dorcas and his mother are conflated in his mind. Joe, at this

point, is driven and dangerous, and he chooses badly to track his lover.

In his mind, Joe is traveling to a house that contained Golden Gray's mother's green dress, and Golden Gray's bone button shirt and fancy trousers; he is traveling toward his own birth, toward Violet's misguided infatuation, but it is young Dorcas Manfred he is, in reality, relentlessly stalking. Joe shoots Dorcas in the shoulder when he finds her because she once again rejects him. Certainly the narrator implies, because she stresses how talented a marksman Joe is, he could have aimed at her, Dorcas's, heart, but he does not aim.

Joe does not kill Dorcas. Dorcas uses this last betrayal as an excuse to die, to become another Toni Morrison ghost. In love with the unworthy Acton, she chooses not to enter another spring in the City. Wanting to be saved, but also wanting to recreate her abject aloneness, she self-destructively chose a personality such as Acton's, selfish, shallow, who cannot choose any one but himself. Dorcas wants to be the object of desire, craves for her nothingness to be filled from the outside, compulsively, recurrently, and impossibly because what she really wants is her mother, her clothes pin dolls, and her father back from the dead: Dorcas chooses death and Morrison allows her to die.

Toni Morrison is magic and the magician. Point of view is everything in *Jazz* and it changes and is treasonous just like earthly geography which leads one toward a self, but not simply or evenly. Like a hieroglyph, the triangle of Dorcas, Violet and Joe become the triangle of Felice, Violet and Joe and the reader is left with three living characters, each a bit less fragmented because of the other. The ice sign in the window of Joe and Dorcas's rented room is replaced by a redwing, the now benign ghost of Wild and perhaps Dorcas in the window that belongs to Joe and Violet. Nature replaces advertisement and living, choosing, being in a certain time and a certain place takes precedence over the past. Ironically, the book, the narrator, becomes less secure, but the characters go forward in life, in possibility.

This is a feminist and modernist novel about what happens beyond the deconstruction of a marriage, about owning one's life, about traveling through people and places and getting closer to one's self, and it is about writing a book that is both wise and entertaining, physical and spiritual, geographical and linguistic, about music and orange bowls that represent nature and art and mystery; it is about movement, the business of life: "men playing out their maple-sugar

hearts, tapping it from found hundred-year-old-trees and letting it run down the trunk, wasting it because they didn't have a bucket to hold it and don't want one either" (197).

Jazz is a book about slavery and about freedom, about leaving Egypt again which is never forever, but recurrent. Sweetheart weather may last a day, but it returns cyclically. This is a story, like the Jewish Passover Haggadah, about the need of every person to save himself and herself, and about mutual respect since we are all in the same geographical boat. Animals in a zoo are not happier because they are safe from hunters: Felice is still young and has much to learn from her elders, Violet and Joe, who have become useful guides for her. Individuals need eyes that look in and out: Joe has been born with these eyes and now is capable of using them in a life-giving fashion; people need to accept change, take responsibility, speak, tell their stories, listen to the sounds the world makes, and sing.

Jazz is a book about learning to love, learning to accept and appreciate power, learning to understand that there is only one apple. People are selfish, comic, a blessing and they all have to get out of Egypt, individually, together, and recurrently. The narrator admits she is stuck on violence, but what interests readers is what happens between the narrator's violent frames. People, the narrator concludes, are not busted records without choices, other than to repeat at the crack; people may and do lift the arm that holds the needle. Ironically, and appropriately, the book which/who narrates itself, is exhausted and wants to be in a place already made for her. As the main characters become more in control of their destiny, the narrator of the book retreats. She/it takes on the desires of an earlier Joe and Violet, musically, jazzily, contrapuntally. But Joe and Violet and Felice make peace with each other and their lives. Not accidentally, the last song the reader hears, with words, is one in Violet's memory during a time when she and Joe are not yet in New York City and are momentarily happy. Women outside of her bedroom are singing from nearby houses, "Go down, go down, Way down in Egypt land..." They answer one another "from yard to yard with a verse or its variation" (226).

Toni Morrison's book, the narrator, tells the reader that people are the music, even if they do not always know they are "the sound of snapping fingers under the sycamores line the streets." It is not the trains, not the human-made patterns, but the people themselves, living in their time, in their place, that determine whether their story

will be tragic or comedic. They are no longer run by geography; they, with the help of language, imagination, and music, use geography to give their lives the necessary images for continuation on this earth.

What the characters have found, the narrator has revealed, but not yet discovered: the book is still in need of outside comfort, public reassurance, recognition, perhaps a Nobel prize, and Toni Morrison will get one for her. So the novel ends with jazz, with geography, with delusion and wisdom, all in human-made syncopated, respectful, if limited, individualized, psychological time, with characters, not geography, in control, mobile, healing and possible.

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