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An Unblinking Gaze

Readerly Response-ability and Racial Reconstructions in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved

By

Lara Fulton
B.A. (Hons.), Simon Fraser University, 1994

THESIS
Submitted to the Department of English
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Abstract

This thesis examines Toni Morrison's reconstruction of racial representations in The Bluest Eye and Beloved. Morrison stresses the need for a transformation of current representations of black and white culture in her critical study Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, in which Morrison examines how black culture has been (mis)represented and (mis)perceived by white Western culture and discourse. She argues that idealized and valorized notions of "whiteness," white identity, and white culture have been constructed from denigrating, binary oppositional (mis)perceptions of "blackness," black identity, and black culture. These stereotypical (mis)perceptions maintain white cultural dominance over black bodies by promoting within black culture self-negating and racist notions of blackness. In her struggle to (re)theorize and transform these racist representations, Morrison examines white and black culture with an "unblinking gaze" (Russell 46) in The Bluest Eye and Beloved. She writes to "repossess, re-name, re-own" (46) and reconstruct representations of black identity and culture by showing how black people see themselves and white people being defined within Western culture. Morrison encourages readerly participation in her racial reconstructions by structuring her fragmented narratives with textual holes and spaces into which the reader must enter to work with Morrison in the telling of the story. This kind of participatory reading underlines the reader's "response-ability" (Playing xi): the ability to enter the text and respond to it, first viscerally and then intellectually. This intimate and intense participation with Morrison and the text liberates our minds to the transformative potential of The Bluest Eye and Beloved regarding representation. Both novels critically interrogate concepts of whiteness and blackness and outline the detrimental effects of white cultural domination upon black and white identity and culture. As we piece together the main characters' fragmented stories, we participate in their differing strategies of resistance to this cultural domination and in their struggle with concepts of love, identity, and meaning. By inviting her readers to participate in the interrogation and transformation of racial representations in her novels, Morrison broadens the spectrum of black and white cultural representations within the literary imagination.

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> From what political perspective do we dream, look, create, and take action? For those of us who dare to desire differently, who seek to look away from the conventional ways of seeing blackness and ourselves, the issue of race and representation is not just a question of critiquing the status quo. It is about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking questions about what type of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad. Making space for the transgressive image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create a context for transformation. And even then little progress is made if we transform images without shifting paradigms, changing perspectives, ways of looking. (Black Looks 4)

In exploring alternate "ways of looking" at black culture in Black Looks: Race and Representation, bell hooks stresses the need for marginalized groups to transform how they are (mis)represented and (mis)perceived within white, Western culture by challenging "dualistic" or binary oppositional ways of thinking. However, a perplexing and paradoxical political and cultural environment has developed within literature and criticism with the rise of postmodern ideology which makes this challenge difficult: postmodernism seems to embrace a decentered, nonhierarchical, and polyphonic interplay of various critical and literary perspectives, while simultaneously reinforcing a powerful, invisible center which silences and appropriates the marginalized voice. In response to this postmodern paradox, hooks writes,

> It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentered subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. (Yearning 25)

Hooks argues that marginalized writers and critics have been accused of this paradox, of constructing and directing their voices towards and in relation to the dominant culture or discourse, despite their intentions to deconstruct or challenge it.[1] A pertinent example of this paradox is Trudier Harris' critical study, Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison. Harris argues that Morrison reworks both African American folklore and Western mythology in her novels "to forge a distinctive voice for herself" (Harris 185). Unfortunately, Harris limits her analysis by consistently drawing parallels between white, Western, patriarchal mythology and Morrison's fiction. In her study of The Bluest Eye, Harris myopically equates Pecola Breedlove's self-destructive desire for blue eyes with "the quest for the holy grail, the quest for the silver fleece, or the pursuit of the three golden apples" (43); in her reading of Beloved, Harris reduces 124 to a pulsating "vagina dentata" (155) and Beloved to an evil "succubus" that threaten to consume not only Paul D but Sethe (153). Harris' readings suggest that many of Morrison's characterizations reinscribe the patriarchal inscriptions underlying Western and African American mythology while few reinvent them. However, by using patriarchal, Western mythology to inform her own readings, Harris limits and roots her analysis in the very master narratives she accuses Morrison of reinscribing. In effect, she erroneously accuses Morrison of the very paradox of which Harris herself is guilty. To avoid this paradox, then, as marginalized critics and writers we need to critically interrogate and redefine our discourse in order to ensure that our voices are not spoken through the filter of the dominant discourse.[2] As there is no position outside discourse from which one can speak, we must explore our peripheral position as a means of constructing our voices and challenging the center.

Russell Ferguson's "Introduction: Invisible Center" claims the margin as a location where "others" can define subversive positions for themselves and speak. Ferguson postulates that there is an invisible center of power within dominant culture which shapes the dominant discourse. He asserts that "this phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable presence over the whole social framework of our culture and over the way we think about it" (Ferguson 9). It subtly reinforces the ideological and cultural foundations of language and perception that maintain cultural hierarchies. Ferguson examines this invisible center and outlines how to deconstruct it:

> As historically marginalized groups insist on their own identity, the deeper, structural invisibility of the so-called center becomes harder to sustain. The power of the center depends upon a relatively unchallenged authority. If that authority breaks down, then there remains no point relative to which others can be defined as marginal. (Ferguson 10)

In other words, the dominant culture exerts its power by its apparent absence. By not drawing attention to itself critically, the dominant power structure seems natural, absent, and difficult to challenge. However, Ferguson argues that marginalized critics and writers who refuse to allow themselves to be defined in relation to the invisible center will construct new representations, new ways of seeing the "other," and will deconstruct the center. "Other" representations of black identity and culture, like those in Toni Morrison's critical and literary works, are challenging the authority of the center by not allowing themselves to be defined by or in relation to white culture. In particular, Morrison refuses to allow herself to be defined by racist or "Africanist" discourse by exposing how both white and black culture are (mis)represented and (mis)perceived by Western, binary oppositional thought. In other words, Morrison challenges the authority of Western discourse by demystifying it.

In her struggle to (re)theorize and represent race, Morrison employs her marginalized position as a viable location from which she can speak. She utilizes this position as a means of existing within white, Western culture, while creating for herself a location from which to challenge it. This vacillating margin[3] is a subversive position from which she can deconstruct binary oppositional discourse, while simultaneously appearing both inside and outside the structures which keep cultural dominance and racist discourse intact. Barbara Hill Rigney's critical work on Morrison supports this assertion. She argues that Morrison's novels "reflect a consciousness that she writes from and about a zone that is 'outside' of literary convention, that disrupts traditional Western ideological confines" and alters binary oppositional and hierarchical "inscriptions" (Rigney 1). This peripheral zone is a vantage point from which Morrison defines "a way of seeing and of knowing that disconcerts and finally discounts the very structure which excludes it" (1). Morrison describes this way of seeing as an "unblinking gaze," in which she can "look at things in an unforgiving / loving way. . .to repossess, re-name, re-own" (Russell 46). By exploring her literary works, we will discover how Morrison gives some of her most intriguing characters this distinctive gaze.

In examining how Morrison (re)theorizes and represents race, my purpose is to address several important questions: How are cultural and literary representations of "whiteness" and "blackness" constructed within a society that typically thinks of itself as universal and race-free? How do notions of whiteness depend on notions of blackness? How does the cultural hierarchy of power control the way representations of white and black culture have been constructed within literature? How can the complex relationship between power and cultural representation be retheorized and transformed? Can cultural representations be transformed by black writers, like Toni Morrison, who will be read by a largely white audience? In addressing these questions, I specifically will examine how representations of race are reconstructed in Morrison's critical study, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, and in two of her novels, The Bluest Eye and Beloved. As I cannot show how Morrison radically reworks hegemonic constructs of blackness without critically examining how whiteness is politically and socially constructed, I will explore Playing in the Dark first, in which Morrison provides a provocative genealogical outline of how white Western discourse defines and represents itself by constructing complex definitions and representations of blackness and black culture. In other words, Morrison argues that white culture has come to know itself as "white" by comparing itself with its own stereotypical (mis)perceptions of black culture. The resultant hegemonic, color-based hierarchy of power maintains white dominance over black cultural bodies. As Morrison's delineation of how this cultural hierarchy of power is established and maintained seems to parallel Foucault's and bell hooks' theories regarding power and representation, I briefly will discuss how their theories complement Morrison's work before moving into a close examination of her novels. In the last section of my introduction, I will examine the narrative strategies Morrison employs to rework racial representations in her literary writing and to encourage readerly participation. I also will outline the similarities in narrative themes and structural devices in The Bluest Eye and Beloved. The second chapter will explore Morrison's first and bleakest novel, The Bluest Eye, which depicts the insidious effects of racism and white ideology on black cultural identity and consciousness.[4] Chapter three examines Morrison's fifth novel, Beloved, in which she fictively reworks historical representations of black slavery and freedom, to reveal the black community's strategies of powerful resistance to white domination: its members critically interrogate the way they have been defined and represented by closely examining white culture with an unblinking, unforgiving gaze in which they define the white 'other.' I will show how both novels have the potential to decolonize the colonizing and colonized reader's mind by creating a distinctive black gaze through which the reader can perceive how white and black culture are defined and represented. In conclusion, I will examine the degree of agency that both novels promote for a radical transformation of the representations of race within white Western culture. Morrison's ability to transform these representations is directly related to her ability to challenge the "naturalized" authority of the dominant discourse by providing critical alternatives to the hegemonic and reified representations of both blackness and whiteness.

Part i: (Re)theorizing Race: Morrison's Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.

In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Toni Morrison examines the white hegemonic and reified constructs of both whiteness and blackness in literature created by "Africanist" (Playing 5) or binary oppositional thinking. Morrison problematizes the literary "knowledge" gathered by white writers, scholars, and critics, as it maintains that "traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-

Americans in the United States" (4-5). In fact, Morrison suggests that most themes in American literature are "responses to a dark abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5). In her examination of literary whiteness and literary blackness within American literature, she does not encourage the "totalizing approaches to African-American scholarship" (8) of some African-American scholars who desire a new hierarchy of black / white; rather, she examines the consequences of Africanist thinking for both academic criticism and the literature it studies.

Morrison specifically appeals to writers to deconstruct Africanist thinking, as she is thoroughly "disenchanted by the indifference" (15) of the critical community:

> Criticism as a form of knowledge is capable of robbing literature not only of its own implicit and explicit ideology but of its ideas as well; it can dismiss the difficult, arduous work writers do to make an art that becomes and remains part of and significant within a human landscape. It is important to see how inextricable Africanism is or ought to be from the deliberations of literary criticism and the wanton, elaborate strategies undertaken to erase its presence from view. (9)

Morrison describes the silence concerning race and representation that enshrouds the critical community as an insidious method of maintaining racist discourse and allowing "the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body" (10). She underlines the urgent need for African-Americans to reappropriate their own discourse to counter the racist readings and writings of texts that universalize and naturalize white culture.

She employs the term "Africanism" for the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (6-7). This racist discourse became naturalized through the "demonizing and reifying" (7) of American Africanism:

> For excellent reasons of state--because European sources of cultural hegemony were dispersed but not yet valorized in the new country--the process of organizing American coherence through a distancing Africanism became the operative mode of a new critical hegemony. (8)

By employing Africanist discourse, white America constructed a powerful, new identity for itself, quite different from the Western identity fashioned by European Africanism. Morrison outlines how Africanist notions of blackness had the power to terrorize the white communities of young America, as these concepts of darkness and blackness came to symbolize "the terror of European outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, Nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin, greed" (37-8). Aided by the presence of a black slave population, these powerful, symbolic connotations of blackness produced by the white literary imagination dramatically shaped the way blackness and black people were represented in American literature. Africanist discourse was a means by which the white imagination could construct notions of identity, freedom, and terror, at the expense of a colonized and enslaved people:

> Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. (38)

Within this polarized literary playground, the major themes of American literature were fashioned. The white imagination could explore "absolute power" and its relation to "autonomy, authority, newness and difference" (44):

> Autonomy is freedom and translates into the much championed and revered "individualism"; newness translates into "innocence"; distinctiveness becomes difference and the erection of strategies for maintaining it; authority and absolute power become a romantic, conquering "heroism," virility, and the problematics of wielding absolute power over the lives of others. All the rest are made possible by this last, it would seem--absolute power called forth and played against and within a natural and mental landscape conceived of as a "raw, half-savage world." (44-5)

With the presence of a voiceless, black slave population, concepts like "individualism," "innocence," and "heroism" were powerfully played out against a background of savage blackness. Through colonizing explorations of authority and freedom, the white population perceived itself as powerful and defined the black population as powerless. A concept of whiteness emerged which was defined by what blackness and a race of black people were not: not-free, not-innocent, not-powerful, not-white. Thus Africanist cultural and literary constructs of blackness were formulated out of the white desire for a "quintessential American identity" (44). In effect, racial difference became the foundation of white self-definition.

Morrison briefly discusses Jim's "foolish" and "mind-softening" Africanist characterization in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn (57). She suggests that Jim is the yardstick by which Huck's developing moral consciousness is measured. Without Jim's presence, Huck's fantasies of freedom and morality cannot be as easily played out. Morrison identifies the two strikingly problematic components of Jim's characterization near the end of the novel: "the apparently limitless store of love and compassion the black man has for his white friend and white masters," despite the endless humiliations they cause him to suffer, and "his assumption that the whites are indeed what they say they are, superior and adult" (56). Morrison argues that his passivity and "boundless love" for his white tormentors, "*after* we have experienced Jim as an adult, a caring father and a sensitive man" (57), would be impossible to imagine if he were white: "for two children to play so painfully with the life of a white man (regardless of his class, education, or fugitiveness) once he had been revealed to us as a moral adult" (57) would be unthinkable. Morrison asserts it is Jim's blackness and slave status that has made his characterization and the ending of Huckleberry Finn believable to generations of American readers. She states:

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

Aided by the Africanist presence of a passive and forgiving black slave, Huck freely interrogates notions of innocence, individualism, freedom, and morality at Jim's expense. As Morrison suggests throughout Playing in the Dark, Huck constructs a sense of himself by defining what he is not.

Literary whiteness, therefore, necessarily depends upon a binary oppositional notion of literary blackness. By defining what is "other," white culture comes to define itself:

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable, not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (52)

To find these formidable dichotomies, one simply opens the dictionary[5] and compares the symbolic and figurative definitions of "blackness" with definitions of "whiteness": blackness is commonly associated with illegal or immoral activities (black market, black hand, blackmail), defilement or disgrace of character (blacken, blacklist, blackball, black wash, black mark, black sheep), wickedness or impurity (blackguard, black deed, blackhearted, black money), invoking evil or inspiring terror (black magic, Black Mass, black man), etc.; in sharp contrast, whiteness is associated with outstanding moral character or fairness (White Knight, white man, white-boy), goodness or purity (white ribbon, whitehanded), making a bad person appear better (white wash, whiten), innocence (white wedding, white lie, white spirit), benevolent well-wishing (white hope, white headed), a counter-revolutionary or disciplinary measure (white terror, white purge), etc. Although there are some exceptions, blackness symbolically represents evil, while whiteness is equated with goodness. In effect, a symbolic hierarchy based on skin-color powerfully constructs racial difference and the literary imagination.

Black writers and critics, like Toni Morrison, and their non-black allies are currently challenging the prevailing notion of Western identity and the value and meaning ascribed to color. For example, bell hooks counters racist discourse by exposing "naturalized" notions like "white ethnicity":

> Racial identities are not only black, Latino, Asian, Native American, and so on; they are also white. To ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it. Without specifically addressing white ethnicity, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other. (Yearning 171)

In other words, racist (or Africanist) discourse is a "naturalized" discourse; it assumes a naturalized, hierarchical position in examining how "others" are constructed and represented within dominant culture and avoids any critical evaluation of its authority to represent 'other' cultures or the authenticity of those representations. Both hooks and Morrison draw critical attention to how white culture constructs this authority, as it radically shapes the way black culture has been represented and has come to define itself in relation to white culture. In Black Looks: Race and Representation, bell hooks examines how representations of both whiteness and blackness have perpetuated "the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people" (2). She emphasizes the intricate connection between representation and racial domination:

> The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only, in Said's "orientalist" sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as "Other" . . . It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that "knowledge," not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm. (3)

In other words, literary constructs of blackness maintained by the dominant discourse have the power to shape how black culture sees itself.[6] To define oneself as "other" is to internalize the aesthetic criteria, the values, and the meanings of the dominant discourse. For black people in a white supremacist culture, this means internalizing racism.

The consequences of this internalized racism within the black community are depicted powerfully in Morrison's The Bluest Eye and will be examined more extensively in my discussion of the novel, in which Morrison reveals how internalized racism constructs the desires of black people and how they value themselves. Individuals within the black community learn to hate their blackness from intricate, interwoven "systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, and racism" (Black Looks 166), which have constructed an ideology of whiteness.[7] This ideology prevents them from seeing how they have internalized white supremacist values to the extent that they do not question the oppressive conditions in which they live, their valorization of whiteness, or the equation of their cultural identity with a denigrating white definition of blackness.

The challenge, then, is to decolonize the minds of both the oppressor and oppressed to create new representations, new ways of looking at both whiteness and blackness. Most white ideologies maintain static and stereotypical definitions of both whiteness and blackness, and the relationship between these representations is a complex dynamic of power and dominance, informed by a hegemonic, color-based hierarchy. It is only through a critical process of "distancing ourselves from the familiar modes of representation that we can expect to identify the areas on which ideology is silent" (Belsey 137). To challenge these representations, then, we need to look beyond the static stereotype by "asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad" (Black Looks 4). We also need to examine the relationship between power and dominance within a white supremacist society in order to construct a strategy for subverting stereotypical representations of whiteness and blackness.

In his explorations of power and knowledge, Michel Foucault asserts that "no one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other" (Language 212). He argues that the direction in which power is exercised is intricately tied to the production of "truth" by the dominant discourse. He writes that the "manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body . . . cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse" (Power 94). Therefore, if the dominant discourse produces truth for the social body as a whole, then "we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power" (94). For example, in a white supremacist society where an ideology of whiteness is presented as "truth," the "relations of power" simultaneously become "relations of domination" (96), where power appears "at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous" (Language 212) to those social bodies who are being dominated.

To challenge the dominant ideology, Foucault invites us to think of domination as interwoven "relations of power," rather than "a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others" (Power 98):

> [Power] is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (98)

If power is not understood as relations of power between dominant and marginalized cultures, then ideology is difficult to challenge. Those who are dominated often view themselves as powerless. Understanding the relations of power between social bodies helps those who are dominated see how they have been defined by the dominant culture as powerless, which is a starting point for resisting cultural domination and eventually eradicating it. For example, Foucault stresses the error in assuming that there is a binary power structure "with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other" (142). As Morrison proposes in Playing in the Dark, Foucault suggests that a close examination of the "relations of domination" between social bodies exposes how both the oppressed and oppressors are affected detrimentally by this power relationship (142).[8] Foucault asserts that it is "not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (133). With regards to cultural representation, Foucault's theories challenge us to search for "a new politics of truth" (133) which exposes the reification of "true discourses," in order to deconstruct the current hegemonic hierarchy of power that controls representation.

Clearly Foucault is not alone in his definition of power in these terms. Black cultural activists, critics, and writers, like Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Martin Luther King, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to name a few, have long since recognized the need to understand the relationship between power and representation. Like Foucault, they define power as an interwoven, net-like organization between white and black culture, to identify how white cultural domination is maintained and to deconstruct those white ideological, normalizing notions of "truth" and "knowledge" which perpetuate the subjugation of black culture. In fact, marginalized critics and writers, like Toni Morrison, have been working to locate "those margins, gaps, and locations on and through the body" (Black Looks 116) where a transformative politics of truth can be defined which reworks cultural representations. In particular, Morrison situates these margins and gaps within her novels' narrative structure to encourage her readers to participate in reworking representations of white and black culture.

Part ii: Readerly Response-ability in Morrison's Literary Works.

In her critical and literary works, Morrison seeks to transform how black culture has been represented by the dominant discourse--to reject the monolithic and homogenous cultural representations of blackness and make room for heterogeneous and transgressive black images. Toni Morrison describes why she began writing novels: "There were no books about me, I didn't exist in all the literature I had read . . . this person, this female, this black did not exist centre-self" (Russell 45).[9] Her primary literary and critical concerns, therefore, consistently address representations of black culture and the language through which these representations are constructed. Morrison asserts, "I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work" (Playing x-xi). Her writing requires her to "learn how to maneuver [*sic*] ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (xi). She argues that the relationship between writing and reading is somewhat similar:

> Both require being alert and ready for the unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes. Both require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability. (xi)

Morrison suggests that, "Readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform within a common language shareable imaginative worlds" (xii). Within her own novels, Morrison argues that she seeks to "provide places and spaces so that the reader can participate" (Russell 44). She invites "the reader to come in and experience, to work with [her] in the telling of the story" (44). She creates novels that are "open-ended" and "participatory" (44), whereby the reader must engage in an intense reading to shape and determine meaning in her work. Trudier Harris also cites Morrison's own comments about her expectation of her readers to participate in her novels:

> My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just about telling the story; it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we [you, the reader, and I, the author] come together to make this book, to feel this experience. (Harris 17)

We discover these textual holes and spaces into which the reader is invited to participate throughout Morrison's writing, particularly in The Bluest Eye and Beloved. Examining the first lines of both novels illustrates how Morrison encourages readerly participation from the onset of each.

The Bluest Eye opens with the phrase "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (Bluest Eye 9). This phrase fosters an immediate sense of intimacy between the reader and the speaker, Claudia Macteer, with its "speakerly" tone and "back fence connotation" ("Unspeakable" 386) As Morrison asserts, "the words are conspiratorial" (386): we are listening to private and privileged "gossip about some one or event within the circle, the family, the neighborhood" (386). Morrison writes:

> The intimacy I was aiming for, the intimacy between the reader and the page, could start up immediately because the secret is being shared, at best, and eavesdropped upon, at the least. Sudden familiarity or instant intimacy seemed crucial to me then, writing my first novel. I did not want the reader to have time to wonder "What do I have to do, to give up, in order to read this? What defense do I need, what distance maintain?" Because I know (and the reader does not--he or she has to wait for the second sentence) that this is a terrible story about things one would rather not know anything about. (386)

Readerly intimacy and involvement are encouraged from the onset to prepare us for the novel's painful subject matter. The second sentence clearly indicates that this intimacy is being established with a child: "We thought, at that time, it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow" (Bluest Eye 9). Told from the perspective of a child, the marigolds take precedence over Pecola's baby. In foregrounding the flowers rather than Pecola's pregnancy, Claudia spares the reader, for the moment, from hearing the full-blown horror underlying Pecola's tragedy. By entering into collusion with the speaker and responding to the painful story, we become implicated in the tragedy. Morrison argues, "If the conspiracy that the opening words announce is entered into by the reader, then the book can be seen to open with its close: a speculation on the disruption of 'nature' as being a social disruption with tragic individual consequences in which the reader, as part of the population of the text, is implicated" (387). As Jan Furman notes, "this three-way collaboration between author, speaker, and reader is the effect for which Morrison strives in all her novels" (Furman 13).

Similarly, the first two sentences of Beloved immediately bring the reader into collusion with its subject: "124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom" (Beloved 3). This abrupt, in medias res beginning unsettles us and peaks our interest. We want to know what "124" represents and why it was "spiteful." Morrison explains her choice of beginning:

> The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense. ("Unspeakable" 396)

This confusing displacement prompts the reader to engage with the text intensely. We continue reading to discover 124 is a house which is spiteful because it is haunted by the spirit of a murdered two year old. Importantly, our feelings of unsettledness grow rather than diminish as we familiarize ourselves with the characters and text, as disjointed, disturbing images and fragmented histories are juxtaposed and require us to wrestle with the narrative to determine meaning. Like the introductory narrative of The Bluest Eye, the opening chapter in Beloved prepares us for its horrific subject matter. By encouraging readerly participation from the onset of each novel, Morrison opens up the creative possibilities for reworking representation within the reader's imagination.

In his excellent study, Dangerous Freedoms: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels, Philip Page alerts us to the potential of misreading Morrison's work, as the textual gaps and holes in her novels make her fiction "dangerously free for author and readers" (Page 27):

> Because Morrison opens and keeps open so many significant issues, readers are given the freedom to enter into the texts, to participate in the constructions of their meanings. But such freedom is also fraught with dangers, dangers that the author will provide too little direction, too much direction, or enigmatically contradictory directions, and dangers that readers will resist or abandon the active role the texts demand. (27)

If the reader resists or abandons his or her role as active participant, the potential for misreading Morrison's fiction is high. For example, as I have indicated, Trudier Harris' limited readerly participation with Morrison's novels severely restricts and misreads them. By using the binaries of patriarchal Western mythology and discourse to inform her readings, in which women are the demonized and defined while men are the saviours and definers, Harris concludes that Morrison's fiction is "male-centered" (Harris 185), when in fact it is largely about women (with the exception of Song of Solomon). Despite numerous examples of radically independent, strong, and self-determined women in Morrison's novels, like Pilate Dead, Baby Suggs, Sethe, Sula and Eva Peace, Harris argues that, "On the landscape of Morrison's fiction, women stand only with the assistance of men" (190). Ironically, Harris' readerly resistance causes her to reinscribe racial and gender stereotypes onto Morrison's fiction, rather than seeing how Morrison ingeniously reworks these stereotypes.

Linden Peach warns us about the other types of misreadings that can result from limited or reluctant readerly participation with Morrison's fiction. He outlines the dangers of seeing Morrison's novels as "purely reactive," as solely inverting Western representations of black and white culture or "reacting to white racism" (Peach 11). He also highlights the kinds of attacks that were made by literary writers and critics on Morrison's work after she won the Nobel Prize in October 1993:

> It was argued that she betrayed her origins as a black writer by employing European models. She was not judged a good novelist because her characters were said to have no social context; they were found to be stereotypes, thinly drawn to convey messages that could not be easily understood. Her work was even said not to challenge stereotypes of black people. (10)

These attacks potently indicate the potential of Morrison's work to be misread by readers who restrict their readerly response-ability with her fiction. Morrison's fiction is complex and transformative, her characterizations are provocative and multidimensional, and her meanings are multilayered and enigmatic. As Morrison suggests, the type of participation she requires from her readers underlines their "response-ability": we must be alert, active, and responsible, "mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision" (Playing xi). Page stresses that Morrison's fiction "requires courage, skill, and creativity, not only of the author . . . but also, most importantly, of the reader" (Page 27). By entering into an intimate negotiation of meaning with Morrison and the text, we can free our minds to the transformative possibilities within each novel.

By comparing both novels, it becomes clear that The Bluest Eye and Beloved share somewhat similar themes and structural motifs, despite their radically different characterizations and subject matter. Both novels chronicle the insidious effects of white cultural domination upon black identity and culture. These effects vary according to each character's response to this cultural domination and the strategies each uses to resist it. For example, some of the characters periodically erupt into fits of violence as a means of resistance, while others, offering little resistance, are systematically destroyed by white oppression. In both novels, the main characters engage in a personal search for identity and meaning, with dramatically differing degrees of success. This search is complemented by each novel's circular narrative structure, which contains two distinct movements: one narrative takes us forward through the present day occurrences in the lives of the main characters, while the other takes us backward into their individual histories.[10] The circular structure of these two movements is not immediately apparent, however, in either novel. Each narrative is given to us in fragments that we must piece together in order to get a sense of the whole, of each character's life. It is only in the last few pages that each novel's circularity is revealed. Herein lies the brilliance of this narrative form: by piecing together the fragments of the main characters' stories, we become active participants in each character's search for identity and meaning. As we piece together the fragments of the stories in The Bluest Eye and Beloved, so the characters piece together memories from their past experiences to try to make sense of their lives and their world, and to define meaning for themselves.

Notes:

1. Lynn Uttal calls this paradox as "inclusion without influence" (Anzaldua 42), where some critics are aware of the hegemonic constructs that have naturalized a colour-based hierarchy of power, but do not actively engage in counter-hegemonic thinking. For example, Kadiatu Kanneh accuses Helene Cixous' argument in "Laugh of the Medusa" as being in "indirect collusion with the deliberate policies of the Western colonial countries which aim to wipe out the achievements and the intricate pasts of the colonized" (Kanneh 144). Kanneh argues that Cixous' argument maintains white Western cultural dominance and appropriates black cultural identity by "linking women's position" (144) with the colonization and exploitation of black culture and the black body. Kanneh asserts that this equation creates a feminine identity that is "curiously ahistorical and apolitical" (150), as the appropriation of the black body for the female body blurs the differences between race and gender, and further obscures the distinct history of black culture which black cultural critics and writers are trying to reclaim. Although this appropriation may be unintentional and may not occur within Cixous' other critical work, it underlines the urgent need for critics to interrogate their positions and discourse.

2. Here it is important for me to position myself within my own argument by stating that I include myself among marginalized critics and writers as a white feminist.

3. See Moi's Sexual / Textual Politics, p. 166-67.

4. For purposes of clarity, I am employing the term "white ideology" to refer to those ideologies which presume the superiority of whiteness, white identity, or white culture, normalize racist notions of Western discourse regarding "truth" and "knowledge," and perpetuate the subjugation of black identity and culture. All subsequent references to white ideology throughout my paper pertain to this definition.

5. Webster's Third New International Dictionary

6. Although Edward Said's excellent critical study, Orientalism, is central to any discussion of cultural representation, I have chosen not to cite his work within my argument because his focus is not on black and white cultural representations but how "Oriental" or Eastern culture has been imaginatively constructed and represented by Western culture and discourse. Instead, I have chosen those critical texts which examine representations of black and white culture, like Morrison's Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination and hooks' Black Looks: Race and Representation, which likely were influenced by Said's formative work.

7. I am employing Catherine Belsey's definition of ideology in Critical Practice: "ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world--real in that it is the way in which people really live their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full

understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted in them" (Belsey 57).

8. Gloria Anzaldua warns us that some discussions regarding this interrelationship redirect attention upon the oppressor, rather than those struggling against oppression. For example, she argues that, with regards to racism, critical discussions that only examine how white culture has been infected by its own racist discourse, rather than how this discourse has affected all cultures, privilege white culture over "other" cultures and sustain racist discourse and domination.

9. Jan Furman cites Morrison as stating years after she had written The Bluest Eye that "she was compelled to do what she thought others had not because she was 'ill-taught'" (Furman 82) and unaware of the writings by black women novelists Zora Neale Hurston and Paule Marshall.

10. Linden Peach also notes these two movements within The Bluest Eye: "on one level, the narrative takes us backwards from the present in the North into the past and the South, whilst, on another level, taking us forward in the events of Pecola's tragedy" (Peach 25).

Chapter Two

"This is not a story to pass on": White Ideology and the Black Body in The Bluest Eye.

Some critics contend that The Bluest Eye's structure is flawed by its use of multi-narrators and nonlinear structure. One critic in particular, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, asserts that these structural devices create unnecessary confusion for the reader, not clarity (Mbalia 34-37). She argues that The Bluest Eye lacks the "symbiosis between text and structure" found in Morrison's other novels and she attributes its confusing structure to Morrison's inexperience as a writer (37).[1] However, as with all of Morrison's novels, The Bluest Eye's structure forces the reader to wrestle with its content. By piecing together the novel's major themes and structural devices, we discover how its polyvocal and fragmented circular structure brilliantly support themes of fragmentation throughout the novel. Certain members of the black community in Lorain, Ohio, are cut off from each other and their ancestry through their adoption of white cultural values; their separation from one another is indicated by their stories being told by more than one narrator. Whether or not Morrison intended to structure the novel in this fashion, the fragmented structure complements the individual narratives, and indicates the characters' separation from each other and the black community. Accordingly, Beloved is not polyvocal to the same degree as The Bluest Eye because the community is much more united in their awareness of each other's personal stories. They all, in a sense, share the same story of personal suffering under the conditions of slavery. Bonded in this manner, Beloved does not require several narrators to tell the story.

One of the major themes in The Bluest Eye is racism. Throughout the novel, we observe how white ideology shapes the desires of black people and how they value themselves. One of the main characters, Pecola Breedlove, prays for blue eyes every night because she believes that having blue eyes will make her lovable, beautiful, noticeable, and acceptable to both her family and society. For Pecola, blue eyes symbolize beauty and happiness; she believes that having blue eyes would mean that she would no longer have to look at "bad things" (Bluest Eye 40), because "bad things" do not happen in front of blue eyes, nor to people with blue eyes. She associates her blackness with ugliness because of the "vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (42) when they look at her, and she fantasizes that having blue eyes would make her beautiful and visible. Her desire is fuelled by her "knowledge" that she is ugly in the eyes of the world. Like many members of her black community, Pecola has "internalized white supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value" (Black Looks 3). In other words, she has internalized the racist ideology around her.

Pecola's internalized racism is shared by her family and the black community in which she lives. Ironically named because they breed self-hatred and not love, the Breedlove family also defines its blackness as ugliness:

> It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and

> went about the world with it. (Bluest Eye 34)

The Breedloves do not challenge this white perception of themselves because they have been subjected to a hegemonic, colour-based hierarchy which normalizes white aesthetics and values. This valorization of whiteness causes another little black girl, Claudia MacTeer, to dismember the blue-eyed baby dolls she is given every Christmas in an attempt to locate their beauty and desirability. The intense self-hatred the black community feels toward its blackness is both self-perpetuating and self-regulating within a white supremacist society. When Pecola falls victim to the verbal attacks of a group of black boys, they attack her blackness:

> It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages. . .They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit. (55)

These boys have learned to hate their blackness from interwoven systems of domination and racism that are informed by an ideology of whiteness that denigrates blackness and black culture. This ideology prevents them from seeing how they have internalized white supremacist values to the extent that they do not question their valorization of whiteness or their victimization of Pecola. In fact, Pecola's victimization is perpetuated by most members of the black community. Infected by white ideological notions of power and representation, the community continues the cycle of domination by defining a sense of itself by what Pecola is not: not beautiful, not clean, not loved, not moral.

The effects of this ubiquitous, enigmatic ideology of whiteness upon black culture are demonstrated throughout The Bluest Eye, particularly in the first of its two prefaces, which is an excerpt taken from a Dick and Jane primary school reader:

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (7)

This passage is immediately followed by a second preface, in which Claudia, one of the central narrators in the novel, introduces the major subject: that "there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941 . . . because Pecola was having her father's baby" (9). By juxtaposing and offsetting these two prefaces at the beginning of the novel, Morrison immediately suggests a relationship between the white cultural discourse of the Dick and Jane reader and Pecola's tragic story. The destructive nature of this relationship becomes clearer, as these two structural devices are juxtaposed in each of the four sections of the novel to demonstrate the powerful effects of white ideology to shape the desires of black culture. Having introduced the painful subject of the novel, Claudia asserts, "There is really nothing more to say--except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*" (9).

By employing the Dick and Jane reader as a structural device, Morrison suggests that Pecola learns to devalue her black cultural identity at a very young age from the white cultural discourses of "truth" and "normality" she is taught to read in school. This normalized discourse enters Pecola's imagination insidiously; she cannot identify with Jane and Jane's family because Pecola and her family are completely absent from the Dick and Jane storybooks. The result is a dizzying whirlpool of self-negation and confusion, which Morrison ingeniously demonstrates by repeating the passage three times. With each repetition, the words flow more closely together, "until a tightly woven fabric is created, a fabric which will run threads through the unconscious too deep to eradicate" (Kanneh 146):

> Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisverypretty
> hereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandw
> hitehousetheyareveryhappyseejaneshehasareddressshewants
> toplaywhowillplaywithjane. . . (Bluest Eye 8)

This interwoven passage visually portrays the black subjective experience of reading Jane's story: presented as universal, black children like Pecola feel painfully isolated from the realm of the "normal."[2] We can imagine Pecola's confusion in reading and rereading this passage, searching the words and then the gaps between the words for a trace of her own cultural reality, only to have the words close in upon themselves and reveal that there is no space for her within this normalized world. Clearly, Jane's world is irreconcilable with Pecola's social reality: her dilapidated house is "both irritating and melancholy" (30) to passersby, her father is a violent alcoholic who rapes her, and her mother beats into Pecola and her brother "a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (102). In examining these effects of white ideology on black culture, Kadiatu Kanneh asserts, "if there is no place at which to position the self within discourse, the result is a form of selfannihilation which, beginning in the mirror of white society, becomes a conscious and then an internalized activity" (Kanneh 147). Although the serenity, security, and aesthetic beauty of Jane's environment seem utterly incomprehensible to Pecola, these qualities shape her desire and teach her a self-negating valorization of whiteness.

Fragments from the Dick and Jane reader are selectively placed throughout the novel. The excerpt at the opening of the novel frames the story and has the thematic effect of demonstrating the ubiquitous nature of white ideology within black culture.[3] Each omniscient chapter within the four sections of the novel begins with a relevant fragment of the interwoven passage to demonstrate how powerfully an ideology of whiteness, an ideology which appears simultaneously present and absent, is ingrained within the black psyche. The presence of the passage at the beginning of each chapter also symbolizes how, even when it appears absent, white ideology controls black culture and perpetuates a profound hatred of blackness through a normalized valorization of whiteness.

Claudia provides the only challenge to the black community's valorization of whiteness. Through her unblinking gaze, we see this valorization being questioned and resisted. Like the Dick and Jane storybook fragments, Claudia's narratives provide a potent framework for Pecola's story. They also provide an ironic commentary on Jane's idealized world, as Claudia's narratives frame each of the novel's four sections. Her interrogation of white aesthetics and values deconstructs the idealized world in which Jane lives, and "exposes the fallacy of happily-ever-after storybook life" (Furman 19). Claudia's family is presented as a colourful antithesis to Jane's sterile family. In comparison with the

MacTeer family, Jane's family "appears to be made up of rigid, emotionless figures incapable of deep feeling" (Awkward 59). Michael Awkward suggests that Claudia's interrogation of the Western myth of the ideal family "exposes each individual element of the myth as not only deceptively inaccurate in general, but also wholly inapplicable to black American life" (59). Awkward states, "The emotional estrangement of the primer family members (an estrangement suggested by the family's inability to respond to the daughter Jane's desire for play) implies that theirs is solely a surface contentment" (59). Barbara Christian also notes that the "solidity of the MacTeer Family" reveals the emptiness underlying the "Dick and Jane ideal" (Christian 143). Even the violence and disunity in the Breedlove family exposes this emptiness. Claudia's narratives ensure that our reading is not limited to a comparison of Jane's and Pecola's families, in which the white ideal is legitimized. It is important that we see Claudia's family as a healthier alternative to both Jane's and Pecola's families.

Claudia's role in narrating Pecola's story is viewed as "one of Morrison's most brilliant strokes" (Christian 140). As Barbara Christian suggests, Claudia's narrative voice is an integral part of the novel because Pecola is unable to have "the necessary distance, space, or time to know what is happening to her" (140). Claudia's reflective narratives try to make sense of Pecola's tragedy. In telling *how* the tragedy occurred, she hopes to give the reader a sense of *why* it happened. Christian also notes that Claudia confronts somewhat similar problems as Pecola regarding the beauty myth. Although she "is not seen as the ugliest of the ugly" nor does she "experience the gravest effects of the myth of beauty as Pecola does," Claudia recognizes that "blue eyes and blond hair are admired by all and that she does not possess them" (140). Rather than passively longing for features she does not possess, Claudia dismembers the white baby dolls she is given to locate their desirability and attempt to learn why "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (Bluest Eye 20). When she is given one of these dolls, she discovers she "could not love it" but she could "examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable" (20). Claudia admits with horror that her interrogation of the beauty myth is not limited to the dismemberment of her dolls. She transfers this impulse to white girls. She tells us:

> The indifference with which I could of axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, "Awwwww," but not for me? . . .
>
> If I pinched them, their eyes--unlike the crazed glint of the baby doll's eyes--would fold in pain and their cry would not be the sound of an icebox door, but a fascinating cry of pain. (22)

Claudia eventually learns to taper these violent impulses with a "fraudulent love" (22) for whiteness. However, she realizes that this change in behaviour is an "adjustment without improvement" (22) and she never abandons her interrogation of whiteness completely.

The crucial difference that enables Claudia to challenge white ideological values while Pecola is systematically destroyed by them is the degree of stability and self-love fostered within their home environments. Unlike Pecola, who is unloved and rejected by her mother, who is required to call her mother Mrs. Breedlove, who witnesses her mother's love for the little blue-eyed, blond-haired Fisher girl whom Mrs. Breedlove nannies, Claudia is nurtured and enveloped by her mother's love which is as "thick and dark as Alaga syrup" (14). Claudia can feel, smell, and taste this love flowing through her house, whereas Pecola goes mad searching fruitlessly for it. Sensing the intensity of Pecola's misery, Claudia wants to "open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit misery out on the streets" (61). In effect, Claudia wants to imbue Pecola with the strength and wisdom she has learned from her mother--the knowledge that suffering is an inevitable part of life against which one stands in defiance to overcome. This defiant stance is powerfully depicted in Claudia's vision of her mother as a "slim young girl in a pink crepe dress" waiting for the arrival of an intense summer storm (146):

> One hand is on her hip; the other lolls about her thigh--waiting. The wind swoops her up, high above the houses, but she is still standing, hand on hip. Smiling. The anticipation and promise in her lolling hand are not altered by the holocaust. In the summer tornado of 1929, my mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her. (146)

This awesome vision underlines Claudia's conviction in her mother's strength, constancy, and love. These maternal qualities shape Claudia's sense of strength and self-love which, in turn, enable her defiant interrogation of white ideological values. It is these qualities and this defiant stance that Claudia desires to pass on to Pecola but, for Pecola, it is too late. The legacy of self-hatred Pecola has received from her parents' valorization of whiteness crushes and destroys her. The tragedy underlying Pecola's story is how this legacy was created. By moving back into Pauline's and Cholly's individual histories, we witness the events that culminate in Pecola's madness.

Pauline Breedlove's narrative begins with a relevant, ironic fragment from the Dick and Jane storybook: "SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICEMOTHERWILLYOU

PLAYWITHJANEMOTHERLAUGHSLAUGHMOTHERLAUGH" (88). Her story is told by two voices: Pauline's own voice and the voice of the omniscient narrator. Barbara Christian clearly states the relevance of having two voices narrate this section:

> It is important that we hear her story in her own sound patterns and images, for her manner of perceiving the world, primarily in rural tones and images of color, is a key to her wasted life. But her sense of herself is too limited, so we also need the more expansive sounds of the narrator to explore fully the dissonance in Mrs. Breedlove's life. (Christian 145)

Both voices combine to give us a greater sense of Pauline's character. Until this point, she has been characterized as a bitter and hostile woman, who defines her sense of self according to her role as martyr and "ideal servant" (Bluest Eye 100) within a white household. Her own children call her Mrs. Breedlove and she has infected them with inexorable feelings of ugliness and worthlessness by rejecting their love for the affection of the little white girl of the couple for whom she works. Rather than masking her blackness like some members of the black community by copying "white" hairstyles and speech mannerisms, Pauline wears her blackness like a cloak and embraces white cultural stereotypes that equate it with ugliness and servitude. Instead of leaving us with this unsympathetic portrait of Pauline, Morrison takes us back into her childhood, into a time before her sense of love and life has been ravaged by white ideology. As an ingenious part of this narrative, Morrison has Pauline speak directly to us and share some of her most intimate thoughts and feelings. By moving through her history and hearing her own words, we get a more accurate perception of Pauline, of her passions and vulnerabilities, and of the circumstances which lead to her increasing sense of isolation, anger, and despair.

Like her husband and daughter, Pauline is one of the most tragic figures in The Bluest Eye. She knows love, laughter, beauty, and the "funkiness" (68) of nature and passion as a young woman, only to lose this knowledge when she leaves her home for Lorain, Ohio, with Cholly. Despite her feelings of "separateness and unworthiness" (88) which she blames on her bad foot, she is moved and nourished by the colours in life. She describes how when she first saw Cholly, all the vibrant colours she has loved in her childhood collect inside her:

> I want you to know it was like all the bits of color from that time down home when all us chil'ren went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of my Sunday dress, and they mashed up and stained my hips. My whole dress was messed with purple, and it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade Mama used to make when Pap came in out the fields. It be cool and yellowish, with seeds floating near the bottom. And that cool streak of green them june bugs made on the trees the night we left from down home. All of them colors was in me . . . So when Cholly came up and tickled my foot, it was like them berries, that lemonade, them streaks of green the june bugs made, all come together. (92)

She feels laughter and these "rainbow" (104) colours inside her whenever she and Cholly make love in the first several years of their marriage. Gradually, however, with her ostracism from Lorain's black community for her overtly "black" characteristics, her unstraightened hair, her "way of talking (saying chil'ren) and dressing" (94), the revitalizing colours of Pauline's childhood become sterilized.

Pauline's increasing sense of loneliness and isolation from both Cholly and the black community take her to the movies, where she fosters a barren sense of happiness by learning to value the white ideals of romantic love and beauty:

> There in the dark her memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to her earlier dreams. Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another--physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it and collected self-contempt by the heap. (97)

These movies have the same effect on Pauline as the Dick and Jane reader has on young black children: they teach a valorization of whiteness that painfully negates black identity and culture. By watching movies, Pauline vicariously enters an idealized, white world, in which white men lavish love and care on beautiful, elegantly dressed, white women in large, clean houses. Although these images give Pauline pleasure, they make "coming home . . . and looking at Cholly hard" (97). In embracing these movie images, she eventually finds it impossible "to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty" (97) according to white aesthetics. She begins to imitate Jean Harlow's hairstyle to feel beautiful, until her front tooth suddenly falls out. After this loss, she stops taking care of her appearance and she resigns herself "to just being ugly" (98). Accordingly, when Pecola is born, Pauline defines her by the lowest possible category of this beauty scale: "Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (100).

The loss of Pauline's tooth is one of Morrison's clearest metaphors for the insidious effect of white ideology on black identity:

> . . . there must have been a speck, a brown speck easily mistaken for food but which did not leave, which sat on the enamel for months, and grew, until it cut into the surface and then to the brown putty underneath, finally eating away to the root, but avoiding the nerves, so its presence was not noticeable or uncomfortable. Then the weakened roots, having

> grown accustomed to the poison, responded one day in severe pressure, and the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place. (92-93)

The brown speck which gradually and unnoticeably rots Pauline's tooth is a metaphor for how internalized racism "poisons" and erodes black identity and consciousness. Unlike Claudia, who gathers the strength to question racist ideology from her strong sense of home and parental love, the "conditions" which act as a prerequisite for Pauline's erosion of identity are her childhood feelings of familial homelessness and seclusion. Having traded her colours for the sterilized, black and white images in the movies, Pauline relates to everything in black and white terms, associating ugliness with blackness and colourful beauty with whiteness. She compares the colours of the white household in which she works with dull, non-colours of her own house. However, the sparkling white of the kitchen, the yellow corn silk hair and blue eyes of the pink and yellow child, are no substitute for the vibrant greens, purples, and yellows of her childhood. In embracing the flat, sterile colours of the Fisher household, Pauline rejects those colours which represented life and love for her. She discovers that the "more she neglected her house, her children, her man," the more she perceives them as "the dark edges that made daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely" (101).

By the time we meet Pauline, she has fully embraced the fraudulent "power, praise, and luxury" she feels in the Fisher household whereas she bears Cholly "like a crown of thorns" and her children "like a cross" (100). She has all but forgotten the life-giving, loving colours of her childhood and her "rainbow" orgasms, and her life outside the Fisher household is characterized by violence. The "darkly brutal formalism" of her fights with Cholly gives "substance to the minutes and hours otherwise dim and unrecalled" (36-37). Tragically, in succumbing to the anaesthetising, sterilizing whiteness of the Fisher household, Pauline turns to violence to awaken her numbed senses and feel physically and spiritually alive.

Unlike Pauline, Cholly is initiated into a "violence born of total helplessness" (117) early in his life, after he suffers the humiliation of having white men watch his first sexual encounter. In the most logical movement of his young mind, he projects his hatred of these white men onto Darlene and makes her representative of his helplessness. He learns that by despising her, he can hold onto his sense of self. It was easier, safer, in the short term, to displace his hatred onto her rather than the white men because she is present and tangible. Hating the white men would have "consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal" (119) as it would mean confronting their power to make him feel impotent and helpless. This moment changes him profoundly. Morrison makes this transformation clear by connecting this experience with the moment that forever changes Pauline: the void that fills his mind when he is not thinking about his 'rape' by the white hunters is like "the space left by a newly pulled tooth still conscious of the rottenness that had once filled it" (119). Cholly never overcomes this humiliating experience. It infects his relationship with Pauline and Pecola and defines his sense of self. With time, it tragically restricts him to expressing affection through acts of violence.

Ostensibly, the most violent act in the novel is Cholly's rape of his daughter. However, Morrison does not allow her readers to fall into equating Cholly with the white stereotype of the aggressive, demonic black male (in fact, we see how he comes to align himself with the black devil created by white values); rather, she takes her readers into Cholly's past, from the moment of his birth, to see and perhaps understand how he arrives at the point where he is able to rape his own daughter. We voyeuristically watch as his spirit is repeatedly raped through a series of painful humiliations. By the time he rapes Pecola, Cholly is a tragic, broken man, consumed by his own sense of helplessness and self-hatred.

Ironically, the chapter in which Cholly is introduced is prefaced by the image of the big, strong, and protective father from the Dick and Jane storybook: "SEEFATHERHEIS BIGANDSTRONGFATHERWILLYOUPLAYWITHHANEFATHERISSMILINGSMILEFATHERSMILESMILE" (105). Linden Peach points out, "This is itself ironic in the light of the text's subsequent celebration of the inner strength and fortitude not of black fathers but of black women" (Peach 35):

> Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this." White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other. But they took all of that and re-created it in their own image. They ran the houses of white people and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that wrung the necks of chickens and butchered hogs also nudged African violets into bloom; the arms that loaded sheaves, bales, and sacks rocked babies into sleep. They patted biscuits into flaky ovals of innocence--and shrouded the dead. They plowed all day and came home to nestle like plums under the limbs of their men. The legs that straddled a mule's back were the same ones that straddled their men's hips. And the difference was all the difference there was. (109-10)

The protective father in the preface is also an ironic comment not only on Cholly's inability to provide for or protect his children, but on the father who first abandons and then rejects him.[4] His father's name is Samson Fuller, which, as Barbara Christian also has noted, is Morrison's ironic reworking of the stereotype (Christian 147): Fuller is a short, balding, "vexed and whiny" man (Bluest Eye 123). Neither Cholly nor Fuller is similar to the Samsonian father in the storybook. Both men abuse rather than protect their children, and proffer a legacy of despair and self-hatred, rather than the sense of order, security, and happiness in the storybook. In this light, the preface also postures the white ideal of masculinity and fatherhood against Cholly's confused sense of himself as a man and parent. By immediately immersing us within Cholly's past, we witness the tragic events that imbue within him feelings of worthlessness.

The blanket of warmth, security, and happiness wrapped around Jane (characterized by the smiling, protective, benevolent image of her father), is immediately and sharply contrasted with the "two blankets and one newspaper" in which Cholly is wrapped by his mother before she abandons him on a junk heap, four days after his birth (105). Abandoned by both of his parents, Cholly is never able to move beyond this rejection. His childhood feelings of warmth and security are characterized by a repulsive image of his Great Aunt Jimmy, who rescues him and raises him: when he sleeps with her for warmth in winter, he is disgusted by the sight of "her old, wrinkled breasts sagging in her nightgown" (105). Although Cholly feels grateful to his aunt for saving him, he is sufficiently repulsed by her elderly habits and aging body that, at times, he imagines that his death in the junk heap would have been better than being raised by her. Distanced from her by age and gender, Cholly never learns to appreciate the strength and wisdom his aunt has gathered from her life experiences, or how she has been fortified by her connection with the black community and its ancestral traditions.

The only person he feels connected to within the black community is an elderly man called Blue Jack. From Old Blue, Cholly learns his sense of masculinity and freedom. Blue is one of Morrison's "dangerously free" men: independent, self-governing, and free from responsibility (125). Tempered by age, Blue is long past the point where his sense of freedom endangers himself or the community; it is, however, dangerous for Cholly, as it defines his concept of what it means to be male. Old Blue's "woman-killer" (119) stories of the women he has loved and left confirm what Cholly knows about his father, and construct a powerful image of glorious freedom. What Cholly fails to see is Blue's connection to the community. Despite living on the periphery and being somewhat self-reliant, Blue's presence is liked and welcomed within the community. He is perceived as old and harmless. Having had no father figure in his life and feeling little connection with his aunt, Cholly marvels at Blue's life--his freedom and the adventures he has had. With Blue he feels that sense of living within the community but without responsibility for it. This sense of freedom is most clearly demonstrated in the watermelon episode, in which Cholly and Blue eat the heart of the watermelon which has been broken badly. It confirms Cholly's sense of getting something without giving anything in return. In eating the watermelon, he and Blue eat the "nasty-sweet guts of the earth" (107) without remorse, gratitude, or responsibility. This episode also depicts the pervasive influence of white ideology in shaping black identity. In watching the powerful image of black father hold the watermelon over his head before breaking it, Cholly wonders if "God looked like that"

(106). He concludes:

> No. God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that--holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it to the ground and spill the red guts so niggers could eat the sweet, warm insides. (106-07)

Cholly chooses to align himself with this black devil. The resultant sense of powerlessness and impotence symbolized in the bad break of the watermelon contributes to Cholly's early conception of himself, his blackness, his maleness. As he feels powerless to challenge the greater system at work, he takes hold of what he interprets as his father's and Blue's dangerous sense of freedom.

Cholly's attempt to find his father also ends in helpless impotence. When he finally meets his father, Cholly is unable to speak or tell his father who he is. Jan Fuman notes how Cholly's "response to his father's angry denunciations--crying and soiling his pants--eclipses any opportunity for emotional maturity and returns him, in a sense, to the helplessness of his abandonment in infancy" (Furman 16). After his father's rejection, he lies for hours curled up in the fetal position, with "his fists covering his eyes" (Bluest Eye 124). He temporarily finds comfort in the warm darkness of the evening, which envelopes him "like the skin and flesh of an elderberry protecting its own seed" (124). Shortly after waking up, Cholly realizes he is truly free for the first time. Having been rejected by both of his parents, he decides "there was nothing left to lose" (126). He is in this "godlike state" (126) when he meets and marries Pauline.

The joy and "curiosity" (126) Cholly feels in marrying Pauline is short-lived. Having learned his sense of freedom from men like his father and Old Blue, Cholly finds the idea of sleeping with the same woman every night "unnatural" (126). The "sheer weight of sameness" (126) in marriage threatens to destroy his sense of freedom and selfhood. Pauline's initial dependence on him painfully reminds him of his previous failures. His inability to provide for her emotional and financial needs, combined with her consequent role as the family's breadwinner, emphasize the "myriad . . . humiliations, defeats, and emasculations" (37) he has experienced throughout his life. He turns to domestic violence and the vapid oblivion provided by alcohol as relief from his feelings of entrapment and helplessness. Pauline comes to represent "one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt" and he violently displaces "the sum of his inarticulate fury and aborted desires" onto her (37). As Furman surmises, "Cholly, then, needs Pauline to objectify his failure" (Furman 17). Like his irrational hatred of Darlene, Cholly believes that by hating Pauline, he can "leave himself intact" (Bluest Eye 37). The event that renders him "totally disfunctional" is the "appearance of children" (126). By the time Pecola is born, Cholly is a broken, violent alcoholic whose family signifies his powerlessness and failure as a man, husband, and father.

Furman rightly points out that Cholly's rape of Pecola cannot be viewed entirely "in terms of scapegoating" (Furman 17). Morrison connects his rape of Pecola with two moments that changed Cholly's life profoundly: his "rape" by the white men and his tender first encounter with Pauline.[5] When he comes home drunk and discovers Pecola hunched over the sink washing dishes, Cholly agonizes over his inability to provide for or protect her. His intoxicated brain conflates the present with the past. Pecola's absolute helplessness stirs within him the same feelings of hatred he directed towards Darlene when he was unable to protect her from the voyeuristic rape of the white hunters. Watching Pecola and feeling the familiar mixture of "guilt and impotence" resurface like a "bilious duet" (Bluest Eye 127), Cholly asks himself,

> What could he do for her--ever? What give her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? 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? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and of life could be useful to her? What could his heavy arms and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (127)

As Furman states, Cholly's "answer is rape--in spite of himself" (Furman 18). Although Pecola's "helpless, hopeless presence" (Bluest Eye 127) infuriates him and objectifies his failure as a father, his desire to rape her is initiated by mixed feelings of guilt, love, and tenderness for her. Overwhelmed by feelings of love and "protectiveness" when Pecola repeats the same gesture with her foot that previously attracted him to Pauline, Cholly crawls towards his daughter "on all fours" and tries to rape her "tenderly" (128). However, the "rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat," and the "tightness of her vagina" dissolve his feelings of tenderness and cause his soul "to slip down to his guts and fly out into her" (128). After violently removing himself from her body, Cholly is once again overwhelmed by feelings of hatred and tenderness: his hatred makes it impossible for him to pick her up, while his tenderness "force[s] him to cover her" (129). By imparting Pecola with his spiritual and physical ejaculate, Cholly ironically succeeds in giving something of himself to Pecola: his dissolute soul and fractured sense of self. The result of this incestuous act is a "disintegration" or "falling away" (128) of identity and spirit. Shortly afterwards, Cholly dies and Pecola's madness indicates that her identity has been permanently split.

Morrison argues that the "trauma of racism" is the "severe fragmentation of the self" ("Unspeakable" 381). As we have seen with Pecola and Cholly, the fracturing of their identities occurs within a racist system that, in promoting whiteness and denigrating blackness, sanctions their spiritual and physical rape. With Pauline, we observe how her identity is split between her role as long-suffering, good-natured, benevolent servant in the white Fisher household and her role as the bitter, violent, indifferent mother of Pecola and Sammy. Her fragmentation of self occurs through her valorization of whiteness at the expense of her blackness. Throughout the novel, Morrison exposes the detrimental consequences of the black community's valorization of whiteness. Two characters in particular, Geraldine and Soaphead Church, reject their black roots for their white ancestry, to the detriment of themselves and those around them. Consequently, they abhor all attributes equated with blackness and embrace the Western stereotypes of white and black culture. The result of their valorization of white culture is a methodical and paranoid cleansing of their black ethnicity, a process of racial sterilization motivated by self-hatred.

Geraldine is representative of the Western-educated, middle-class "sugar-brown" (Bluest Eye 68) women who have been instructed in coveting whiteness:

> They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music

> to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. (68)

In "normal" schools, black women learn the white values that associate whiteness with civility, order, and refinement and their blackness with "dreadful funkiness" (68) and disorder. In adopting these values, they spend their lives attempting to rid themselves of the "funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (68) that they associate with their black ethnicity:

> Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies. They fight this battle all the way to the grave. The laugh that is a little too loud; the enunciation a little too round; the gesture a little too generous. They hold their behind in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick, they never cover their entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair. (68)

In suppressing the characteristics they associate with their blackness, they also suppress their emotions. They form loveless, orderly relationships and households, and they move through life trying not to "touch or feel too much" (69), contemplating such thoughts as why their vaginas are not tucked into a more "convenient" location, like the armpit or palm (69). In effect, these women trade the funkiness of life for a sterilizing, anaesthetizing whiteness, one which erases their identity and numbs their emotions.

Geraldine's character is introduced in this numb state, coveting whiteness for its apparent power to civilize, sanitize, and suppress her blackness. All traces of her "funkiness," her blackness, have been masked or driven out, and her home mirrors the model in the Dick and Jane myth. Within this cultural and emotional vacuum, she upholds black cultural stereotypes, teaching her son the "easily identifiable" differences between "colored people and niggers" (71): colored people are like white people, who are clean and quiet, while niggers are bestial, "dirty and loud" (71). To ensure their inclusion in the former group, Geraldine keeps Louis Junior "brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod" (71) and refuses to allow him to play with black children. She also obsessively watches for the "subtle and telltale signs" that blur "the line between colored and nigger," keeping her son's hair cut short "to avoid any suggestion of wool" and rubbing lotion on his light skin to prevent it from darkening (71).

A striking example of Geraldine's valorization of white cultural values is in her affection for her clean, quiet, black and blue-eyed cat. Metaphorically, the cat's quiet disposition and cleanliness clearly align it with the white ideology to which Geraldine ascribes, whereas its blue eyes within its black body signify the realization of the beauty myth to which so many in the black community aspire. It is these same "blue eyes in the black face" (74) which enthral and comfort Pecola when she finds herself trapped by Louis Junior inside Geraldine's home. For Pecola, the black cat's blue eyes represent the realized potential of her prayers. Significantly, Pecola's brief encounter with the cat is similar to Geraldine's relationship with it: it is the only living creature through which they both are able to give and receive affection. Geraldine makes it clear to her family that, above all, the cat is "first in her affections" (70). Significantly, the cat's association with white ideology makes it easy for Geraldine to love it. It is the cat, not her family, that loves and rewards her for her adherence to white ideological values, for her "order, precision, and constancy," as it is "as clean and quiet as she is" (70).

Having "cleansed" herself with white ideology, Geraldine's view of Pecola is hardly surprising:

> She had seen this little girl all of her life . . . Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had all stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (75)

These eyes are the reason why Geraldine clings to her white ideological values so completely. She has internalized these values to such an extent that she sees in Pecola's eyes a threat to civilization that is consistently associated with black culture; that within their unblinking, unabashed eyes lies the ever-present, always looming threat of chaos. The power of these eyes escalates Geraldine's sense of dismay: somehow the disorder that Pecola represents has found its way into her house and killed her cat.[6] Ironically, she does not perceive the threat as coming from her own son or from inside her own house, from what she is forcing her son to become by encouraging him to adopt ideological values that negate his cultural identity and sense of self. Geraldine associates all the decay and disorder she perceives in the black community with Pecola. Maintaining the quiet voice of her ideology, she calls Pecola a "nasty little black bitch" and tells her to "Get out of [her] house" (72).

Unlike Geraldine, Soaphead Church feels an immediate connection with Pecola when he meets her because he understands her sense of self-loathing and the logic underlying her longing for blue eyes. Soaphead Church projects his own sense of self-loathing onto those around him to such a convincing extent that he considers himself superior to most creatures, even God. He cannot remember a time when he did not hate people or feel repulsed to the point of nausea around them. He learns the word "misanthrope" early in his education and finds the term comforting as it confirms his sense of the world. In short, he is a professional misanthropist, offering counsel to all those in Lorain, Ohio, to whom he feels superior as their "Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams" (130).

Soaphead's hatred for people is a lifelong obsession. He can love only inanimate things upon which "the residue of the human spirit" has been "smeared" (131). Like Geraldine, Soaphead learns from his family and from his education in "normal" schools to maintain a sense of superiority over others by privileging the "white strain" in his "mixed blood" (132). Intent on separating themselves "in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa" (132), his family sustains a conscious, methodical ethnic cleansing of their bloodline for generations, to rid themselves of their black ancestry:

> They were industrious, orderly, and energetic, hoping to prove beyond a doubt De Gobineau's hypothesis that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it." (133)

To preserve this "noble" bloodline, Soaphead's family obsessively engages in "lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features" (133) by marrying white or light-skinned people. Their hatred of their black ancestry and their need to disguise it is as intense as Geraldine's.[7] By the time Soaphead is born, there is such a legacy of repressed self-hatred ingrained within the Whitcomb family that he can do little to protect himself from it.

From this legacy, Soaphead cultivates an obsessive "hatred of, and fascination with, any hint of disorder and decay" (134). Despite his "exposure to the best minds of the Western world" (134), he lacks the insight to see how his simultaneous hatred of and fascination with disorder relates to his feelings towards his black ancestry; in fact, he avoids any self-analysis at all, as it requires "too much truth, too many confrontations" (135). Like Geraldine, his adoption of white values teaches him to despise his blackness and associate it with all the disorder and decay in the world. Sensing that this disorder lies at his core, Soaphead projects the sense of chaos within himself onto those around him. As counsellor and spiritual advisor to the black community in Lorain, he is able to maintain his focus on the chaos in other people's lives rather than his own.

Tragically, it is this spiritually void and self-hating man to whom Pecola turns by the end of the novel to grant her wish. As Jan Furman asserts, Soaphead "does little more than use her in his own schemes of revenge against God" (Furman 22) for creating an imperfect world. His treatment of Pecola in fraudulently "granting" her request is little better than how she has been treated by the entire community. Claudia alone profoundly recognizes the part she and her black community played in Pecola's victimization:

> All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us--all who knew her--felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used--to silence our own nightmares. (Bluest Eye 159)

This indeed is one of the tragic consequences of an unexamined, unchallenged system of domination: that a group of dominated and oppressed people continues the cycle of domination by selecting members of their group to scapegoat and subjugate to define a sense of power and control--to see their "fears of unworthiness embodied in some form" other than themselves (Christian 153). Claudia recognizes the fallacy underlying this system:

> . . . we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely liscensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. (Bluest Eye 159)

If we have been participating actively in our reading of the novel, looking like Claudia for "truth in timbre" (16), we will understand how this fallacy extends into the dominant culture and its ideological constructs, as Morrison asserts in Playing in the Dark. In moving through the cycle of a year, from fall to fall, we have also moved through cycles of life, from birth to spiritual death. There is no rebirth or renewal for Pecola nor for the members of the community in Lorain, Ohio. Importantly, however, there is Claudia's and our own unblinking gaze and poignant insights. Although The Bluest Eye ends where it began, with the image of a land "hostile to marigolds" (160) because love is "never any better than the lover" (159), we share Claudia's raised consciousness about the detrimental effects of white ideology on black culture. Like Claudia, we come to understand how, in a world where love is weak, restricted, violent, hate-filled--where the "best hiding place" is behind "fraudulent love" (22)--there always will be little girls like Pecola to use as an "accessible dumping ground" (Christian 153). By outlining the terrible effects of white ideology and racism on Pecola and her black community in The Bluest Eye, Morrison reveals to us that insight without action is not transformative for those struggling against oppression. Without actively resisting ideological constructs of racial superiority and reworking racial representations, the "land" will continue to kill "of its own volition" and society will "acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live" (160). In examining Beloved, we see how Morrison locates this transformative resistance within black slave culture.

Notes:

1. Morrison herself has remarked about how her inexperience as a writer affected The Bluest Eye. She is critical of her use of voices within two of the novel's sections. She asserts that Pecola's hallucination at the end of the novel in which Pecola talks to herself "does not work in the reading process" ("Unspeakable" 388). Morrison wanted to "shape a silence while breaking it" (388) when Pecola finally speaks but states that this type of silence "required a sophistication unavailable to me" (387). As Pecola has had no voice until this point, her conversation reads like an "outside-the-book conversation" (388), rather than "the emptiness left by a boom or a cry" (387) that Morrison desired to create. Morrison is also critical of the Pauline Breedlove section, in which we hear two distinct voices. She argues that, rather than securing the "feminine subtext that is present in the opening sentence (the women gossiping, eager and aghast in 'Quiet as it's kept')," she resorted to using "two voices, hers and the urging narrator's, both of which are extremely unsatisfying" (388).

2. Black children are not the only children who would have difficulty locating themselves in the Dick and Jane narrative. Any child from a lower class background or a non-nuclear family structure would feel painfully isolated from these texts too, an important fact that Morrison does not address in her novel. However, as Mbalia argues in Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness, Morrison's primary concern is racism and not classism in The Bluest Eye.

3. Peach highlights another irony in the positioning of the preface: "Morrison adapts the eighteenth and nineteenth century convention whereby work by a black American often carried a preface from a white writer confirming the authenticity of the black authorship" (Peach 24). Michael Awkward also notes this irony and suggests this revision of the convention demonstrates Morrison's "refusal to allow white standards to arbitrate the success or failure of black experience" (Awkward 50). Awkward argues that Morrison's "manipulation" of the white text undercuts the authority of the eighteenth and nineteenth century convention and emphasizes the "inappropriateness of the white voice's attempt to

authorize or authenticate the black text" (50).

4. Peach points out that the words "play with Jane" take on a different connotation here than they do in the preface: "The primer extract begins by asking the white father if he will 'play' with his daughter, Jane, a verb which in the Breedlove episode acquires a much less innocent connotation" (Peach 35).

5. Several critics have noted how Cholly's rape of Pecola is connected with his "rape" by the white men and his tender first encounter with Pauline (Page 49; Furman 18; Christian 148.) Page notes that Cholly's incestuous action repeats "his inverted sexual experience with Darlene" and "the initial sexual encounter with Pauline" and is a "vain attempt to reconstruct his own identity" (Page 49).

6. Peach suggests that the image of the cat with its blue eyes closed, "leaving only an empty, black, and helpless face" (Bluest Eye 75), represents the "cultural vacuum in which blacks who aspire to white norms may eventually find themselves" (Peach 33).

7. Barbara Christian astutely points out the connection between Geraldine and Soaphead by suggesting that Geraldine "breeds Soapheads, the only end to which her generation could come, for as her son Junior already grasps, there is a dainty, cold self-hatred at her core" (Christian 151).

Chapter Three

"Anything dead coming back to life hurts": Re-membering Identity and History in Beloved.

The central theme of Beloved is quite different from the one in The Bluest Eye. Although Beloved expands the theme of racism by depicting its most horrible consequence--the enslavement of black culture by white culture--the focus "shifts from external factors that create fragmentation toward internal healing processes that allow for psychic integration" and self-definition (Page 133). In order for this healing process to begin, however, each of the characters must review and come to terms with the horrors of their past lives as slaves. Accordingly, Morrison structures the narrative in a manner similar to The Bluest Eye so that it is simultaneously fragmented and circular. This narrative structure delineates each character's piecemeal but consistent revision of the past and necessitates the reader's intense participation with the text. Philip Page contends that "as the characters tell, retell, and listen to their own past stories, the reader is drawn into even more active participation as implied listener, which results in the further fusion of author, narrator, characters, and reader" (Page 134).

It is clear from the onset of Beloved that each character's past is inexorably enmeshed within the present. Although we are introduced to Sethe and Paul D as free people, we observe how their history as slaves infects and controls their present day lives. Their "bittersweet memories of Sweet Home, the killing of Beloved, and Alfred, Georgia" (Page 133), refuse to be beaten down and repressed. These horrifying memories take shape, determine present actions, and restrict identity. The energy required by Sethe and Paul D to try and suppress these memories also robs their present of its future by making the future "a matter of keeping the past at bay" (Beloved 42). When Paul D arrives unexpectedly at 124 Bluestone after eighteen years, Sethe contemplates her future for the first time and wonders if she can "feel the hurt her back ought to" by allowing her mind to "remember things" from her painful past (18). Both she and Paul D realize they must share their "unspeakable thought, unspoken" (199), to move beyond their pasts and have a future together and to initiate their journey toward spiritual healing and self-definition.

Fundamental to the process of spiritual healing and identity formation is Sethe's notion of "rememory" (36). Sethe's rememories conflate memory, storytelling, and history as a method of re-viewing and re-membering her past.[1] Page notes how the term also combines the words remember, memory, and re-member to suggest a reworking of one's identity and personal history by piecing together remembered fragments from one's past (Page 134,150). Although Sethe is the only one who specifically names this revisional process "rememory," each of the characters actively rememory their individual pasts. As a structural device, the concept of rememory in Beloved is crucial, as it enables the reader to enter into the personal histories of each character. Through the individual rememories of each character, we see how Morrison's characters observe their world and themselves with a powerful black gaze which resists, defines, and rejects the colonizing white gaze. Rather than constructing the differing voices and perspectives from a colonizing perspective that emphasizes the subjugation of black culture, Morrison counters the white gaze by showing how black people see white people seeing black people. In other words, she shifts the locus of perspective so that her black characters are not the objects of the white gaze of either the white characters within the novel or her white readership. She intricately constructs the way black people see themselves, with intimately subjective, unblinking eyes, being objectified and dominated by white culture. She creates a space for her characters wherein they critically interrogate how they have been represented and define what they see. In this way, Morrison reveals the powerful agency of her characters to shape and transform how they see themselves by refusing white definitions of themselves. She also helps her readers read with non-colonizing eyes (or perhaps with a distinct awareness of the colonizing gaze) by constructing this agency. In particular, Sethe's and Paul D's rememories redefine black identity and the history of black slavery in non-colonizing terms and expose where resistance to white ideological definitions of black culture is possible. In order to understand how each character's black gaze reconstructs black identity and history through rememory, we first must examine the concept of rememory more closely.

Sethe's concept of rememory suggests that it is timeless and tangible. In describing the relationship between time and rememory to Denver, Sethe asserts that both concepts intersect and exist "as a place, a dimension, in the collective unconscious" (Rigney 74):

> Some things you forget. Other things you never do . . . Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened . . . Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when

> you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm--every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there--you who never was there--if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (Beloved 36)

It is this ever-present, incarnate sense of rememory that makes it possible for Paul D to be reminded of Baby Suggs' death when he sees Sethe lying in bed at the end of the novel, even though he arrives at 124 eight years after Baby Suggs has died. Rememories, then, "have a physical existence beyond the minds of the individuals in whom they originate" and make it possible for someone to "inhabit another person's memory" (Peach 101). According to Sethe's description of rememory to Denver, Beloved itself can be viewed as an elaborate rememory awaiting readerly participation. By piecing together the narrative, the reader "bumps into" these rememories and vicariously experiences Morrison's revision of black slave history as well as the fictive representation of the actual experience of a black slave named Margaret Garner. Significantly, Morrison's discovery of Garner's story in a 1851 newsclipping could be described as "bump[ing] into a rememory that belong[ed] to someone else."[2] She remembers being awestruck by the article's extraordinary story:

> It said that the Abolitionists made a great deal out of her case because she had escaped from Kentucky, I think, with her four children. She lived in a little neighborhood just outside of Cincinnati and she had killed her children. She succeeded in killing one; she tried to kill two others. She hit them in the head with a shovel and they were wounded, but they didn't die. And there was a smaller one that she had at her breast. The interesting thing, in addition to that, was the interview she gave. She was a young woman. In the inked pictures of her she seemed a very quiet, serene-looking woman and everyone who interviewed her remarked about her serenity and tranquility. She said, "I will not let those children live how I lived." She had run off into a little woodshed right outside her house to kill them because she had been caught as a

> fugitive. And she had made up her mind that they would not suffer the way she had and it was better for them to die. And her mother-in-law was in the house at the same time and she said, "I watched her and I neither encouraged her nor discouraged her." (Furman 68)[3]

The contents of this article provided the framework for Beloved: Sethe becomes "the fictionalized Margaret Garner" (69); Beloved becomes Garner's murdered child.[4] In depicting Garner's story in an "unforgiving / loving way," Morrison writes to "repossess, re-name, re-own" and re-member the forgotten slave's narrative (Russell 46). In effect, Morrison comes to inhabit a memory which is not her own by writing this narrative. Beloved, then, is Morrison's profound rememory of a black woman's "extraordinary capacity for love and sacrifice" (Furman 69) by murdering her own child. This particular rememory forms the heart of the story and is the horrifying event that Sethe and her black community must remember in order to transcend it. As Page asserts, "to remember [the event] is also to re-member, that is, to put oneself back together, which is what Sethe's remembered stories finally accomplish" (Page 150). For Sethe and her community, the process of spiritual healing and self-definition occurs through sharing rememories, "the telling of one's story, the listening to one's telling, and the listening to other's similar tellings" (Page 154).

As Beloved is Morrison's rememory of slave history, Beloved's character is Sethe's incarnated rememory of her murdered child. Beloved epitomizes Sethe's notion of rememory: she is physically re-membered so Sethe and the black community can initiate their spiritual healing. As Kadiatu Kanneh states, Beloved's body is "formed by death, violence, and mourning, which has rocked the foundations of home, which forms and channels desire, disturbs the unities of love and revisits dead rages upon the living" (Kanneh 148). I would add that Beloved is incarnated by a combination of intense love, desire, and rememory. Sethe welcomes her presence stating, "if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her" (Beloved 4). Sethe recognizes that her healing only will come by re-membering Beloved and explaining to her why she had to die. Beloved's manifestation is also key to the spiritual healing within the black community, as her death represents what the black community cannot face because it is too painful: the seeming irreconcilability of black love and identity within white oppression. Beloved's re-membered presence forces the black community not only to confront and accept Beloved's death but to remember and transcend their own painful experiences of oppression--experiences most would rather forget but cannot. Importantly, in re-membering Beloved, Sethe and her black community re-member themselves. In this way, Beloved's incarnation gives expression to the repressed memories, silenced speech, restricted love, and frustrated anger that the black community suffered under the conditions of slavery.

Beloved, then, physically and metaphorically embodies the sufferings of black people under the oppressive conditions of slavery. Her footprints by the stream behind 124 are "so familiar" that "should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit" (275). Her birth name, which is never mentioned, is replaced with the name given to the black community by the preacher at her funeral, the latter half of which Sethe has inscribed on Beloved's gravestone: "Dearly Beloved" (5).[5] As Beloved's name is a metaphor for those who attended her funeral, her body is a physical representation of their suffering, a reconstitution of the past as present.[6] Kanneh states,

> Her name a metaphor for the gathering at the grave, her death a necessity of love, her resurgence reconstitutes the past as incarnation and female experience as an embodiment of histories within the present. It is suffering which lives on, which forces itself into physical reality, inhabiting tangible places throughout the agonizing creativity and destructiveness of love. (Kanneh 148-49)

As she represents the entire black community's experiences of oppression, Beloved's self is fragmented. She consistently voices her fear of the "chewing laughter" (Beloved 274) which threatens to chew her into bits. She has two repeating dreams--one where she explodes and the other where she is "swallowed" (133). She finds it "difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself," and she believes that "she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces" (133). She uses all her energy and the strength of those around her to keep herself together and prevent herself from exploding into pieces. As she is the literal embodiment of the black community's rememories of oppression, her fears of bodily explosion and the energy she expends in keeping herself together are hardly surprising.

Beloved is also strongly associated with the oppression experienced by the "Sixty Million and more" of Morrison's dedication (Rigney 41). Although the descriptions of Beloved's origins are relatively obscure, it is clear that she "return[s] to life via the Middle Passage" (Page 139), the voyage from Africa to America on which countless black people died. This voyage is depicted in Beloved's cryptic chapter in which we are invited to decipher and understand the images underlying Beloved's thoughts. In this poetic section, the circular and repeated images come together to present a complex portrayal of black slave experience. By examining these images closely, we uncover at least two separate histories that Morrison intentionally intertwines to show Beloved's historical connection to past and present memories of enslavement. For the most part, Beloved's memory is composed of the "racial memory of the Middle Passage" (Rigney 41). These memories exist painfully within Beloved's psychological and spiritual consciousness as "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (Beloved 199), that chronicle the horrific, unrecorded experiences of the black slaves on the Middle Passage between Africa and America as well as Beloved's journey towards rebirth. That the history of the past exists within the present is evidenced by Beloved's assertion, "All of it is now it is always now" (210).

By piecing together and reading Beloved's fragmented memories of the Middle Passage, we vicariously experience the horror of this crossing. On this journey, the slaves are branded and continuously whipped into position with "a hot thing" (210-213). Initially, they are separated according to gender and placed in a cargo hold in which there is barely enough room to crouch.[7] Beloved states that it seems "there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too" (210). In this cramped, dark area, the slaves are forced to crouch in their own urine, feces, and vomit, until their bodily functions begin to cease. Eventually, they cannot sweat, vomit, "make tears" or "morning water" (210), so the white "men without skin bring [them] their morning water to drink" (210) by urinating on them. Storms rock the boat, mixing "the men into the women and the women into the men" (211). Beloved is rocked onto the back of a man who sings softly of home and of his beloved, "of a place where a woman takes flowers away from their leaves and puts them in a round basket" (211) before she is captured and obscured by "the clouds of gunsmoke" (214) from the slavecatcher's guns. Although the woman he is singing about could be any of the women in the hold, Beloved associates her with a woman who is crouching beside them, whom she only sees once the singing man has been jostled onto her face and dies.

The dead man remains on Beloved's face for a long time before he is pulled up onto the deck of the ship by the "men without skin" to sort the dead from the living. Those who have been "able to die are in a pile," while those who are alive are standing together, attempting to stretch their "locked" legs out of the crouching position (210-11). Beloved watches as the bodies of the dead are thrown overboard "into the sea" and pushed beneath the water's surface with "poles" (211). She then looks on in disbelief as the "woman with [her] face" joins the dead by leaping overboard into the sea. Here Beloved's association of this woman with Sethe becomes clear: both of these women have the courage to make terrible loving choices in defiant resistance to their enslavement.

In this cryptic chapter, Beloved's search for identity, for "the face that is her own" (210-13), through her rememories of the Middle Passage and her return to life parallel Sethe's and the black community's struggle for identity. In re-membering and transcending their oppressive rememories by telling and retelling their personal stories, Sethe and her community re-member themselves. Self-definition through storytelling is a crucial motif in Beloved. In fact, the predominant metaphor for the black community's oppression is the iron collar, as it chokes off speech and robs the identity; it silences and dehumanizes. Paul D is only able to refer to the physical marks of his "neck jewelry" once he has transcended the spiritual scars left by the collar in reclaiming his "manhood" and sense of self and deciding to "put his story next to [Sethe's]" (273). Although Sethe does not have the physical marks left by the collar like Paul D, she too wears a spiritual iron collar. This collar chokes Sethe when she is in the clearing with Denver and Beloved and it is associated with Beloved's hands. It is significant that Sethe feels Beloved is strangling her, even though Beloved is nowhere near her, because Sethe literally is choked into silence by Beloved's death. Until she transcends this rememory through redemptive storytelling, Sethe will continue to be choked by it. Importantly, part of Beloved's agenda in returning to life is to remove Sethe's collar, to "bite [off] the circle around her neck" (211) and relieve Sethe from her oppressive memories through storytelling. Beloved's constant questions--"Where your diamonds?" and "Your woman she never fix up your hair?" (58-63)--help initiate Sethe's movement toward spiritual healing and self-definition by speaking about her past, thereby transcending it.[8]

bell hooks argues that the movement from silence into speech is redemptive for those who have had their speech choked or silenced. She asserts that breaking the oppressive silence by speaking or storytelling is a fundamental step toward resistance and redefinition of oneself as it creates agency:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of our movement from object to subject--the liberated voice. (Talking Back 9)

The importance of speaking, of reclaiming one's identity through storytelling, is depicted by Nan's stories to Sethe about Sethe's mother. Nan's "defiant" speech communicates to Sethe what her mother cannot: Sethe was conceived through the act of love rather than the violence of rape, she was named after her father, and she alone was the child her mother kept. Nan stresses the importance of speech and storytelling in repeating the phrase "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe" (Beloved 62). Through Nan's stories, Sethe receives a sense of her mother and of herself. Although Sethe eventually forgets the language that Nan spoke, she remembers the underlying "message" (62): her mother's choice to keep Sethe and abandon the babies conceived through rape is a self-defining act of loving resistance. Her mother's ability to choose which babies she kept and which she "threw away" (62) defies her enslavement and maintains her sense of self. Nan's defiant speech and Sethe's mother's terrible, loving choice are two of several different strategies of resistance in Beloved to colonizing exploitations of the black body and blackness within slave history.

Aleticia Tijerina's "Notes of Oppression and Violence" contains profound insights into the connection between agency and lovingly resisting one's oppression. She asserts that when a woman of color declares, "Because I am Brown, I am oppressed" (Anzaldua 170), she ironically becomes her own oppressor, as it erases any possibility for agency and maintains self-hatred. By harbouring deep feelings of self-hatred, one effectively perpetuates one's own oppression and relinquishes control to one's oppressor (as we have seen with several of the characters in The Bluest Eye). While I believe it is highly important to recognize the nature of ones own oppression, I agree that recognition without resistance cannot challenge one's oppressors. Tijerina argues that women of color must fight their oppression by refusing to allow themselves to be consumed by hatred, either for their oppressors or themselves, by holding onto visions of love: "Each moment we recall the vision of love *we commit an act of resistance against the oppressor*" (173).

Within this act of loving resistance lies the transformative agency for self-definition--the power to transform how one has been ideologically defined and oppressed by that definition. Significantly, Morrison's Beloved contains many profound visions of love within memories of oppression which effectively challenge white hegemonic and reified constructs of blackness and black culture, and resist the colonizing gaze.

A poignant example of this act of resistance and redefinition is Baby Suggs' lessons in love. She teaches the black community to envision loving themselves, loving their blackness, in order to redefine their cultural identity and refuse white definitions of themselves. She embodies her loving philosophy of resistance: she decides that because sixty years of "slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,' she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart" (87). She creates a loving space for the black community in a forest clearing, opens up her "great big heart" (88), and invites the people to love and re-envision themselves:

> She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.
>
> She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. (88)

Baby Suggs' philosophy rejects white ideology in several ways: she refuses to accept the domination and definition of black culture by white culture and passively believe in the (white) Christian promise of a spiritual reward in heaven for suffering; she teaches her community to stop believing that they need acceptance or approval by the white community in order to accept or approve of themselves; she creates a space for them in which they can love, redefine and re-envision themselves, and begin a cathartic process of healing; and she gives voice to their silenced oppression and creates a place for joyful expression. In effect, her words resist the colonizing gaze as they flow over and reclaim the black community's bodies:

> "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off, and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all of your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver--love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize. (88-9)

Baby Suggs asks her community to dance, cry, laugh, and love in resistance to their oppressive memories and experiences. She asserts that the "prize" of self-love is an affirming self-identity. She teaches how learning to love their flesh will engender a loving spirit that counters "the depth of black self-hatred, inner anguish, and unreconciled pain" (Black Looks 20) that the black community feels. Her sermons parallel bell hooks' assertion that loving blackness actively transforms the way black people perceive themselves and "creates the conditions necessary" for them to "move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life" (20). In the clearing, Baby Suggs invites her community to transform how they have learned to define themselves and their blackness within a white supremacist culture and begin the spiritual healing process by loving their physical bodies.

Baby Suggs' lessons in loving self-definition also teach the community the importance of reclaiming themselves and their love for one another, as this action will cultivate and nurture a sense of freedom within them. When Sethe reaches 124 Bluestone Road, she is able to reclaim and love her children in a manner that she could not while she was enslaved at Sweet Home. From her own experience of losing her mother and being sold to Garner as a young girl, as well as watching other black slave children being sold to other slave owners, Sethe realizes that her children are not her own. When Sethe rejoins her children, she feels a love for them she had not felt previously because they are truly hers to love. She tells Paul D:

> I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was that wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon--there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. (Beloved 162)

For Sethe, the choice to love whomever she wants defines her sense of freedom. Throughout Beloved, Morrison reworks the white historians' simplistic notions of black freedom during and after the Civil War, who assume that freedom for black people is solely a physical state of being and not a mental state. Sethe describes how she has had only twenty-eight days of "unslaved life" (95) between her escape from Sweet Home and

Beloved's death. Despite being physically free shortly after her release from prison, Sethe is not free of the internal effects of slavery which have shaped both her memories and her identity. Like other members of the black community, who follow Baby Suggs into the clearing to learn how to spiritually free themselves by redefining their identity, their blackness, in non-white terms, and relieving their fear of white culture, Sethe recognizes that the path towards spiritual freedom is a slow, complex process of claiming ownership over her physical body and repudiating her terror of whiteness. She states, "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95). For Sethe, claiming ownership of herself involves rememory, as she must piece together the past in order to come to terms with it and redefine an identity for herself.

In one of Paul D's rememories, we see how he maintains a sense of identity and resists internalizing white oppression when he is imprisoned on a chain gang in Georgia. Crucial to his strategy for resistance and assertion of identity is to not let the white prison guards prevent him from "loving small and in secret" (221). While other prisoners chose "the tiniest stars" or "grass blades, salamanders, spiders, woodpeckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants" to love (162), Paul D directs his love towards a small aspen "too young to call a sapling" (221). Importantly, this ability to hold onto love within the reality of oppression separates those who survive and those who do not in Morrison's novels. He and the other prisoners also survive the horrific conditions of their existence by asserting their identity through song, symbolically overcoming their oppressors with the rhythmic beat of their hammers:

> With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through.

> They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyards and sisters long gone. Of pork in the woods; meal in the pan; fish on the line; cane, rain, and rocking chairs.
>
> And they beat. The women for having known them and no more, no more; the children for having been them but never again. They killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time. . . Singing love songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head. (Beloved 108-09)

The men create a lyrical language, incomprehensible to the white prison guards, to assert their humanity in resistance to the dehumanizing conditions imposed by white men. By singing about their individual experiences and desires, and symbolically smashing the heads of their oppressors with their hammers, they hold onto their identity and repudiate their oppression.

An integral part of reclaiming one's identity, body, and spirit is referring to one's abused and oppressed physical body with one's own language to challenge one's oppression. For example, the scars on both Sethe's back and Paul D's neck are referred to euphemistically as her "chokecherry tree" (17) and his "neck jewelry" (273). By referring to the marks of their oppression in these terms and refusing to define them in white terms as "scars," Sethe and Paul D resist internalizing the horrifying reality of their experiences as slaves and reject white definitions of black domination. These euphemisms also follow Baby Suggs' sermons on loving the flesh. For example, by referring to the scars on her back as a chokecherry tree, Sethe gives life to dead flesh and reclaims that flesh.[9] In effect, she and Paul D reclaim their bodies by seeing themselves through their own self-defining language and black gaze.

bell hooks describes how black slaves were often "brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving, as only a subject can observe or see" (Black Looks 168). She argues that "to be fully an object then was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality" (168). In Beloved, Morrison radically constructs black subjectivity and rejects the colonizing gaze as she writes from the perspective of her black characters, who consistently struggle to name their experiences and what they see. For example, after Paul D and Beloved reenter her life and their presence fills her mind with horrific repressed images of Sweet Home, Sethe struggles to articulate her memories with Paul D, to voice her oppressive, silenced memories rather than repress them again:

> Her story was bearable because it was his as well--to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other--the things neither had word-shapes for--well, it would come in time: where they led him off to sucking iron: the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby. (Beloved 99)

Sethe trusts that they eventually will find those "word-shapes" to define and reconcile their oppressive memories. Like the other slaves at Sweet Home, Sethe had been objectified, severely beaten, rendered invisible, and denied a subjectivity; through "trust and rememory" (99), Sethe creates a powerful new subjectivity for herself by gradually allowing her mind to re-view her experiences and her voice to define her terror of whiteness.

In constructing radical black subjectivity, Morrison creates binary-breaking representations of both whiteness and blackness. None of her characterizations are simple or stereotypical or work to invert the hegemonic hierarchy to a new hierarchy of blackness over whiteness. Rather, she deconstructs hierarchical thinking with characterizations that are complex and multidimensional. She transforms the symbolic association of goodness with whiteness by portraying the terror of whiteness within the black psyche, a concept that would be unfamiliar to most of her white readers.

Described as a "dragon" which lurks in the Ohio river and is "desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live" (66), this white terror is most powerfully represented by "schoolteacher." His ability to terrorize lies in his power to define and control his black slaves' existence. He dehumanizes and destroys all but one of the Sweet Home men, temporarily "punch[es] the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight" (9), and indirectly causes the deaths of both Beloved and Baby Suggs.

Schoolteacher brutalizes and dehumanizes Paul D to the extent that he temporarily transforms Paul D into a voiceless object. Waiting to be taken to Alfred, Georgia, on a chain gang with an iron bit in his mouth, having previously witnessed the horrific abuses of each of the Sweet home men, Paul D realizes the depth of his objectification when he compares himself to a nearby rooster called Mister:

> "Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd still be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub." (72)

Schoolteacher's terrifying ability to objectify and dehumanize his black slaves into voiceless commodities and subject them to a death-in-life existence motivates Sethe's attempt to kill her children when he comes to recapture her. Her tremendous love for her children drives her need to prevent them from ever knowing the terror of whiteness or having it inscribed on their bodies and in their consciousness. In fact, her loving infanticide is in direct defiance of this white terror. In describing her terror when she recognizes schoolteacher's hat, she remembers hearing "wings":

> Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every little bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. (163)

Her terror of whiteness combined with her powerful love for her children motivates her attempt to kill them. After successfully killing Beloved, this terror extracts all color from her life: "It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips" (39), and those were the last colors she ever saw.

This absence of color caused by an all-consuming terror of whiteness eventually kills Baby Suggs. After witnessing Sethe's loving attempt to kill her children so they will never know this terror, Baby Suggs' philosophy of love is overcome by the terrifying presence of whiteness. She concludes, what good is it to teach black people how to love themselves and their community when this love can motivate a young mother to murder her own children when confronted by the terror of whiteness? In effect, what good is it to invite her black community to love their blackness and redefine their cultural identity in an attempt to end their historical domination, when this process of self-love and self-definition can succumb so completely in the overwhelming presence of whiteness? It is this seeming irreconcilability of a simultaneous coexistence of black love with white terror that causes another black woman in the community, Ella, to advise black people strongly, "Don't love nothing" (92). In fact, Baby Suggs realizes that the terror of whiteness is so powerfully inscribed on the black body and psyche that it breaks the "heartstrings" (89) of her huge heart and causes her to contemplate "harmless" colors like blue and yellow until her death (179). She declares shortly before her death "that there was no bad luck in the world but whitepeople" because "they don't know when to stop" (104). The poignant truth underlying her words is that these white people, in violently oppressing black people, are "bad luck" for both black people and themselves.

Stamp Paid shares this realization. He defines the terrible effect of racial domination on both the oppressed and oppressor:

> Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own.
> (198-99)

In this passage, Morrison brilliantly portrays what she articulates so poignantly in Playing in the Dark: in order for white people to maintain a racial hierarchy and control their terror of blackness--a terror which they have fabricated--they must project a terror of whiteness which dehumanizes both black people and themselves. Stamp Paid accurately identifies this paradoxical effect of dehumanization: by planting a dehumanized jungle within the black body, the white body effectively dehumanizes itself. In other words, in constructing a dehumanized, terrifying representation of blackness, an equally dehumanized and terrifying representation of whiteness emerges in order to maintain a hierarchy of whiteness over blackness. As this hierarchy clearly affects both representations of whiteness and blackness detrimentally, Morrison exposes the ignominy of a color-based hierarchy.

Although Morrison deconstructs the stereotypical and symbolic association of goodness with whiteness, she does not deconstruct it completely in order to create a new symbolic stereotype which makes whiteness synonymous with terror. She counterbalances the terror of whiteness by including relatively benevolent characterizations of whiteness. Mr. and Mrs. Garner, the Bodwins, and Amy Denver are generally referred to by the black community as "good" white people. In particular, Amy Denver is the most benevolent representation of whiteness. Having suffered the abuse of indentured servitude her whole life, Amy shares a strong sense of oppression with the black community which allows her to treat Sethe with kindness; she too has been severely whipped for "looking" directly at her white oppressor. Both Amy and Sethe are running from their enslavement caused by a "right evil hand" (79) when they meet one another. Amy helps Sethe survive the night by massaging the feeling back into Sethe's feet, treating the deeply infected wounds on Sethe's back, and trying to make Sethe as comfortable as possible. Although she initially responds with abject horror to the wounds on Sethe's back, Amy's compassionate nature and her own experience of oppression help her to touch Sethe's back lovingly and define the horrifying marks of Sethe's oppression in non-colonizing, loving terms:

> "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk--it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dem if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. (79)

Like Sethe, Amy is able to look for and identify life-giving beauty when confronted with horror as a strategy to overcome her oppressive experiences. Amy helps Sethe redefine her bodily inscription of the terror of whiteness as a beautiful, strong cherry tree. Sethe refers to her back in these loving terms her whole life as a counter to the memory of how this terror was inscribed. In this way, Sethe reclaims her own body. By redefining dead flesh as a blossoming chokecherry tree, she refuses to relinquish control of her body or her spirit to the terrifying and oppressive whiteness.

Although schoolteacher represents the terror of whiteness and is ostensibly the most powerful character in the novel, Morrison refuses to give authority to his definitions of black culture or authorize his white gaze. He has no identity or name except "schoolteacher," which adds to the formidableness and mystery of his whiteness, but also suggests that his characterization is ironic. He is a schoolteacher who actively defines and represents black slave culture in his notebooks, like so many committed yet disinterested white scholars and historians of this period who believed that "definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined" (190). However, Morrison never authorizes schoolteacher's perspective. In fact, she actively rejects the colonizing definitions of black culture so prevalent within white history books by never showing her readers what schoolteacher writes in his notebooks. Similarly, we never see the newspaper article's rendition of Sethe's infanticide. Instead, Morrison offers a revision (or rememory) of black slave history, told from the perspectives of black slaves in order to reject the colonizing, white perspectives of this historical period.

Another way Morrison counters the colonizing gaze in Beloved is by showing how her black characters question and reject static and stereotypical definitions of themselves. For example, Paul D questions the notions of identity and manhood given to him and the other Sweet Home men by Garner. After Sethe opens "the closed portion of his head" (41), he is able to ask himself: "Was that it? Is that where the manhood lay? In the naming done by a whiteman who was supposed to know? Who gave them the privilege not of working but of deciding how to?" (125). In closely examining the interrelationship of white power with black identity and freedom, Paul D comes to realize that "Garner called and announced them men--but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave" (220): "One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke" (125). That their identity as men rests on Garner is evidenced by the loss of this definition when Garner dies. Under schoolteacher's ownership, the Sweet Home men are defined in bestial terms and treated as such. Paul D posits this lack of power for self-definition as the true condition of black slavery--that one's identity, or lack thereof, is determined by white men. The fragile nature of identity causes Paul D to question his manhood, long after he has escaped from slave life:

> Was [Garner] naming what he saw or creating what he did not? That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not. It troubled him that, concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will? What would he have been anyway--before Sweet Home--without Garner? In Sixo's country, or his mother's? Or, God help him, on the boat? Did a whiteman saying it make it so? Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? (220)

In asking himself these kinds of questions, Paul D realizes Garner is not so different from schoolteacher or other slaveowners. Although Garner sees himself as a benevolent slaveowner, he actually perpetuates the subjugation of black people by "permitting manhood but denying the expression of it" (Rigney 72-73). In believing himself to be "tough enough and smart enough to call his own niggers men" (Beloved 11), Garner simply recognizes the balance of power between owner and slave better than other slaveowners. Garner is shades away from schoolteacher's mentality regarding slaves that "you can't mishandle creatures and expect success" (150). Garner believes he cannot treat his slaves badly and expect them to behave well, so he places them within his firm control by calling them men and giving them limited tastes of freedom.

In questioning concepts of masculinity, Paul D also identifies the source of the white man's power and manhood:

> Listening to the doves in Alfred, Georgia, and having neither the right nor the permission to enjoy it because in that place mist, doves, sunlight, copper dirt, moon--everything belonged to the men who had the guns. Little men, some of them, big men too, each one of whom he could snap like a twig if he wanted to. Men who knew their manhood lay in their guns and were not embarrassed by the knowledge that without gunshot fox would laugh at them. And these "men" who made even vixen laugh could, if you let them, stop you from hearing doves or loving moonlight. (162)

Without looking at them directly, Paul D deconstructs the white prison guards' manhood, by recognizing that the guards' sense of themselves as "men" lies exclusively in their guns. Despite his imprisonment, Paul D's black gaze observes and defines the white "other." He names the source of the white prison guards' power and deconstructs their ability to terrorize. The white men are ridiculed by Paul D's defining, black gaze: their fraudulent sense of manhood makes fox and vixen laugh.[10] This deconstruction of white identity and power occurs throughout Beloved and effectively counterbalances the terror of whiteness represented by schoolteacher. By deconstructing these racial representations and demonstrating how the black gaze identifies and defies fraudulent definitions of white power and selfhood, Morrison has the potential to decolonize her readers' minds.

Another powerful way Morrison may decolonize her readers' minds is by deconstructing the symbolic association of terror with blackness. The most threatening black presence in the novel is Beloved, who embodies the black community's terror of whiteness and epitomizes the horror of their oppression: she is lovingly killed by her own mother so that she will never know the terror of whiteness or the horror of slave life. Although she haunts Sethe's house, she is not a terrifying or evil presence, but a "sad" and "spiteful" (8) reminder of the irreconcilability of black love with white terror. In fact, Beloved has a relatively benevolent effect on the entire community. Once she reenters their lives, her presence helps the community begin the slow process of healing as they remember (rememory) and redefine their experiences. For example, Beloved encourages Denver to assert her own identity by forcing Denver out of her isolated environment and into the welcoming arms of the black community. Beloved also enables Denver to visualize and feel the pain Sethe experienced around the time of Denver's birth: "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it--through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked" (78). In telling the story to Beloved rather than hearing about it from Sethe, Denver is forced to recognize her mother's pain and move from narcissism into action. Beloved's presence also disturbs the community to such a degree that they question and reevaluate their ostracism of Sethe and decide to embrace her lovingly. Beloved even bursts open the rusted, tobacco tin of Paul D's heart by having sex with him:

> She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. Softly and then so loudly it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. (117)

Beloved wakes up Paul D's heart so powerfully that he is able to transcend his initial horror at Sethe's loving infanticide and return the "thickness" (164) of Sethe's love. He lovingly offers Sethe a new, affirming definition of herself:

> He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers.
>
> "Me? Me?" (273)

Beloved's presence begins the spiritual healing process within the black community more powerfully than Baby Suggs's sermons about love in the clearing. She helps the community repudiate white cultural dominance by re-membering and articulating their painful, oppressive memories and learning to redefine themselves and their blackness lovingly.

With Beloved, Morrison poignantly portrays the transformative power to rework racial representations of identity and history through rememory and storytelling. By the end of the novel, each of the characters have moved cathartically from oppressive silence into liberating speech. Through telling and sharing their stories, the black community re-members Beloved so that they can forget her. Beloved's explosion into her separate parts signifies the community's movement beyond their oppressive rememories as well as their reclaiming of each other and themselves. In concluding that Beloved's story is "not a story to pass on" (274-75), Morrison brilliantly emphasizes the story's horrifying and painful subject matter that makes its telling difficult and its important underlying message: Beloved is not a story to be dismissed or forgotten. By thrusting us into the stories and rememories of each of Beloved's characters, we participate in their piecemeal and intense process toward healing and self-definition. This intense readerly participation and response-ability with the text underlines its transformative potential regarding racial representations. To paraphrase Sethe's comments to Denver on rememory: if we "enter into" the painful subject of Beloved--we "who were never there" and, perhaps, have never experienced severe forms of racist oppression--if we "go there" and participate in the rememories of each character, we will experience their experiences vicariously and see through their eyes (36). By discovering the power of storytelling to initiate spiritual healing and self-definition, we will know that Beloved is not a story to be silenced or overlooked: it must be "passed on" to others, read and reread, for its readers to participate to their fullest potential in (re)theorizing and transforming representations of white and black culture.

Notes:

1. Sethe's notion of rememory parallels Foucault's notion of "counter-memory" (Language 160) in that they both involve the revision of history to expose where resistance to oppressive ideological definitions is possible. According to bell hooks, Foucault "posits memory as a site of resistance" (Black Looks 174). hooks argues that counter-memory, as a "process of remembering," will actively transform black history "from a judgement of the past in the name of a present truth to a 'counter-memory' that combats our current modes of truth and justice, helping us to understand and change the present by placing it in a new relation to the past" (174). Following this assertion, Beloved is Morrison's counter-memory of black identity and slave history, in which she actively reworks current representations of black and white culture by revising the racial representations of the past.

2. According to Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, the news article was entitled "A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child" and was taken from The Black Book, "a compendium of newsclippings and advertisements chronicling the life of African people in the United States from slavery through the civil rights movement" (Mbalia 113). There is a discrepancy over the actual publication date of this article. Mbalia attests that the article was published in 1856 (Mbalia 113), whereas Jan Furman cites Morrison as stating it was published in 1851 (Furman 68). For purposes of clarity, I have chosen to use Morrison's account of the publication date.

3. Linden Peach points out the startling fact that Garner was tried for stealing and not murder, because she and her children were considered her master's property (Peach 9).

4. In one of her most curious and paradoxical strokes, Morrison chooses to give Margaret Garner's name to the wife of the white slaveowner at Sweet Home.

5. My understanding of Beloved's character has greatly benefited from my discussions with Viona Falk.

6. Barbara Hill Rigney also notes Beloved's connection to the novel's epigraph and dedication: like the epigraph, she is called Beloved who "was not beloved" and her consciousness is the "group consciousness" of the "Sixty million and more" of Morrison's dedication (Rigney 41).

7. Significantly, the darkness and death in the cargo hold is connected to the shed where Beloved is killed. When Beloved is in the shed with Denver, having returned to the place where she was murdered, she merges with and emerges from the blackness in the shed because she is the blackness itself and all it represents. Beloved tells Denver, "This is the place I am" (123) because she embodies the horror and suffering that occurred in the shed. She merges with the blackness that is terrifying to both Denver and herself, because it is

the blackness associated with death. Her disappearance and merging with the blackness symbolically re-enacts her death in the shed years earlier.

8. There is also a clear connection between this type of collar and the half-circle below Beloved's neck left by the handsaw, as this mark represents both Beloved's oppressed identity within slavery and her terrible freedom from it.

9. Like Sethe's chokecherry tree, the connection between life and tree imagery is maintained throughout the novel: Paul D follows tree blossoms to freedom after his escape from his imprisonment in Georgia (Beloved 112); Sethe's mind chooses to remember the life-giving beauty of the trees at Sweet Home rather than their death-giving branches in which black slaves were hung (6); the Sweet Home men locate shelter and security in one tree in particular, Brother (21); Denver hides in a ring of trees to feel safe and alone (28-29); Paul D maintains a self of selfhood while imprisoned on the chain gang by loving a sapling a "little and in secret" (221).

10. This laughter at the white men's sense of manhood parallels Sixo's singing laughter at his captors' attempts to burn him to death. Importantly, he is described as "only laugh[ing] once, at the very end" (23) By laughing at their attempts to light a fire underneath him, Sixo ridicules them and dies undefeated. His laughter is a powerful defiant stance that shapes Paul D's sense of self and strategies for resistance.

Conclusion

In Black Looks: Race and Representation, bell hooks underlines the urgent need to transform representations of blackness: "Unless we transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation" (Black Looks 7). Of necessity, this agenda also includes transforming images of whiteness. She argues that "images of race and representation have become a contemporary obsession" (7):

> Commodification of blackness has created a social context where appropriation by non-black people of the black images knows no boundaries. If the many non-black people who produce images or critical narratives about blackness and black people do not interrogate their perspective, then they may simply recreate the imperial gaze--the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize. This is especially so for white people looking at and talking about blackness. (7)

Have Morrison's works been appropriated by the postmodern, fetishistic impulse to collect the "best" cultural products of black culture? To add her to our collection of "great" literature as a token black writer of black culture? According to Foucault, all texts are "objects of appropriation" (Language 124) by the reader, as she will bring her own context and prescribe her own authority on the novel. In fact, it has been suggested by several critics that the reader actually creates the text in reading it. I believe the relationship between reader and text to be more complex: as I have shown, the dominant discourse, like racist and Africanist discourse, powerfully constructs and informs how the social body views the surrounding world. To suggest that the reader "creates" the text implies that the text itself has no effect on the reader. Therefore, it is more feasible to view the relationship between reader and text as an intricate, interwoven negotiation of meaning. If the process of reading is viewed as a negotiation between the reader and text, what occurs when a white reader reads a black literary text which has the potential to decolonize the reader's mind?

Throughout my own readings and interpretations of Toni Morrison's critical and literary texts, I have tried to interrogate my own position and discourse as a white feminist critic and reader by asking myself the following questions: How I am constructing my own discourse? For whom I am constructing it? Who I am excluding by writing? From what position do I speak? As a reader, I have entered Morrison's narratives and tried to participate in a readerly response-able manner, as I hope my readings of her texts have shown. If white critics and readers like myself negotiate our readings of black literary texts, such as the novels of Toni Morrison, "cautiously" and "locate them in a self-conscious and self-critical relation to black feminist criticism" (Abel 498), then we are more likely to avoid inadvertently reimposing both the colonizing gaze and a critical and literary ideological hierarchy of white authority over black authority. Morrison's literary and critical work demonstrates how to further a radical paradigm shift in how whiteness and blackness are constructed and represented within culture and the literary imagination. As Elizabeth Abel suggests, white writers and critics need to interrogate their whiteness and acknowledge how "whiteness--that elusive color that seems not to be one--gains materiality through the desires and fantasies played out in its interpretations of blackness, interpretations that, by making the unconscious conscious, supplement articulated ideologies of whiteness with less accessible assumptions" (498). In Playing in the Dark:

Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Morrison exposes how these assumptions about whiteness are played out against a savage blackness that makes whiteness synonymous with goodness and blackness synonymous with evil. She stresses the need for both black and white culture to (re)theorize concepts of whiteness in order to redefine representations of whiteness and blackness. In The Bluest Eye, she outlines the detrimental consequences of current ideological racial representations on black culture: they instruct Pecola's black community to valorize white constructs of racial superiority which denigrate black cultural identity and consciousness. In Beloved, Morrison demonstrates how (re)theorizing transformative racial representations is possible. She delineates unforgiving / loving strategies for resisting and transforming cultural domination. She also constructs a narrative that has the potential to decolonize both the colonizing and colonized mind by creating radical, transformative representations of whiteness and blackness. If we as readers engage in sensitive, negotiated readings when reading The Bluest Eye and Beloved, then Morrison's texts have the agency to transform how both white and black culture perceive each other and themselves. Whether or not Morrison decolonizes the minds of her readers as a whole is irrelevant, as each reader's own subjective political and cultural context will shape how she reads the novels. It is highly important, however, that through the process of negotiation her work has the potential to decolonize her readers' minds. Within a literary and critical landscape where Africanist discourse prevails and the relatively unchallenged authority of white ideology continues to infect representation, literary writers and critics are often "too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before [their] eyes" (Playing 91). Therefore, white and black literature and criticism would benefit from "broadening the spectrum of interpretation, illuminating the social determinants of reading, and deepening our recognition of our racial selves and the 'others' we fantasmically construct--and thereby expanding the possibilities of dialogue across as well as about racial boundaries" (Abel 498). Toni Morrison asserts, "Cultures, whether silenced or monologistic, whether repressed or repressing, seek meaning in the language and images available to them" ("Unspeakable" 375). She writes:

> . . . it is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dinesen's "aspects of nature," nor Conrad's unspeaking. We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, "other." We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar. (375)

By exposing the aestheticized and mythologized representations of both whiteness and blackness in her critical work, and providing radical alternatives to these representations in her critical and literary works, Morrison deconstructs ideological and racial boundaries and cultivates a new landscape for the literary imagination.

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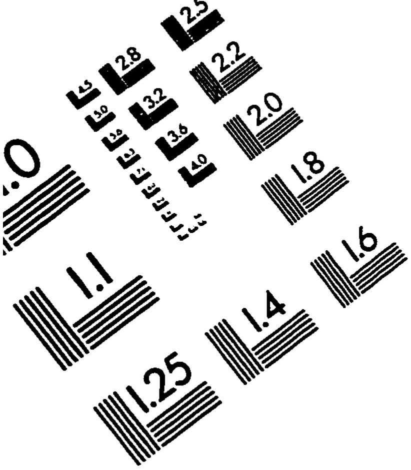

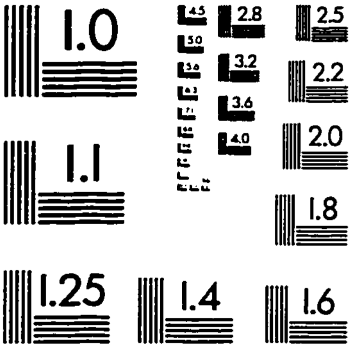
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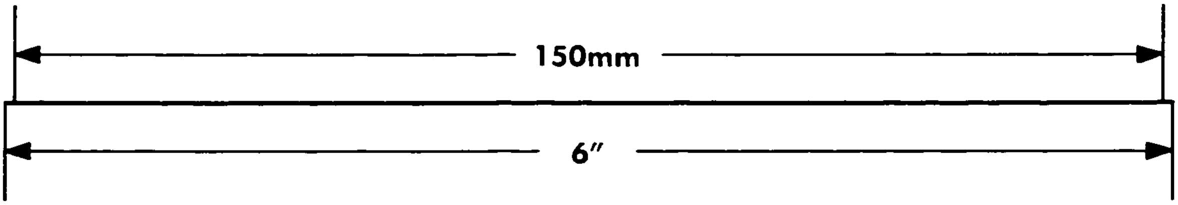

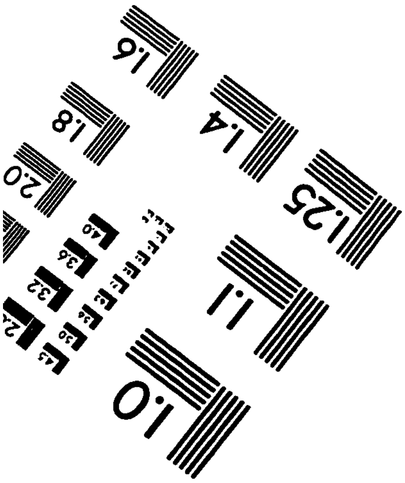

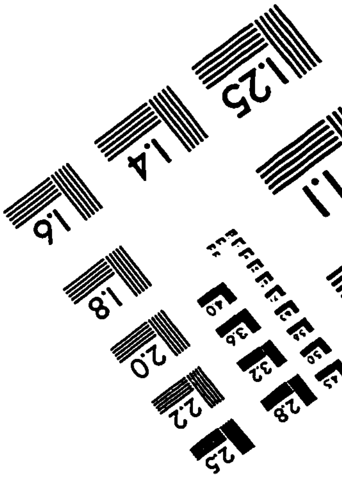

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