

## Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Race and Tragedy

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates Toni Morrison's engagement with tragedy in her novel *Beloved*. In opposition to late twentieth-century interpretations of *Beloved*, which see this novel as reordering or revisiting history in order to establish in its characters a sense of self-worth, this thesis understands *Beloved* as the narrative which calls a halt to the search for a worthy sense of self in a prescribed history. It argues that the form of this novel is designed and arranged in order to present in dramatic time a conception of a consciousness recognisable as already and always existing in African American individuals: that is, before, during and after slavery. This thesis contends that an engagement with tragedy is crucial in the achievement of this end.

In an engagement with Morrison's Nobel Lecture (1993), Chapter One argues that the significations of cultural authority are the result of a process in which negotiations of difference take place (Bhabha 2005). In a study of Morrison's engagement with Du Bois's (1897) theory of double consciousness, Chapter Two researches the complex nature of true fulfilment for the marginalized. Du Bois's difficulty in establishing a simple claim to equality is contrasted with Morrison's rejection of the discourses of difference, exclusion and marginalization (Morrison 1993). Chapter Three develops this line of enquiry to include Morrison's adaption of ancient, tragic drama to the demands of African American writing. Morrison's innovatory use of the separate and external configuration of human sensibilities in the form of *Beloved* is carefully considered in this chapter. Chapter Four engages with theories concerning the imposition of difference and the material conditions of appropriation, and the signifying system it spawns (Guillaumin 1995). It discusses Morrison's aesthetic engagement with the master/slave relationship.

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## Introduction

James Berger (1996), in considering Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987), feels that it returns to an essentially liberal view of the traumatic effects of 'institutional racism' (408), positioning this novel in the discursive contexts of the decade of its publication. His perception of the 'liberal position' (415) is developed within a critique of 'Reaganist' conservatism of the 1980s, and the oppositional forces of 'black nationalism' and the New Left.

Neo conservative polemics thrived within conservative denials that race was a 'continuing, traumatic and structural problem in contemporary America' (Berger 1996: 408). The conservative view of race 'attributed the poverty and violence of urban [African American] ghettos to individual moral deficiencies' (411). In this context racial injustice was thought to have little influence on life in the slums. Berger points out that 'the few negative reviews' (411) of *Beloved* 'emerged' from this position (411) and perceived the African American community as an underclass which consisted of 'single mothers on welfare, drug addicts and gang members' (411). In this way, American racial trauma became 'submerged' and 'disguised' (412) within a debate which concentrated more and more on problems concerning 'crime, welfare and the underclass' (412).

Berger contextualizes this debate as one of the consequences of Daniel Moynihan's report which, in the 1960s, 'strongly endorsed investment' (412) in employment and housing in African American communities. This report cited as

the reason for this support the fractured family life and family structure in the community which it saw as a continuing cause of poverty. Berger points out that Moynihan was 'particularly critical' of what he believed was the matriarchal organization of black families (412). The report, he believes, 'severed' the links between 'liberal activists and thinkers' and encouraged African American feelings of militancy that were to arise within black nationalism (412).

In contrast, the 1970s witnessed a vigorous attack on the idea that 'there was nothing of value in the black community' (413) and Berger points to the growing belief in the extraordinary powers within African American communities to absorb the racialized criteria foisted on them and to establish a firm base from which to develop an African American culture (Berger 1996). In these terms, the new left 'denied any dysfunction within African American communities' (414).

In light of these arguments *Beloved* is placed as an 'intervention' in the debates which preceded but were also associated with its inspiration. Challenging ideas of moral deficiency and environmental deprivation, and the inability of 'white' America to recognise the insidious presence of racism at the centre of the debate, Berger claims that Morrison's view is that 'power and official knowledge continue to violate African American lives' (411). And more than that, he claims that Morrison in *Beloved* 'revives traditional liberalism by insisting on African American personal and cultural agency and a powerful role for women' (415).

In Ashraf Rushdy's opinion, it is recollection which serves and conserves a sense of self. In *Beloved*, he says, Morrison has presented a story 'in which memory is the crucial device of being' (1990:307). The joining of recollection and

sense of self is achieved, he believes, through the construction of 'primal scenes' (303) whose significance is manifested in their recollection during a second critical event. The primal scene, he argues 'need only be of such significance that an individual would recollect it' and not another at a moment in time 'when driven to re-evaluate her or his life' (303). Consequently, a primal scene is an occasion which facilitates self-discovery through 'memory and through what Morrison felicitously calls "rememory"' (303).

It is the presence once again of Paul 'D' in Sethe's life that triggers thoughts of their slave past and the memories they share. This is the catalyst, according to Rushdy, which leads to the events which cause both characters to remember the traumas of their past lives as part of the same story, their story. In this way, memory is neither 'stable' nor 'personal' but is a 'communal property of friends, of family, of a people' (321). In Morrison's novels, Rushdy sees the 'magic of memory' as 'interpersonal' (322) and fundamental to the beneficial relationships between people who have been subjected to disturbing experiences and who also remember. In this context, memory is a personal thing but its sharing assists healing and self-discovery within the individual in the community: Sethe's and Paul's became 'communal property' as 're-memories' (322).

Two years later, Rushdy (1992) was still very interested in how the past is remembered. He labels Morrison's efforts to relate events from the past as 'this black aesthetic of remembering' (568). Not only does Morrison use a theory based on an inherited culture, an 'inherited history', but she 'delicately yet resolutely' takes up 'the task of reviving the very figures of that history' (568). It is the search to represent the compellingly human dilemma of the slave which prevents

Morrison's work from forming a 'master plot of victim and victimizer', he says (568). In 'articulating this critical and hopeful feminist voice' (568), Rushdy believes that what Morrison does is to revise history around subjective characters whose experiences are able to signify on the accepted readings of the past. Their experiences as slaves are perceived as crimes against the individual because they demean and disregard what are seen as self-evident, human values. However, it is noteworthy that if the past is to be revised it means that history is to be implicated in the successful, or otherwise, presentation of the African American character. And, critically, this would mean an encroachment into a history made in America by white Americans.

James Baldwin (1988) has also spoken in terms of the aesthetic concerning Morrison's work. 'Her gift is allegory' but 'her books and allegory are not always what they seem to be about'. In acknowledging this Baldwin feels that '*Beloved* could be about the story of truth' (284). But the truth he refers to, he feels, is not wholly achievable in a revision of history or a revival of the characters who took part. He points out that 'whites want black writers to mostly deliver something as if it were an official version of the black experience' (285). However, 'no true account really of black life can be held, can be contained, in the American vocabulary' (285). Within these views it is possible to detect differences between Rushdy's black aesthetic of remembering and Baldwin's mistrust of the representation of experience within a language where the 'allegedly inferior are actually made so' (Baldwin 1995: 25). Lynn Scott (2006) encapsulates Baldwin's argument when she says that 'even well-intentioned "protest" literature reifies racial oppression through a theology of whiteness that denies the complexity of black experience' (2006: 90).

And when Baldwin describes Morrison's allegory as 'horrifying' (1988:284), we get a sense of its remove from revision and revival. It becomes something other than a position from which to reify difference through a revision of history.

Rushdy (1992), however, establishes that in this revision of history and in inscribing hope into the narrative, 'Beloved is not the most important character' (571). That character is Denver and, 'if Beloved is the embodiment of the past', then Denver is 'the daughter of history' (571). However, this thesis argues that Beloved is the embodiment of Sethe's need to develop self-worth through an instinctive engagement with an elusive past. Beloved is the source of Sethe's longing made up as a person. Denver's intimate relation with Beloved encapsulates these longings, but that relation is also the catalyst which renders self-consciousness a revision of longing. Sethe, we can say, has come to the end of her tether, and Denver, having been born waving free, so to speak, embodies a sense of movement away from the source to which Sethe was irrevocably drawn. The implication here is that the sense of loss incumbent in the figure of Sethe is conceivable in Denver's movement away from the source of Sethe's enthrallment. The impossibility of Sethe fulfilling her need is the motif for its transmission from longing into existence. At the moment of Beloved's flight, the source of longing is revised into the presentation of an idea conceivable in the figure of Denver. Not history revised, but the truth manhandled out of a history which could no longer sustain it.

Lorraine Liscio (1992) describes *Beloved* as the effort by Toni Morrison to reinvent a past in order to establish a racial memory (36). In this context the novel is able to 'honour' the real life experiences of those who endured the trauma of



slavery and provide a medium for their voices. She says that this is achieved through the narration and enactment of the mother/daughter bond which supplies expression and disrupts the language of the 'father' (35). This is to say that Sethe's story avoids the assumptions made about her which are present in white patriarchal language: a language that does not recognise or represent her. Morrison's novel, she says, is able to point out that male narratives are not representative 'of all blacks in slavery' (34).

Carol Henderson (2006) likens this to the 'memorial haunting' that precipitates familial and ancestral recovery (149) of the human condition of the enslaved. Morrison, she says, is 'keen in fleshing out the dynamics of human relationships' (150) to ensure that some wounds should be seen, 'manifested in the flesh so that one's spiritual essence can be reconnected with the lost self' (150). This is fulfilled in the presence of Beloved who facilitates this 'reconciliation of body and spirit' (150). In this way, the 'private longings of a people' are made public (150). Henderson, too, refers to Morrison's aim as one of 'clearing space for the recovery of this past' (150) in order to focus on the interior lives of the enslaved. In this reading, knowledge of the past is connected to the yearning for maturation: the importance of racial memory allied with spiritual essence.

However, 'fixing in language a past that can never be adequately named' (35) is problematic according to Liscio (1992). The target, Liscio points out, is this 'white patriarchal narrative oppressive to blacks' (36) and represented in the actions of schoolteacher and his perceptions of Sethe. Nonetheless, this 'entails some hazards' (35), as presenting Sethe within a maternal discourse risks denying her the status of a speaking subject and becoming 'objectified in others' narratives'

(35): and in light of the narrator's opinion that 'this is not a story to pass on', Liscio believes that 'no metaphor can satisfactorily represent these people' (36). This means that in attempting to write what has been stolen from Sethe, 'her mother's milk' (45), in a narrative where white patriarchal assumptions are undermined by establishing the 'black mother-infant daughter bond' (39), Sethe's experience, her story, forever remains within the significance of the power of schoolteacher because her defiance is expressed on the site of schoolteacher's knowledge and power and, as such, her reaction is the action of a slave and not a human being. For Liscio, the narration of the mother/daughter bond is the narration of the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic disruption' (36) of a full presence into an empty place where the object retains its original shading, because 'the narration of what has been stolen cannot be written' (45). The symbolic suggests the presence of a known unity based on a 'body of knowledge' (Tambling 2010: 118) which can be expressed symbolically. Consequently, for Liscio, its failure disrupts that unity into a void where the ex-slave remains bereft. Nevertheless, in dramatic time, that which remains after disruption we argue, is a fragment able to retain the smallest semblance of the original unity. The symbol expresses Sethe's humanity; its fragmentation, disruption, means that this can continue to be expressed as an idea in another form.

This is significant because it can be argued that the point is precisely that she is forever under the power of schoolteacher and forever the slave. This is not in question, but the suggestion for consideration is that her sensibilities as a human being and her awareness of her condition as a slave must be apparent in any situation in which she is written. Liscio is correct in saying that no metaphor can

satisfactorily represent these people. The representation of the humanity they have lost is expressed in the fragmentation of a symbol whose meaning was established through the use of metaphor and allegory. Terms such as 'her mother's milk' provide allegorical connotations which, it is argued, cannot be judged as means to an end. Allegory has no consequences and, in this context, it is the medium capable of sounding a place which is cognizant of the pull of culturally hegemonic language and the forming of the symbolic. To think otherwise is to reject the aesthetic and the role of language within it. Henderson's (2006) point that *Beloved* facilitates the reconciliation of body and spirit is a point in question, because it can be argued that the allegorical formulation of *Beloved* ensures the exact opposite is made public. *Beloved* is neither symbol nor metaphor but the incarnation of the longing whose context is an unknown and irrecoverable history. As she flees, Sethe's loss is confirmed, and our perception is changed. It is not a matter of history anymore, but of a human right denied. It is everyman's idea of human dignity as a fragment in dramatic time.

Caroline Rody (1995) congratulates Toni Morrison for writing a novel which the African American canon 'had long lacked.' It is, she says, the story of the African Americans who 'survived slavery' and is about filling 'historical gaps' in what is a 'historical novel' (93) in a mythic creation of 'black history' (93). In her reading of *Beloved*, Rody registers the influences of 'magic realism' in Morrison's attempt to relate a 'prehistory of the present' (93). She acknowledges those 'poststructuralist critics' who read *Beloved* as more a novel that takes its place within the historical discourse which deals with 'the problem of writing history in the complicated moment in which we tell the past', but establishes that within the novel

there remains the 'burden' of communicating 'an authentic truth' (94). This burden is a result, she says, of the 'inherited conviction' of 'slavery's evil' which still registers in the perceptions of the individual in the present day. This provides a moral purpose to the quest for authentic voices and the need to put 'authority back into the hands of the slave' (94).

Even though the slave history novel may well involve questions of memory, knowledge and identity and seek out an authoritative voice, the 'awesome authority' given to Sethe is problematic for Caroline Rody (1995) in this reading of the novel. She asks 'what logic does the plot of child murder serve late twentieth-century ideological interest; and how is authority served in such an act of violence' (94)?

The answer to these enquiries, she points out, is in the novel's extraordinary 'psychological reach'. In this context, historical writing cannot be judged solely in terms of 'ideologies of representation'. The reach of this novel points towards an effort to link the reimagined past with the complexities of the present. Rody articulates this as 'an emotional implication of present and past' and suggests that we 'integrate an ideological reading of historical fiction with a psychological project of re-imagining an inherited past' (95).

Rody articulates an aesthetic where integration acknowledges the connection between the individual and his/her group and the group's development of 'the authority or cultural need to represent its history' (114). Part of this, however, is rejected by Hannes Bergthaller who claims that Morrison's aim to make *Beloved* 'a personal experience for the reader' is, of course, 'a manifest

impossibility' (Bergthaller 2006/7: 3). The reasons for this are the 'limitations' of literature itself and the fact that in order to provide a slave within the text an element of 'personhood' that character must be at a 'temporal remove' from their own experience of slavery (3). This seems to say that personal experience in a slave 'narrative' is a 'consequence' of the character's inability to communicate autonomously as a slave through the medium of a text: he/she cannot display human sensibilities as both a slave and a 'person'. For Bergthaller, this makes *Beloved* not so much a novel about slavery as one 'about its effects on those who live in its wake' (3).

In this context he reads *Beloved* as the reclaiming of a community through 'a ritual of healing' (3). Each character has a part in this and 'refigures' their experiences in the quest for an identity which finally 'inaugurates' them and their reader in a 'shared experience' (3). Denver's relationship with Beloved is cited to reinforce this reading. Beloved is seen as someone with whom Denver communicates sufficiently to enable a bond of 'intimacy' to become established which is indicative of this healing process in the search for 'origins and genealogies' (4). Bergthaller is then able to point out that Beloved provides the medium through which the process of healing is 'dramatized for the reader' and 'literature' is the 'catalyst' for the 'reproduction of a community' (2), and the novel facilitates the enactment of a communal healing process.

However, the healing process entails the characters forgetting those experiences which are capable of overwhelming them and mentally breaking them, and represented in the text by the 'eponymous character' of Beloved. Beloved's fate, then, is to 'literalize' the fears of dismemberment which must be forgotten if

the community is to reinvent itself (2). In this reading a community is empowered to form and re-establish itself through the act of jettisoning its recent history. However, a historical connection must be maintained. The idea of a community reinventing itself through rejecting its recent history is prevalent in much of late twentieth century criticism of *Beloved*. And yet Morrison has repeatedly confirmed the importance of the ancestor in her work: 'nice things don't always happen to the totally self-reliant', she says, 'if there is no conscious historical connection' (1984:344). Consequently, the importance of the individual's relationship with the community is central to many interpretations. However, it is important here to stress that the loss of any ability to be autonomous has to be written as an individual loss in order for that loss to resonate beyond the context of its suppression. The community as a group recognize that loss because it has happened to each of them. This communal recognition identifies the intolerable loss of one individual as an affliction of a whole group of people. It is not as if they are stranded in time, but that they are stranded in a moment of recognition of the enormity of their loss. This moment of recognition resonates in the figure of Denver. As we shall see, Morrison's use of the ancestor provides her with the images which facilitate her use of symbolism, but the presence of the ancestral community is necessary in order for her to conflate individual sensibilities with that community.

Nevertheless, both Bergthaller (2006/7) and Rody's (1995) views on community are echoed in Betty Powell's opinion that Morrison initiates 'the possibility of coherence and recognition for the characters in *Beloved* through freedom and alliance with community' (1995: 143). However, the idea that

Beloved's departure is the catalyst which enables other characters to 'connect with one another' (153) simplifies Sethe and her community's continuing isolation as ex-slaves. They must remain in their state of recognition in dramatic time because a loss of such magnitude has been configured as semblance in order for that which has been lost to be conceivable in another form. They can only be remembered as human beings in our recognition of what they have lost. They are allied in loss.

Denise Heinze (1993) is able to claim that this outsider, insider status is not always resolved but Morrison has achieved 'a rare accommodation of two competing literary selves' in her own work that may point to 'irresolution as a motivating factor in the... struggle for wholeness' (5). Heinze (9) explains this as the ability to combine 'political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility' in that both blacks and whites are ignited into 'political action', while elevating 'through art the beautiful... in the human condition'. Here the arguments concerning allegory and its uses have been transformed into an aesthetic framework, something Conner terms the unyielding connection between the work of art and life as it is (2000: ix).

Nancy Peterson (2008) points out that in *Beloved* none of the characters are wholly good or bad. She cites as example Sethe who, among other things, is interpreted as heroic, rash, strong, and 'completely absorbed in her own explanations' (96). Coming to terms with these characters, she says, 'offers keen insights into narrative point of view', and especially into the desires and conflicts they may experience at a subconscious level (97). The result of the readers' endeavours is their involvement 'with complex layers of interiority' and the extent of the individual's ability to 'recognize and articulate' the 'deepest desires, fears, and dreams of his or her innermost self' (97).

Within this context, Peterson is able to discuss how Morrison is able to pay 'a great deal' of attention to individual consciousness in her aim to reveal what 'constitutes a particular character's subjectivity' and the making or forming of that individual's humanity (97). Her thorough engagement with character leads to her conclusion that 'if we listen carefully to the voices' in the novel, we as readers become aware that 'all truths are partial and relational' and by this we develop 'an awareness of our own potential complicity' in the story of slavery (95). Similar to Sethe's heroic struggle to be rid of schoolteacher's evaluation of her, we too are haunted by the shift in our own consciousness.

Our coming to terms with these characters, the insights into narrative points of view, and our involvement with complex layers of interiority are strong indications of the power of the aesthetic to neutralize those insinuations which are active in the history of racial superiority. It also implies that the reader's involvement with a character's subjectivity is an involvement with the agency of the aesthetic: the method for producing meaning.

Morrison's emergence as an author of significance corresponded with the ongoing debate concerning 'the contested ideas of the relations between the work of art and the political arena' (Connor 2000: x). This is an area in which Ralph Ellison (1953) questioned the claims that black artists should in the first instance be acclaimed as just that, black; and the value of their work judged by the extent to which it shunned white literary strategies and as a consequence earned its place within a black literary canon. 'Through the display of black intelligence and artistic versatility, it was believed, whites would come to a new understanding of African Americans' (Rampersad 1992:xvi). In opposition to this Ellison, along with James



Baldwin, argued that, even though they agreed that a writer should write from within his own experience, the 'sociology of his existence' should not mean his work should simply be a protest against those conditions (Ellison 1972:111). In a telling insight into the writing strategies of those authors whose work necessarily must address the situation of the marginalized, Ellison points out that how much of the sociology of existence is present in his work 'depends upon how much of his life the individual writer is able to transform into art' (111-12). In this context, political and sociological considerations are taken from the lived experience of the author and transposed into the immediate experience of his/her characters. We can say that the function of the content of the aesthetic, in these terms, must be to incorporate and shape the conditions of existence within the human condition.

Importantly, Ellison goes on to say that there are aspects of his role as writer 'which do not depend primarily upon [his] racial identity' (125). He points out that in order to 'fulfil the writer's basic responsibilities of his craft' he/she must 'maintain a certain precision in language, a maximum correspondence between the form of a piece of writing and its content' (125). He extends this 'to include the importance of a correspondence between words and ideas... and the processes of [the] world' (125). This correspondence can be likened to Oscar Wilde's ideas concerning art and the writer: 'Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself... the outward expressive of the inward: in which form reveals' (Wilde 1982:160-161). He also stresses that 'an idea is of no value until it becomes incarnate and is made an image' (171). Wilde and Ellison's theories of the aesthetic production of truth are, then, similar and concerned, within a particular form, with a correspondence between ideas and sociological experience. Baldwin's point that *BeLoved* could be

the story of truth is conducive with Ellison and Wilde's theories on the aesthetic production of sociological experience. But, as Ellison points out, this is achieved by a precision in language and a correspondence between form and content but not with racial identity. This should be balanced by what Wilde calls the 'individualism of art' (1982:36) in that 'the artist selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses'. As a consequence we can say that the writer's ideas and themes may well be influenced by his/her sociology of existence but their successful correspondence with their chosen form is dependent upon the language used by the writer in fusing form and content. This is to argue that language and not the ideology of the aesthetic will dictate the theoretical, critical approach because the writer's language in which his/her theme is developed within the form of the work, in an act of correspondence, subsumes all other considerations. It is ironic that the search for the truth regarding the situation of the African American should involve the cessation and subsumption of any classification of the author's racial identity. In light of these considerations, it is pertinent to argue that the aesthetic is the conduit through which the situation of the marginalized is made palpable, and the main area of consideration for interpreting and understanding the author's themes as opposed to the context in which they were written.

In line with this, Valerie Smith (1987:7) has said that within literature 'we can discern politics and its relation to ideology only through close analysis of its language'. This is particularly telling in light of the inquiries into the ideology of the aesthetic by Terry Eagleton (1990). With reference to Rousseau's 'law of the totality' (25), Eagleton bases his discussion of the ideology of the aesthetic in the 'anxiety' of 'a class wedded in its robust individualism to the concrete and

particular' (25). That is, 'individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity' (20). In this context, the aesthetic intervenes here 'as a dream of reconciliation' between an 'abstract totality' and 'the flesh-and-blood reality of the individual being' (25). For Eagleton, 'the mystery of the aesthetic object is that each of its sensuous parts, while appearing wholly autonomous, incarnates the 'law' of the totality' (25). This is reminiscent of Ellison's understanding of the sociology of experience and its necessary contribution to the formulation of the aesthetic: immediate experience of an existence within the totality which questions the idea of the attainment of a robust individualism. However, Eagleton remains within the framework of an intimate unity in his belief that 'each aesthetic particular, in the very act of determining itself, regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particular' (25). This would seem to say that the content brought to the aesthetic form, even as it is transposed into an art form, retains its original connotations and inferences which influence and are influenced by any other material garnered from the everyday world. The result of this, Eagleton confirms, may be, 'politically speaking' that 'what appears as my subordination to others is in fact self-determination' or the more cynical view where 'my subordination to others is so effective that it appears to me in the mystified guise of governing myself' (25). It perfectly frames the dilemma of a society who covets a burgeoning sense of self-determination within the controlling material and moral framework of the group. However, what becomes plain is that this explanation of the aesthetic cannot encompass the experience of those that society marginalizes and whose rejection provides confirmation for the group of its own idea of itself. Connor (2000) likens this to a 'desire', on the part of the 'Western cultural aesthetic' to 'conceal its own

political ideology beneath the innocent façade of art' (xvii). In contrast to this Western aesthetic, we can say that Morrison's use of the aesthetic is to transcend the presence of ideology in art. Morrison's aesthetic, operating at the margins of society in dramatic time, is denied access to the political ideologies out of which western art manifests reconciliation between an abstract totality and material being. Because of this it must deliver autonomy for its characters within an aesthetic that is able to communicate a unity found to be unrepresentable in the material world, something, for all intents and purposes, which is not considered to be there. In this postmodern game of hide and seek, speaking the unspeakable involves the use of an aesthetic which presents, as a conceivable idea, that which already exists. The form which gives flesh to the unspeakable, then, must survive its own presentation only as an idea. In Lyotard's (1986) explanation, 'it is our business not to supply reality, but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented' (81). The form, in our case Sethe, must incorporate, to the exclusion of everything else, the truth which cannot express itself in that form.

If, as Connor says, art and ideology coalesce in the western aesthetic, then it becomes plausible to believe that Morrison's aesthetic, or a black aesthetic, is a form of opposition in that its sources are embedded in the black community and in that community's cultural essence. This would be a mistake because this belief could result in a concentration on that essence and those sources to the detriment of the aesthetic: ideology as art and, unfortunately, that is where we came in. However, the stance taken in this thesis is to interpret the novel in line with Benjamin's claims that the enabling conditions of its production are indeed to be found integrated, assimilated or insinuated within it. With this in mind, the author's

task is to transcend this content within an aesthetic which is able to manifest a unity, a resolution, between the philosophical enquiries whose aim is to apportion credence to their own enquiries (Benjamin 1919-1920a). If we consider the claims made for the black aesthetic as different from the western or European aesthetic, the claims made for the language used and the respective traditions of each are, more often than not, the grounds for discussion. Connor has pointed out that when approaching the African American text from 'the perspective of western aesthetics, we must attend to how the literature signifies upon and transforms our sense of the aesthetic tradition' (2000:xx). Similarly, Gates says that 'a mode of reading to explicate a black text changes both the received theory and received ideas about the text' (1984:9). On the one hand is the transformation of the aesthetic tradition, and on the other, the challenge to received theory and received ideas. We understand the latter as a conglomeration between political, ideological and aesthetic considerations. Gates's assertion, that if 'theory and practice...aid the critic in responding to the multifarious demands of the texts of our tradition...then the critic must embark on their mastery' (4), encapsulates the doubts concerning an aesthetic as tradition, that is, what it is, and in achieving a resolution to the multifarious conditions thought to influence the production of texts. We reiterate our position that an aesthetic approach is an art form 'in which the ideal of the philosophical problem makes itself manifest' (Benjamin 1919-1920a:218), that is, a unity in place of the problems arising from an engagement with the text based on received theories and ideologies. Additionally, if we consider that, in Morrison's terms, the artist must kill off, as it were, her chosen form for the incorporation of the unspeakable, then we begin to understand that the rules for any aesthetic must

transcend the content, that is the received ideas and traditions, out of which the form emerged. The transcendence of this content will involve the use of an aesthetic whose application will be governed, in our case, by the artist's chosen technique for providing a conception of the existence of the unspeakable. We cannot in these terms speak of a mastery of theory and practice aimed at the demands of the text, but rather of a mastery of the aesthetic, which is the method the artist uses to transcend the received theories and ideas which are the conditions of the novel's production and its content. The rules of Morrison's aesthetic are formulated through the demand for the demise of the form.

It can be agreed, then, that the close reading of language and its treatment of external influences is crucial to aesthetic analysis. In response to Eagleton's argument concerning the influence of political ideology on the aesthetic, Conner (2000) has said that 'subsuming the aesthetic to the political... refuses to see the potentially liberating effects of art' (x). However, the argument will be taken further to embrace Wilde's theory of the unity of art, Ellison's correspondence, and the relation of the image incarnate to the social influences which make up its interior and exterior.

Morrison's engagement with the aesthetic will be discussed further in Chapter Two in a comparison between her novel *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987). The aim of this analysis is to compare the result of Morrison's aesthetic, that is the marginalized individual's conscious realisation of their true situation, with Morrison's determination to expose the 'rank illusion' of delineating human experience, individual or collective, in racial terms (Winant 1997: 89). In Morrison's own words, the dilemma is 'how to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal

cling' (1997: 5)? The answer will involve 'questions of concept' and of 'language', and although her commitment to them has been 'fierce, fitful and constantly... evolving, they remain in her thought,' Morrison says 'as aesthetically and politically unresolved' (5).

This revelation by Morrison will be discussed in relation to her use of the aesthetic and its affinity with the production in language of a consciousness which seeks self-definition and self-expression in a society which retains the power to marginalize and reject the outsider. However, this enquiry will go further to claim that tragedy is the necessary framework in which to provide the denouement of the character whose form must be overtaken by the idea which sustained it. In the briefest of terms, if *Sula* is the novel in which the concept of the unspeakable is never fully realised, then *Beloved* is the novel where this is resolved through tragedy.

This is in opposition to Tessa Roynan's research (2013), which investigates the classical tradition and its use by western artists. Roynan argues that the 'Greek and Roman tradition' has been used to 'purify' white history in a 'fabrication' in which narratives of American history have become idealized (3). Similar to some of the critics in this review, Roynan believes that Morrison's aim is a revision of the past but that this is done through a radical deployment of the classical tradition (4). This rewriting of America's past, according to Roynan, is visible in *Beloved* and its framing within Greek tragedy.

However, this thesis differs from this point of view. Whereas Morrison's imagery and symbolism does emanate from the past, her use of tragedy, we

believe, is to diminish the influence of the past, and its insinuations concerning African American identity. Her use of tragedy enables Morrison to draw a line under the events that her use of imagery and imagination has brought to the novel. Tragedy not only brings the character to an intensely public and anguished fall, it also parades for all to see the most personal and intimate suffering. This is an important consideration in *Beloved* because from this point, Sethe's tragic demise, we get little else than personal reflection on the human condition as history is pushed to one side. Imagery, symbolism and tragedy are manipulated to provide the smallest totality of semblance of the consciousness left bereft through afflictions of slavery. It is this fragment which is brought forward and instilled in the consciousness of another: a product of the past but not careful of it. In this sense, tragedy is the manipulator of the character and not the context of her situation. The argument here is that any revision of events would involve an intellectual commitment to those events by Morrison, which they hardly deserve. Through an engagement with Hegel's theory of tragedy, Chapter Three of this thesis will explicate Morrison's use of tragedy in her determination to write, as it were, out of context. We can say, then, that a study of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* reveals that African American writing is the attempt to be done with a past not worthy or representative of the African American. Tantalizingly, a covenant, between the beneficial pride and dignity derived from a relationship with those who came before, and the consciousness conceivable in the character of the present of dramatic time, is maintained. Because of this we encounter a fully recognizable human being whose facility is the product of a relationship with a community of the past.



## Chapter 1.

Morrison's Nobel Lecture, the archaic demands of culture, and the appropriateness of tragedy in the postmodern presentation of the unspeakable

'Nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought. Committed to writing in such a case, it is not even a bad photograph. And the truth refuses (like a child or a woman who does not love us), facing the lens of writing while we crouch under the black cloth, to keep still and look amiable. Truth wants to be startled abruptly, at one stroke, from her self-immersion, whether by uproar, music, or cries for help. Who could count the alarm signals with which the inner world of the true writer is equipped? And to "write" is nothing other than to set them jangling. Then the sweet odalisque rises with a start, snatches whatever first comes to hand in the melee of her boudoir (our cranium), wraps it around her, and-almost unrecognizable-flees from us to other people. But how well constituted she must be, how healthily built, to step in such a way among them, contorted, rattled, and yet victorious, captivating!'

Benjamin, Walter (1978:480)

Although African American literature is classed as being written by Americans of African descent who reside in the United States of America, it is widely accepted among commentators that its beginnings are not to be found in Africa: its 'recent vintage', neither 'pressed on the African continent nor bottled during the slave era' (Warren 2011:1). Rather, to follow the gist of this point of

view, it is considered a 'postemancipation phenomenon' that developed and cohered within 'a social order' which lawfully sanctioned decades of 'violence and intimidation.' Not only one sanctioned in law, but 'buttressed' by 'scholars, scientists, artists, and writers' as well as ordinary citizens (1). However, in this reasoning, we would have a literature which is the product of a context from which it had been shunned and marginalized. This can only make sense if we consider its motivation as simply a protest at being marginalized by the controlling forces and institutions of that order.

As a phenomenon, Warren likens African American writing to an 'undertaking' defined by the system of 'Jim Crow' segregation; and the legal demise of that system corresponded, 'imperceptibly', with the 'erosion' of African American literature as a coherent enterprise (2). Such an historical framing is possible only in a concentration on events and their contextual situation. Nevertheless, a literature, seeking to express in human terms the human consequences of segregation, is not confined, in selecting its subject matter, to any period; neither should it be defined as writing out of a period: that is, that its motivation is that period and its powerful institutions. The point to be made here is that African American literature, whose form and subject matter are chosen by the author, strives to express a singular knowledge derived from an understanding of the causes and effects of the injustices arising from prejudice and marginalization. In this sense, it is able to be expressed as a personal projection of a consciousness which is not the result of a certain set of events or situations, but one derived from a human understanding of the human condition in relation to those events. 'The work's truth content is the more relevant the more

inconspicuously and intimately it is bound up with its subject matter' (Benjamin 1924-25:10), and the consciousness we speak of fulfils this intimacy because, in Morrison's hands particularly, it is a projection of a knowledge present within the limitations of subordination, which is the novel's subject matter, and the reactions of a human being in relation to that matter. It is the projection of knowledge suffocated in an intimate relation with slavery and the positioning of the human subject in relation to that.

'My evolution in consciousness about being black in the world is my first thematic level'. These are the words of Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1995:111), and they refer to 'the specialness' for him 'of black culture when no white people are around' (109). He is referring to the intimacy of family life, its secrets and revelations, and its imitation in his writings in order to express a sense of self that has, as its bottom line, 'myself' (109). It is the private and personal memoir of a human being's development within the bounds of family and community life. Nonetheless, he records the risks of 'lifting the family veil' and telling not only its secrets but also its 'racial and ethnic secrets' too (109). We can speculate that these are classified because they are vulnerable to an interpretation from outside and their classification as racial traits, and as applicable to all black families and black individuals. Frederickson comments that 'the consciousness of race as a basis of personal identity...is difficult to eliminate', because, 'so deeply rooted in the white psyche...it often seems impervious to rational argument' (1972:331-2). Not only rational argument, but in this case, can the vital and personal consciousness, which emerges in Gates's writing, withstand the revelatory risks taken in the interests of writing the truth of his own consciousness? They are grist to the mill

for a controlling white society whose perception is that the black individual is the representation and expression of the traits of the mass.

We can begin to see in Gates's writing a shift in emphasis from that which Warren describes as an erosion of African American literature consequent on the demise of the 'Jim Crow' system. Warren seems unwilling to conceive of a framework that is not reliant on a single period in time and whose motivations lie elsewhere. Gates implies that the context for his writing is his family and community. However, it must also be considered as the vehicle of his choice for expressing a consciousness which is readily understood by and associative with other African Americans. As such, it is writing that emanates from a chosen situation, one where there are no white people, but one defined by an outside, debilitating force. Consequently, similar to the subordination of the 'Jim Crow' years, its subject matter is primed in a void, in exclusion; and because of this its content risks being defined by its need to sideline white culture, and in this it cannot avoid the juxtaposition of exclusion and subordination with the family life of African Americans. The crux of the matter is that the consciousness which Gates wishes to express as private and personal cannot maintain its isolation as it emerges into a wider context. It will be constantly impinged upon by the shadow of the controlling society standing over it, and its context defined by the exclusionary powers of the controlling majority. And this is where Warren's enquiries begin: African American writing as cohesive only in the context of its protestations and in its telling of its own subordination. However, we argue that the essence of African American writing is the coherence and cohesion it demonstrates in its efforts to express its human sensibilities in the contextual unreality provided by a controlling

society. This is a method of writing whose content reduces the events of its time to the effects they have on human beings. That is, to what 'the writer makes of them' in the effort to imbue them with 'human value' (Ellison 1972:145): a situation where the preference of the author is to select events rather than writing out of them. And the more striking these events, and the more they jar on the perceptions of the reader, the more useful they are as the vehicle for the 'transfiguration' of the 'futile elements of the real' (Arendt 1999:11). In contrast with Gates's development of a themed consciousness in the absence of white people, the point of view taken in this thesis is that, as a result of 'watching and interpreting the historical process that brings about such magical transfiguration' (Arendt:11), Morrison projects a consciousness into dramatic time in order to present a black consciousness within a society controlled by white people.

The sense being sought here is of a literature which is not seeking to express personal experience of intimidation and subordination at the hands of white people, or knowledge of the intimidation of loved ones or acquaintances or deceased relatives, including, importantly, those distant relatives known or thought to have been slaves. Because it is literature written from outside the source of its intimidation, its words will seek to be framed within an 'unmolested language' which cannot risk being discredited in blaming or in the hubris of 'a self-ravaged tongue' (Morrison 1993:187). At the very beginning of Morrison's novel *Beloved* (2004 [1987]), before the foreword written by her and before the text, a whole page is given over to four words, 'Sixty Million and more'. These words refer to the people who lost their lives to slavery. Their significance as a memorial is increased in light of Morrison's comments concerning Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address:

he 'refused' she says 'to encapsulate the reality of 600,000 dead men', and in 'refusing to monumentalize...his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns' (Morrison 1993:186-7). And if we juxtapose the sixty million and more with Morrison's comments on Lincoln's address, her meaning becomes apparent in her choice of life and not lives: there is no reality which can encapsulate sixty million dead, but the destruction of life itself is to be mourned. 'Language can never pin down slavery...nor should it' because 'its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable' (187), its reach toward the dignity and sanctity of life. We can say that the real juxtaposition is the encapsulation of life within the context of subordination. However, the challenge for Morrison's language is to avoid any link between the two: the motivations for slavery and prejudice must remain elsewhere if the language is to retain its felicity.

The reason for this language of appropriate expression can be examined in Morrison's (1993) story, in her Nobel Lecture, of the transportation of slaves from the auction house to their new master's plantation. Their journey in an open wagon is halted at an inn while the 'driver and his mate' eat and rest inside. Eventually, a boy and girl emerge and give the slaves bread, meat, warm cider; and 'a look', and the slaves 'look back' (190). The framing of the 'look' in this story is reminiscent of Benjamin's 'little hunchback' (1968), who is always present when something is dropped, spilt or broken. For the child, the 'hunchback' of the nursery rhyme is the cause of things crashing to the floor and the mess at the child's feet, because the child has looked at him. However, for the adult Benjamin, he is changed into simply the observer and not the sign or instigator of misfortune: the debris at the child's feet is the misfortune. For, 'anyone whom the little man looks

at pays no attention; not to himself and not to the little man. In consternation he stands before a pile of rubble at his feet' (1968 cited in Arendt 1999:12). Inflicted by misfortune, the self and the observer are forgotten as the individual surveys the chaos of his situation, the mess which surrounds him. The boy and girl who tend to the slaves have stepped from the 'light' of the inn into the darkness of the wagon full of slaves. The context is one of intimidation and subordination, but also of the unknown. The look in this sense is a look of enquiry, of observation, and in the context of the wagon, it is the effort to understand the mystery of blackness. The look back is simply that: a response uncomprehending of a dogma whose primacy is the cause of so much misery, and a response not in any sense blaming of itself. Although surrounded by misery, the look and the look back evoke, respectively, a detachment indicative of the extent to which society's myths control its individuals; and a detachment able to reject any sense of connection with an incomprehensible context: one transfixed in the light of its own superiority, and the other dismayed by its situation. This contrast between light and darkness ensures that the dignity of life is preserved in its contemplation of the rubble at its feet. Unconcerned with itself, that self remains inviolate and separate from the rubble. This is the sense inherent in an unmolested language which can only speak of intimidation as intimidation, and not of intimidation of itself if it is to preserve its dignity. It must remain consistent in its occupation of the space it opens up between lives and life.

Commenting on the work of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, Anna Kerchy points out that the creative processes in these authors' works are able to 'transgress conventional discourse' and go 'beyond the ideologically prescribed subject position' (2006:58). Their processes provide an escape 'from the prison

house of language' in order to avoid the usual 'subject-in-process' development (58). Consequently, the subject of Kerchy's insight is already formed in his own position because of his isolation in his concentration on the chaos around him. His position is formed in his helplessness and in his consternation at his situation. Those who look are the creators of the debris, and those who look back come to know it. And their transition from object to subject is achieved in Morrison's unmolested language because, finally, the object will become subjective in an understanding of the truth of his position in a white environment. Their look provides Morrison's subject with the quality of being a person but that quality, isolated in silence, is not enough to change his situation. Morrison's reason for this is that, being the darkness, her characters risk playing the mythical roles assigned to them by the controlling power. In order to remain separate from the myth, that is, not be defined by it, she must write her characters a consciousness which is not a result of isolation or protestations, but one which has adapted to its isolation. Unmolested language is language for the conception of the individual's own subjectivity.

Although Walter Benjamin is not normally associated with race and slavery, his use of imagery and allegory is applicable to Morrison's search for an unmolested language. The depth and scope of the allegorical concept in Benjamin's contemplations become accessible if we consider his flaneur, sandwichman, gambler and whore as dialectical images which, although being individual images for contemplation, are simply 'incarnations' of the prototype image which set the allegorical intention in motion (Buck-Morss 1991:306). The commodity as an allegorical object is prominent in Benjamin's thinking and



illustrative of the emptiness he perceived at the heart of modernity. Whether we view the commodity form as the symbol of the separation of human labour from its production of the ever same, or as its transformation into 'the souvenir and collector's item,' Benjamin's point is that, as object, the commodity is 'not a metaphor for...emptiness'. Rather, as allegory, it stands 'for what the commodity has made out of the experiences that people...have' (cited in Buck-Morss 1991:188-9): the commodity as affecting 'the most basic biological drives' (Buck-Morss 1991:188). This means that Benjamin's allegorical vision has rendered personal experience a commodity, the commodity as the source of emptiness. The flaneur is closely involved with this empty time of modernity. Although he can look through the glass roofs of the arcades at the moon and stars, he is unmistakably inside, and his reactions to the crowds are as commodified as theirs. And at this point, and as the allegorical image degrades, the sandwich man replaces the flaneur. As the flaneur circulates his commodified views in writing or in actions, he becomes a purveyor, a conduit, for the commodified experience of modernity. In Benjamin's terms, he becomes one of 'the strewn implements with which allegory has so disfigured and mauled the material world that only fragments remain as objects of contemplation' (cited in Buck-Morss 1991:188). Hence, the flaneur now advertises, as the sandwich man, the benefits of his commodified experience to the masses he lives with. Disfigured and mauled, the flaneur becomes 'the first to fall victim to that which has since blinded many millions' (Buck-Morss 1991:307). As the incarnation of the flaneur, the sandwich man now peddles as real the myths garnered from his observations. However, as a fitting example of the allegoric in Benjamin's dialectic images, the sandwich man undergoes a further change. In a

disturbing image, he appears escorted by storm troopers in a Munich street carrying the sign, 'I am a Jew, but I have no complaint about the Nazis' (312: image 9.25). Having undergone a further metamorphosis, the flaneur is now 'advertising the state', and acknowledging as normal the corrupting power of a controlling majority. In following a society's transition from its absorption in consumer capitalism to its immersion in a 'political phantasmagoria' (312), Benjamin's images, degrading ceaselessly into fragments, are now emotive 'less of new political possibilities than of recurring political dangers' (304).

Morrison's recourse in her tale is the provision of a character marginalised by an overbearing culture for no reason other than ideology. In order to do this she conjures events from the past, but always with the present in mind. Although 'the flaneur's object of inquiry is modernity itself' (304), his projection from the past, as collaborator with the present of modernity, is allegorical in that, in Benjamin's words, 'he takes the concept of being-for-sale for a walk' (cited in Buck-Morss 1991:306). The images discussed above, in this sense, must be thought of as conducive to the ideal reality of the present time in which the past is complicit. They are not to be thought of as causes, because ideology is not a context but a state of mind; and the allegorical, in its effect on the realm of thoughts in dramatic time, is, we argue, Morrison's method for juxtaposing the concept of an isolated consciousness with the concept of white superiority. Her images originate in the past in order to join up with themselves in the present. Their presentation, as shadows of their former selves in the dramatic time of the present, marks the cost to the individual of living in that present, and severs dramatic time from history and its contextual situations.

The shifting emphases, brought about by the changing images of the flaneur, have resulted in the reduction of an apparent knowing individual into one, not only embroiled in that which he thought himself apart, but also active in promoting it. The boy carrying a lamp and a jug of warm cider in Morrison's story 'will have a gun in three years' (Morrison 1993:190), and in this we sense the movement of the allegorical image which undermines the unity established in young white children caring for those oppressed by their elders. If we think of the symbol as having a 'natural significance' in that it evokes 'eternal truths', and holds 'certain values as natural...and as having an essential, unchanging existence' (Tambling 2010:16-17), then we can say that the allegorical image destroys the totality presented by the symbol. The ideology that is present in the performance of the white children outside the inn is exposed as the ideas and values with which their society has awarded itself. Far from natural, their actions appear stilted and affected, and framed elsewhere.

Here we are consciously aware of the powerful and insidious presence of a cultural performance whose significance is its failure to recognise the humanity of those it enslaves. The look into the eyes of the slaves which communicates nothing preserves the slave's isolation. Not only that, Morrison's representations of white power, the two children, exhibit an ability to differentiate whose meaning is not grasped 'in relation to some un-said or polysemy' (Bhabha 2005:186), but in its relation to a power which is not present. As such, white power is caught outside its historical signification, 'outside the hermeneutic of historicism' (186). The symbol cannot work here because, stripped of its eternal truths and natural significance, white power degrades and becomes exposed to Morrison's allegory. In its role as

authority with no reason, the image of the children renders white society meaningless other than in its own ideology. Tambling (2010) describes the allegorical in this situation as 'the ruin of thoughts which think themselves whole and entire...self existent' (119). This means that any idea of a totality disappears leaving behind the allegorical image as a fragment of the former whole. In opposition to the fusion of the 'object, or the emotion, and its representation' (120) in the symbol, in the allegorical image 'any one thing can represent any other, no special unique value can be given to either the object or its representation' (120). As with the degraded image of the flaneur, and thoughts of a progressive modern society as a narratable story, the values white society has accumulated for itself over time become incomplete and unsustainable within the original idea. Because of Benjamin's flaneur and Morrison's image of the white children, modernity and white superiority can no longer occupy the places we constructed for them in our thoughts.

The importance of the allegorical image for our argument is its ability to reduce a given unity to a fragment of its former self. This is central in Morrison's intent to produce writing whose form, in its mastery of the narrative, has the capability 'to shape an untenable reality, mould it, sing it' from 'a knowing so deep it's like a secret' (Morrison 2008:32). Morrison has said that 'slavery and silence' are 'hell's twins', and we can say this describes precisely the situation of the slave in her story, and the writer whose task is to give voice to the untenable reality of the human being enslaved. In Morrison's story the slave is the individual she has chosen as the conduit through which to develop a language incapable of being molested by any controlling majority. Her slave is juxtaposed with an ideological

presentation of white superiority in order to present to the imagination the hidden consciousness of the slave. She has chosen a framework in which silence registers human sensibilities in the presence of fragmented whiteness. Morrison registers this discourse as so 'devastating that "civilisation" could not risk engaging in it lest it lose the ground it stomped. All claims to prescience disintegrate when and where that discourse takes place' (32). This suggests that the ground of white superiority is vulnerable to the formation of a consciousness whose form is maintained in the isolation forced upon it. It is becoming evident that should this silence be broken by the slave expressing a sense of her humanity, what would be deemed an equivalence, she would, by speaking the unspeakable, risk fragmenting the wholeness that silence affords her. Here we are seeing Morrison establishing the beginnings of her language that will resist contextualization. Addressing female black artists she says that the devastating power of this language is to be found 'in your silence' (32). Apart from the danger, then, it is in silence that the artist can become 'the touchstone by which all that is human can be measured' (33). We understand by this that humanity is to be preserved in silence, because in the slave's silence, the artist finds the means to fragment whiteness.

We are engaged here in an interpretation of a literary method which draws on the enforced silence of slaves, and the consequent inability to express their worth. Because of this silence and its accompanying isolation, this method is able to formulate an understanding, a knowing, of the false premise of white superiority. It is this knowing which provides Morrison with the framework with which to establish a fully fledged human being whose humanity is self-evident in dramatic

time in the context of her silence. This framework, we argue, is the key in achieving the unmolested language of which Morrison speaks. However, it can only remain so in silence, because its secret is unspeakable. This means that in not engaging with any given context, that is white ground, the unity achieved between knowing and humanness in the slave can be preserved in a symbol and referred to as a given, providing meaning and validation to that which the language wishes to give visual form. Drawing on the experience of the slaves' inability to express their humanity under subordination, Morrison has woven the reality of slavery into the untenable reality of an individual consciousness under slavery.

However, because this reality is untenable, it can never be presented other than symbolically, and the unity on which it relies cannot exist in anything other than silent isolation. In this situation it fulfils Morrison's need for a language which gestures towards the ineffable, avoiding the arrogant pinning down of slavery. Nevertheless, in emphasizing life over a life, and the effect of slavery on the silent individual, the consciousness of the slave becomes representative of life; its presence in silence. In this situation the presence of humanity achieves ideal status in opposition to the degraded image of the fragment. However, in the words of Lawrence Danson (1998) 'a new oppositional meaning can only be accomplished by keeping the old meaning in circulation' (3). This would imply that Morrison's language would be of little use in a setting other than the past, because the theme would always be slavery. If there is no slavery, the question becomes not, as in Williamson's terms, what is there now to write about, but rather in what framework or form can the knowledge and humanity of African Americans be expressed? Morrison already stands accused of perpetuating black history as a

slave history (see Chapter 3 of this thesis), and thereby of weakening the unity of diverse peoples obtained in the notion of a shared past. Briefly, here, this is unacceptable for the artist and citizen whose compensation is membership at a price not of their choosing. We should reiterate here that Morrison's recourse to the past is for the conception, the mental representation, of a human being who has become enslaved. She requires this conceptual image in order to make up the fabric of the present of dramatic time. We can understand this in the present if we remember that her characters came to slavery as human beings, and remained human beings as they became defined within their roles as slaves. We have here been discussing Morrison's method for fending off that definition, and now we are able to conceive of life confronted with enslavement.

However, blackness as a representation of humanity is the measure of the many because it is framed in opposition to that which it displaces, whiteness. Its strength is in its idealized separation from the situation of its present moment. If this symbol is to retain its self-evident humanity outside the slave narrative, and white signification, then it must make the transition from the measure of the many to that of the individual. This is a necessity because the fragment of whiteness evident in Morrison's story cannot survive in a context where it is disowned by white people, that is, in a context of its telling where slavery no longer exists. Margaret Mead confronts James Baldwin (1971) with just such an argument when she tells him, 'I will not accept responsibility for what other people do because I happen to belong to that nation or that race or religion. I do not believe in guilt by association' (225). Baldwin's argument is that the past and present are the same, that is, human behaviour is not concomitant with the changing events which

surround it. This means that human behaviour is responsible for events and not that the events elicit human responses: 'I am an American citizen, and the crimes of this Republic, whether or not I am guilty of them, I am responsible for' (225). Baldwin's position is to engage with life as a mass noun, and in so doing he demonstrates an individual response while promoting a collective awareness. On the one hand we have Baldwin's ability to recognise the presence of the past in the present, and on the other Mead's individual dissociation from a collective awareness although expressing a tacit relationship with it. The contradictions we sense in both responses are an indication of the complexity surrounding the individual's relationship with past events. As an African American, Baldwin exhibits a profound and intense understanding of the barbarism absorbed into the fabric of the society with which he must engage (Gikandi:2014). However, within this engagement, his knowledge is evidence of his dissociation from that view of the past which, 'in the name of progress', renders the outrages of the past as 'historical norms' (Benjamin 1999:249). Similarly, Mead's refusal to accept guilt by association is an indication of a strong denial on her part of her society's ability to assimilate the wrongs of the past.

However, if we claim that Mead is a product of her society, that is, that her ideals have been framed and tested within its framework, then we must also say that Baldwin is a by-product of it. As an educated white woman Mead would be sure of her ground and the forces and traditions open to her progression within that society, but, as an educated African American, Baldwin would never be sure of his acceptance or of his access to those same traditions. In this juxtaposition we become aware of the subtle differences between them in their attitudes towards the



past and their relative positions in the present time. Mead's view of the past can be conceived within her determination to reject that part of her society which is not representative of her value base. As such, she expects Baldwin to feel the same. However, as a by-product of her society his perceptions are as a result of an intimate knowledge of those forces rejected by his friend. His individual awareness is not the result of being one of the collective but of having survived that collective, and of knowing its true colours. Contrastingly, Mead's perspective is framed in her opposition to the forces at work in her society which means she has become the datum for her own values. And their conversation convolves around this particular datum, which is the measure by which the individual is able to absorb the barbaric into perceptions of a progressive timeline which leads to the civilization of the present. The moral certainty on view in this position can never change the situation from which it derives its motivations, and nor is it meant to. It only requires that you agree with it. And because of this, it requires of Baldwin his acceptance into the scheme of things, that is, his commitment to a moral certainty, and a conception of history which feeds it. Notwithstanding that this would go against the grain of an individual consciousness gained elsewhere, immersion in such a culture, which may reject him anywhere and everywhere if it chooses, would be further evidence for him of the value of the 'unique experience with the past' his consciousness affords him (Benjamin 1999:254). This means that Baldwin has not bought into the moral certainty lodged in the scheme of things in the present. He is aware that the claims for it are framed as constituting a political achievement, and as such tempt him to disregard, in Benjamin's words, his 'enslaved ancestors' and instead rely on an image of enlightened, 'liberated

grandchildren' (252). However, Baldwin's understanding of his situation is an understanding of his ancestors' situation. For him, time is not progress. Now that slavery is over, and whiteness has recovered a unity of purpose in opposition to its former fragmented self, Baldwin appears as the individual consciousness able to question that unity. He is the example for this introduction of that which Morrison's language seeks to express. And it must be an individual in order to express that which has been taken from the individual by slavery. A loss of universal proportion brought about in an individual consciousness: a conception of life outside the influence of white signification.

Stephen Greenblatt (2017), in relation to his interpretation of the *Merchant of Venice*, has spoken of the insistence by a society that those people considered as outsiders or different should embrace the framework and nuances of the culture in which they find themselves. However, outside the demarcations of law and human rights, he says, 'there is no assumption of shared values, and no presumed equality' (38). In this case, assimilation into a dominant society appears to require a concerted effort to be the same while being considered as alien. Shakespeare's plays, he points out, offer us 'the possibility of an escape from the mental ghettos most of us inhabit.' He is referring to 'the conferral of life' as one of 'the essential qualities of the human imagination' (39), achieved by Shakespeare in his formulation of his characters. The quality of life of which he speaks 'is to some degree democratically shared' (39), and by that we understand that each individual is aware of that quality as a prerequisite for being fully and recognisably human. The reason why our ability to enter into the experience of another 'is often limited', he says, is ideology, and Shakespeare's plays, although not offering 'practical

solutions to the dilemmas they so brilliantly explore, awaken our awareness of the human lives that are at stake' (39). The effect is that 'in dramatic time, the distance between native and stranger collapses; walls wobble and fall; a ghetto is razed' (39). Because it is in dramatic time that walls wobble and ghettos are raised, and that ideology is the reason we cannot enter into the experience of another, then dramatic time is the site of the artist's engagement with ideology, that which 'persuades men and women to mistake each other, from time to time, for gods or vermin' (Eagleton 1991:xiii). If ideology is a system of beliefs, ideals, and ideas embraced by a group or individuals, and responsible in the first place for the subordination of other human beings, the extent to which it persists as the framework through which the outsider's assimilation is conducted will render assimilation as simply a progressive, controlling, ideological exercise.

The framework of which we speak is that cultural place of deep-seated underlying assumptions that provides ideology with its identification as discursive human truth. The suspicion is that the outsider will be assimilated into a system which, in its responsibility for the demise of outsiders, will continue to protect its assumptions by acknowledging them as those particular truths relevant to 'the frozen world of idealist and essentialist categories' which render them self-evident (Bennet 1979:169-70). The outsider, we can say, is perceived as belonging to a category which is defined, to some extent, by its lack of those criteria which the controlling majority has awarded itself. The ability to differentiate gains its authority simply from the augmentation of its own values and ideals in private. The contradiction here is that, although the outsider is recognisably more human than stranger in that he shares in the artistic embodiment of the universally recognised,

he is not able in his role to acquire any determinacy over the augmented values at work in the main group. This is because those deep-seated human truths not only define the group, but also the individuals that make it up. They acquire their consistency in their particularization in each individual. In the case of the isolated character, the abstract conceptions of universal thought never come to be particularized in him/her as sources of individual purpose because he/she is not a member of the group. There is no situation afforded in dramatic time sufficient for their expression, as individuals, of the unity of thought and deed available in that place occupied by their detractors, and so they remain isolated.

In a similar vein to Mead's rejection of guilt by association, Keith Byerman (2005) discusses Morrison and her novel *Beloved* as either the proof of her belief 'that the past can be manipulated to one's own ends' or, conversely, 'that the past is so powerful that one has no responsibility for the present'. He argues that 'the first of these positions is taken by whites generally, and by black conservatives'. The second, he points out, is the 'mainstream position' in that 'the past has little meaning other than as a commodity', and, consequently, is 'a separate reality from the present'. With this in mind he is able to sum up mainstream opinion as believing that 'whites do not have responsibility for what occurred in some distant time' (33). Here we are hearing the familiar conclusion that the moral certainty of the present owes its existence to the elevated status of those who occupy it, and who exist in a progressive timeline of their own making. Byerman acknowledges the phenomenon when he points to the American 'grand narrative' in which conceptions of prosperity and deprivation are understood within the framework of 'individual achievement in defiance of the odds' (4).

His point is that Morrison disrupts the narrative with a slave story, and the trauma associated with it, in order to prevent African Americans from being 'caught within the dominant discourse', and to undermine the perceptions through which the dominant culture regards itself. Presenting 'the past specifically as historical' enables 'present conditions' to be seen as fundamentally different from those presented within the narratives of individual achievement. And if American history can be understood as the promotion of black suffering on a huge scale, then 'success is as much the product of national denial of history as it is the result of individual effort' (4). However, the narrative to which Byerman draws our attention is an indication in itself that conceptions of individual achievement rely on a selective but specific history. Nonetheless, if African Americans are considered different, despite, as Byerman says 'a post-race national discourse' in the present, then that difference 'continues to exist as a definer of social reality' (4). This reasoning regarding Morrison's novel *Beloved* is sufficient to motivate Byerman in his research on the ways in which African American authors 'manoeuvre through this discursive situation which potentially implicates them in black suffering' (5). That is, African American narratives as the recreation of 'endless black suffering', and this conception of history serving as 'the meaning of race in these fictions' (6). In this reasoning, this is the price African American authors like Morrison pay for writing slavery as specifically a historical event.

However, a selective history manifests the personal elevation of those who are responsible for that selection. Those who are excluded from that history then become different, not, in Byerman's view, because of exclusion, but because they simply offered an alternative to a selective history. Social reality, in this case the

dominant narrative, is a hidden false history sustained by a rejection of those people who are forced to live at its margins. History is, then, the definer of social reality at the expense of the excluded, and not the excluded and their efforts to transcend it. Those who revel in a social reality of their own making become entangled in notions of history because they are unable or unwilling to countenance the worth of those events they have rejected. Morrison has called this, 'the self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the American as a new white man' (1992:39). As a result of his sojourn in Paris, James Baldwin has criticized the formulation of American history, and articulated his perceptions of that history and his exclusion from it. He is 'assured' he says, 'by his country and countrymen that he has never contributed anything to civilization-that his past is nothing more than a record of humiliation gladly endured' (1963:679). This, then, is an example of the reading of the past usually offered to African Americans. However, Baldwin's aim is to point out its false assumptions. American history is nothing less than 'the total, and unwilling, alienation of entire peoples from their forebears' (1995:131). He is referring to the history of the past lived on the American continent. It is the past he blames for the 'troubling role' lived out by the American people, one that has created 'an entirely unprecedented people', who have turned away from their other past 'irrecoverable on the shores of Europe' (130). The past lived out on the American continent is, then, only half the story. It is a past which requires of its present a framework sufficient to embrace the events of five-hundred years ago, or those of fifty years ago, in the production of an identity. Baldwin found that in Paris, the American student had nothing to sustain the idea of this unique past unless he embraced this other European past. This

would bring to an end 'the alienation of the American from himself'. It is 'from the vantage point of Europe' that the American 'discovers his own country' (131). In light of claims such as these, the sense is that artists such as Morrison, and their attempts to step outside the self-proclaimed cocoon of American history, will face the strongest criticism from those who are embedded in it. The 'conscious necessity for establishing difference' (Morrison 1992;39), manifest in a selected history, must persist as long as that history's progressive timeline holds sway. The construction of difference is concomitant with the white construction of black subjectivity, a 'fabrication of the African persona' (17). And in that prescribed subjectivity is to be 'found not only the not-free, but also...the projection of the not-me' (38).

In this context, and as 'a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century', Morrison stresses the importance of writing the 'interior life' of the not-me (1987:191). This exercise is critical, she says, 'for any person who is black...for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic' (191). She points out that the precise problem with the 'discourse that proceeded without us' is the absence in it of any reference to the interior life of black people (192). The idea that 'no text is generated in some purely aesthetic realm' (Byerman 2005:5), and the corresponding effort to place the production and interpretation of African American writing of the latter twentieth century within a context of present day ideological and cultural elements, is sharply undermined by Morrison. Byerman's statement that 'Morrison...cannot be understood as a writer who stands outside her historical moment and produces transcendent works of

literature' is, indeed, an argument levelled at many authors. However, to suggest that 'she must', consequently, 'use the discourse available' (7) jars with her own experience of being, historically and currently, left out of it. We understand from this that the topic, whose concern is the context for literary production, in this case excludes the artist and replaces her with someone who is recognisable only within the parameters of the discourse available. In her contemplations of the not-me, Morrison has delivered an insight into the obsessions with the social realities of the present of those who are most intimately bound up with their complexities. And in her exclusion, she can clearly see how the search, within the present, for a unified answer to the vagaries resultant of a selective past, is detrimental to her quality of life.

Byerman has pointed out that no text is generated in some purely aesthetic realm; rather it is the product and producer of the discursive systems and social realities of the time (2005:5). However, in opposition to this, we are able to point out that 'works of art are ways in which the ideal of the philosophical problem makes itself manifest' (Benjamin 1919-20a:218). Social realities in this case provide the complexity out of which the ideal is conceived. The ideal in this sense is not manifest in the ability of the art work to solve the complexity of social reality, but rather conceived in the 'transcendent content of its solution', provided by the artist: 'the concept that it possesses a unified answer to the problem' (218). This means that the social realities of any context can be perceived as providing the vehicle which contains the truth of the artist's intent. The artist's provision of the content to



be transcended, social reality, contains the truth which in the artist's hands will become universally recognisable in the present.

Benjamin is saying that the artist must deal with the unreality of our reality in order to bring to that reality the concept of a unified answer, an ideal answer, to the problem which is the content of her novel: 'a work of art is the virtual possibility of the formulation of its contents as a philosophical problem'(218). He is pointing out that 'every great work has its siblings in the realm of philosophy' (219). We take our meaning for this from his observation that 'the philosophical problem can be discovered in every work of art' (218). This would mean that the realm of philosophy is the harmonizing influence under which works of art and their siblings achieve a sense of the ideal in relation 'to certain authentic philosophical problems' (218). The conceptions of the philosophical realm become available to the senses through the artist's ability to transcend the content used for the solution of the problem. It is not 'the immanent form of the problem' (218) in the chosen content that provides the unity of the ideal, but the transcendence of the content chosen to provide the solution to the problem. We argue that the argument concerning the role of ideology and cultural elements in the production and reception of texts has become fixated on interpreting the formulation of the content of the problem, and not the artist's aesthetic in transcending her chosen content. This means that the ideologies of race, superiority, and selective histories are considered the means by which to investigate their own norms.

In juxtaposition to the claim that she writes out of her time, that is 'the patterns of the past quarter century that have shaped African American narrative

practice' (Byerman 2005:5), Morrison's perceptions of this period are quite different. 'I...am deadly serious about fidelity to the milieu out of which I write and in which my ancestors actually lived' (1987:192), she writes. Here, she registers her commitment to writing out of the social environment of her ancestors and her own imagination. 'Infidelity to that milieu-the absence of the interior life' (192), is, at heart, an obsession with the social realities of the present. Morrison is succinct concerning the effort to critique her work within the context of when and where it was written. It is, she says, the 'oh yes, this is where she got it from school', which then derives 'its own credibility from excavating the credibility of the sources of the imagination' (193). It is pressing here to link the credibility, or otherwise, of the sources to the need to establish their meaning within the discourse resultant of a selected history. Morrison will then fit the subjectivity prescribed within the available discourse. For her, it is 'the nature of the imagination' (193) that is able to facilitate her access to the inner life of her characters and to the milieu out of which she writes. In addition, it provides an intensely personal response to the remains which still linger among her recollections of the milieu she has chosen. Already outside the historically created moment in time, it is her personal response to the construction, in the present time, of the not me, and to a social discourse, existing within a system of appraisal, that must believe that her history has no place within that discourse other than as an indication of difference. In this sense, Morrison's recourse to writing an interior life that is not recognized within the social realities and discursive practices of her time bears on those realities as 'the articulation of culture at the point of its erasure', making 'a nonsense of culture itself' (Bhabha 2005:189).

Bhabha describes this discourse as ‘the production of multiple and contradictory belief’; and as an indication of ‘two contradictory and independent attitudes’ inhabiting ‘the same place’. It is in this place, we argue, in ‘the enunciatory moment of multiple belief’ (188), that the formulation of what Morrison describes as the not me takes place. In the context of Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, we recognise the ambivalence manifest in the articulation of contradictory beliefs concerning who is human and worthy, and who is human and unworthy. Additionally, the ambivalence present in the critique of Morrison’s writing is noticeable in the claims that her conception of history, the milieu out of which she writes, serves as the meaning of race; that the present moment confirms the superiority of those individuals who reflect the ideals they have awarded it, while invalidating the marginalized as representatives and symptomatic of the undesirable shortcomings of race; that human suffering be reduced to the vagaries of a historic moment, meaning its deselection; and that, because of this, the victims of that moment are defined in the present moment as responsible for that definition. The human suffering at the heart of the matter becomes a little beside the point in the process of disavowal.

The anxiety manifest in the need to articulate contradictory beliefs is described by Bhabha as the ‘ambivalence’ created ‘at the point of disavowal’ (188). Crucially, it is at this moment, that is, in the process of disavowal when the visibility of difference makes little sense, that ‘a strategy for the negotiation of the knowledges of differentiation’ is produced (189). The ability to negotiate the forms of its own desires ‘is productive of powerful, if ambivalent, strategies of cultural authority and resistance’ (189), an authority based in cultural ambivalence, ‘never

the mere authority of its originality' (197). White 'culture' in this case is the master of a power which provides it with an identity at the expense of reality. In a cultural mishmash, this identity is unable to be shared with those who provide it its justification for its strategies for normalizing its negotiations of difference. Meaning grasped, ineffectually, in the 'production of an authority to differentiate' (186), and given voice in signification. In making its own point, the discourse of the historic present, in its proximity to differentiation, is able to deliver the justifying, signifying, and normalizing strategies for the fulfilment of its own desires. The negotiations of difference, which make sense of contradictory beliefs, make 'a non-sense of the disciplinary meanings of culture itself' (189). The dominant culture's demands for imitation and identification now become areas of negotiation for the assimilation of conflict and the translation of ambivalence into normality; and what remains as the source of culture is simply a selective history which must be defended continually and at all costs in order to provide a backdrop to the negotiations of normality.

Although Bhabha does not mention specifically the extent to which a selective history frames these negotiations, he does point out that they bring the individual 'face to face with culture's double bind-a certain slippage or splitting between human artifice and culture's discursive agency' (196). We trace this to the fact that as a culture's desires become the generalizations of normality, they become a little beside the point. That is, 'to be true to a self one must learn to be a little untrue, out-of-joint with the signification of cultural generalizability' (196). In the attempt to normalize contradictory beliefs, how far can the individual stray from the bulwarks to chaos he erected for himself as he comes to terms with his own

haphazard self; as he enunciates, not the authority of his culture's originality, but an authority based in cultural ambivalence?

At this point, where the results of power cannot keep up with themselves, and culture 'can no longer guarantee to author its "human" subjects as the sign of humanness' (195), the negotiator requires an object by which to calculate the extent to which his culture's disciplinary meanings survive as he enunciates the strategies resultant on their erasure. It is the point where cultural ambivalence steadies itself with the fabrications it weaves around those it has deselected from history's selective timeline. Their presence is now an indication and reminder of the disciplinary mimesis at the heart of the culture for whose membership they were found inadequate. In their perceived lack, they become the permanent reminder of the existence of the superior and worthy qualities that their betters imagine they possess in their struggle to replicate those imagined qualities in 'culture's discursive agency' (196). It is in this struggle that the not me appears and doubles as the unknowable definer of lack, and also as the sign of the longing for that certainty erased in culture's double bind.

The formulation of the not me becomes the depository for any signification the haphazard self wishes to apply as replacement for the loss of certainty it experiences. The void in which the haphazard self operates becomes manageable as the nagging failure of its own artifice is erased by the perceived horrors inherent in the unknowable unworthy. No matter how far this new self strays from the discourses of contradictory beliefs, it is confirmed in itself in its contemplation of the double of the not me. We argue that in an interracial society such as that which reduces Morrison to the not me, the ability to assimilate conflicting beliefs is

dependent on the configuration and part incorporation of the object that is forced to live at its margins.

For Bhabha, the ability of the controlling majority to signify lack in those it rejects emerges as the lie 'that never speaks the whole truth', but comes to be 'repeated endlessly' in the name of the marginalized. In these lies we find 'the archaic survival of the "text" of culture' (197), but lacking its originality. And as such, as it strives to maintain a self outside its own negotiations for authority, it pleads 'a partial incorporation', one that 'deprives the object of a part of its body in that its integrity may be attacked without destroying its existence' (197). We find this phenomenon in *Beloved* (Morrison 2004:321) as Sethe wonders whether the parts of her body will hold together. It signals that 'the existence of the disabled native is required for the next lie and the next and the next' (Bhabha 2005:197-8). We would substitute the word signification in describing the perpetuation of the myth of lack as the haphazard self negotiates the changing forms of his society. In Bhabha's example (198) of Marlowe's lie to the 'Intended' (Conrad 1995[1899]:103), we find in her formal role a testament to a cultural significance which Marlowe's lie reduces to ambivalence. In the face of this lie she is representative of the archaic demands of culture, and not its original authority. In Marlowe's use of her name instead of the words of horror, we hear the negotiations of ambivalence seeking out a new authority. Her intended role is erased to be replaced by whatever artifice he is able to negotiate. His artifice confirms his requirement for the existence of the 'Intended' as the locator, though less worthy of earlier cultural demands, for an authority that has to be preserved if the haphazard self is to remain unconscious of its true situation as neither one thing nor the other:

although erased, her integrity, though a little beside the point, is preserved.

Bhabha's example of Marlowe as the 'awkward, ambivalent, unwelcome truth of empire's lie' (198) underlines his argument for 'the existence of the disabled native' (197). We take his substitution of the disabled 'Intended' for the disabled native as a clear indication of their representative roles as the palimpsest on which the significations of empire or cultural authority can be seen as that process of 'disavowal' which 'produces a strategy for the negotiation of difference' (189). These negotiations signal a reduction in the certainty of their former role. In the realm of negotiations of differentiation, they become defined in accord with culture's diminishing, former authority.

In this new discourse their definition belies their humanity. They are able to say that the controlling power must be talking about someone else, not me. Conversely, disabled, they signify, within this discourse, the form of the next lie to be uttered in their detractor's pursuit of an elusive authority on which to ground an elusive identity. Signified as unworthy, the disabled native is also the not me that the controlling majority knows it must not become. They become the sign of what must be avoided, the not-me datum for the haphazard self in its proximity to the negotiations of generalities. As the facilitators of an archaic cultural authority, they become the ever-changing source of meaning in the discursive systems and social realities of a controlling culture at any given time. They facilitate meaning, but are not themselves the product of it. In this context the discourse of the present moment is the impossible ground of ambivalence and artifice. We can say that Morrison's aim is to avoid the discourse which negotiates the replacement of imitation and identification with 'knowledges' of differentiation. These negotiations

can only ever signal her part incorporation as the disabled native. We understand Morrison's declared intention to engage with the interior life of the not me as the decision to expose 'a truth about the interior life of people' living with the insinuations of differentiation (1987:193). She acknowledges the power of signification in its ability to produce facts but not truth: 'facts can exist without human intelligence,' she says, 'but truth cannot' (193).

Her statement is an indication of the extent to which the discursive systems of signification have become established as the substance of meaning. The ability of signification to establish meaning at the expense of truth is because it takes place within negotiations of difference. These negotiations in the discourse of the present moment are resonant of claims for the recognition of a desire which is now the subject of artifice. As meaning wanes in the erasure of culture, old sensibilities survive as the foil for artifice. Grounded now in ambivalence, these sensibilities become enthralled to facts, that is, the knowledge of differentiation. It must be noted that an endless seeking for recognition of an identity that is neither one thing nor the other is the search for a truth that, if it once existed, no longer survives. Morrison is pointing out that signification is the replacement of truth in the name of artifice at the expense of independent thought.

We view Morrison's use of her aesthetic, in her approach to the formulation of an independent sensibility, as the provision for her access to the interior life. Regarding the writing of an independent sensibility outside signification, Morrison has said that as 'a writer who is black and a woman', her job, in the latter stages of the twentieth century, 'becomes how to rip that veil drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate' (1987:191). In order to explain her motivation within the context of



African American writing, she gives examples of the use of first-person narrative in the slave narratives. This is the strategy where the refusal to relate the detailed particulars of punishment or abuse preserves the dignity of the writer in the eyes of the reader: dignity achieved in the presence of recognisably human qualities in adversity. Juxtaposed with this is an example of nineteenth-century writing which acquainted the public with the brutalism of slavery. Maria Child is identified as a writer who is willing to draw the veil aside: she is known to have researched 'instances of slave abuse' (Baym 1998:1718) which she inserted into Harriet Jacobs's novel, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (2001[1861]) during the writing of its introduction and its editing. However, for Morrison there is 'no mention of the interior life' (1987:191). In each example, whether its theme is dignity or the revelation of atrocities, Morrison 'finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day' (190). She points out that this entails 'shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it' (191), and even those who were willing to draw the veil aside did so by appealing to the better natures of those careful of patriarchy's hegemony: 'my sisters in bondage,...are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them' (Child 2014[1861]:4).

In Morrison's examples we hear the conversations that were taking place with the controlling majority, and in which the narrative attempts to frame its appeal in a common reality. However, this is a reality whose meanings are derived from signification, and as such, although 'the narratives are instructive, moral and obviously representative' (Morrison 1987:190), they remain an appeal on someone else's terms. W.H.Auden's insight that, 'the experience an artist attempts to

embody is of a reality common to all' (2015:210), is instructive in the situation faced by Morrison. The lack of any mention of an interior life can be understood in the difficulty these authors faced in relating their experiences free of signification. Their experiences can only ever relate to an oppressed group and, consequently, appear private to them. In these terms, the perspective of these authors is, indeed, one that no one else can occupy in the sense of whom they address. However, this perspective must be expressed in 'complete detachment, as if it were somebody else's' (210). This is not to say that this is a call for a factual account devoid of human sentiment. Rather, it is a call for a human voice whose humanity is enhanced in speaking in no other terms and from no other perspective. Fractured by signification and confined to the margins as representative of a group, these voices must evoke images and memories consequent on the human condition: the somebody else is the intensely personal life of every human being. Consequently, in order to resonate in a group whose authority rests in differentiation, and equally, to nullify that authority, and in order for it not to account itself private in its claims, the interior life must embody the state of being recognisably human in dramatic time. The job now, Morrison says, is 'how to rip that veil' (1987:191), and consequently, drawing aside the veil is now replaced with the sense that instead of revealing all, it becomes a matter of making a tear in the fabric of signification and differentiation in order to maintain a perspective whose significance emanates from somewhere other than the oppressed; somewhere where humanity exists despite what people say. It is the indication of an aesthetic which is able to function outside the discourse of differentiation: a human perspective as the source of a common reality.

The integrity of her aesthetic requires that she trust her own recollections, but also 'the recollections of others' (191). This places her memory at the centre of her writing. Clearly linked to the milieu out of which she writes, her memories are the product of 'the material that went to make me' she says (192). Morrison's aesthetic is closely allied with Auden's belief that 'the arts are chief means of communication with the dead', and his personal view that 'without communication with the dead, a fully human life is not possible' (2017:BBC Documentary). We seem face to face with the source of an identity whose intimate link with the past is outside the influence of the present moment and its priorities. In the context of Auden and Morrison's artistic presentations, we know who we are because our deeply personal life is honed by the fragments we remember of our immediate dead. In light of this reasoning we are the owners of our own measure.

Morrison's recollections of her family and their friends and acquaintances provide her access to the interior life, and decide the method to be used to present the 'truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it' (1987:193). However, this will not provide 'total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help...' Access is 'a kind of literary archeology' (192) in that, on the basis of information gained and 'a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind' (192). The reconstruction of 'the world that these remains imply' calls for the act of imagination: the imagination being brought to bear on the image. The nature of Morrison's research begins with something ineffable and flexible: 'a dimly recalled figure, the corner of a room, a voice' (196). These images are the remains retrieved from the milieu of memory, and the approach that is most productive and most trustworthy for Morrison 'is the

recollection [memory] that moves from the image to the text' (194)...: 'the act of imagination...bound up with memory' (198). A human life expressed in human terms.

In order to stress the importance of that move from the image to the text, and not from the text to the image, Morrison is clear that the event to be written about must not be the source of the image which remains. That is, meaning derived from the event represented by the image. Her novel *Beloved* is not an exploration into the images of slavery. Her 'route is the reverse. The image comes first' and tells her 'what the memory is about' through her imagination (1987:195). The remains, the memory, must remain 'intact in their mystery' (196) to provide free rein for the artist to reconstruct the milieu out of which she writes. Morrison notes that the image of corn provides meaning in the text of her novel *Beloved*. Corn on the cob is the image for Morrison which 'keeps coming back' (197). It is reminiscent of her parents working their own cornfield and the pleasure derived from it by the whole family as they gathered its crop. 'The picture of the corn and the nimbus of emotion surrounding it become a powerful one' in her novel *Beloved* (198). The picture Morrison paints is worth remembering in full.

'I see them walking, together, away from me. I'm looking at their backs and what they're carrying in their arms: their tools, and maybe a peck basket. Sometimes when they walk away from me they hold hands, and they go to this other place in the garden. They have to cross some railroad tracks to get there' (197).

In this passage we become aware of the intimacy and dignity that the artist is able to transmit: even if the freedom to prosper takes place across the tracks and, by association, in the shadow of the controlling majority. In recollecting this picture 'and in trying to figure out what all this corn is doing', Morrison is

able to 'discover what it is doing' (197). As a fragment taken from the past, it is transformed by the artist 'to fill in and complement slave autobiographical narratives' (199) as the source of a human, intensely private voice. However, the outcome 'is dictated by other concerns, not least among them the novel's integrity' (199). We understand integrity to mean the maintenance of the novel's aesthetic as the expression of a reality common to all. This is noteworthy in that it signals that Morrison's images become transposed into the individual expressions of several characters. The corn picture and its aura of emotion become the means through which a collective response to a situation is communicable in the voices of several individual responses to that situation and which embody human sensibilities common to all.

This contrasts well with an example from W.E.B. Du Bois's, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (2004[1911]:107).

'So it was that the Fleece rose and spread and grew to its wonderful flowering; and so these two children grew with it into theirs...all the Fleece was in flower--a mighty swaying sea, darkling rich and waving,...The joy of the two so madly craved expression that they burst into singing...a low sweet melody of her fathers' fathers, whereunto Alwyn's own deep voice fell fitly in minor cadence.'

Unseen and unbeknown to the controlling forces around them, the Fleece is the result of their own efforts. In Du Bois's hands it is suggestive of their own deeply personal interior lives and their free development. However, this takes place in secret because, as representative of black life in early twentieth-century America, the freedom required for the expression of individual worth and aspiration was denied them. Their singing voices, rich in

association with their forebears, signal a burgeoning identity of human proportion. But it is Zora who must hold centre stage in Du Bois's narrative: 'in the field of the Silver Fleece all her possibilities were beginning to find expression' (104). From her sweet melody to Alwyn's fitly minor cadence, Zora has to be different in displaying her 'pride' and 'womanhood' (104): in their subsequent marriage, it is Zora who will propose. Du Bois is determined to reveal the human qualities of those who are marginalized and threatened by white power. His novel's theme, however, delineated and represented by the cotton field, necessarily defines the qualities of his two young characters. The context for the expression of their human qualities is the representation of those qualities. And as such, those qualities become private to them. These two are defined and confined within the context of Du Bois's image, as are their human qualities. In moving from the event to the image that is left, Zora and Alwyn's maturation appears peculiar to them, and representative of black endeavour as a response to a pervading white power. In this sense, they simply become an example of what could be achieved.

Morrison's aesthetic requires that the image tells her what the memory is about. She says, 'I can't tell you how I felt when my father died', but the image, the memory retained allied to her imagination, provides the access for her to write about 'the world he inhabited and the private or interior life of the people in it'. First and foremost, however, the people around whom these images float 'are my access to me; they are the entrance into my own interior life', she says. They are formed within an aesthetic whose response to her chosen milieu, as 'the revelation of a kind of truth' (1987:195), is always in

human terms. Morrison's attempts at defining who she is are centred on her existing knowledge, we must call it memory, of the people at the heart of these images.

A human voice, speaking in human terms out of a milieu whose formulation is the interior life of the people in it, is the precursor to Morrison's transposition of the corn image into the symbolic form during its 'interaction with an external world' (Frisby 1986:62). We become satisfied of its existence. However, autonomy conceived in lived experience, we argue, is more of a means to an end in Morrison's aesthetic. The human voice that Morrison derives from her images requires a significance by which it becomes abstracted from the fragmentary, varied circumstances in which everyday existence takes place. This means that the 'fortuitous fragment' can no longer remain 'merely a fragment' because its significance 'lies in its being connected with the essential' (58). In order to deal with the implications of the word essential, we understand that 'an aesthetic retreat from reality cannot be a final one' (45). Our interpretation of Morrison's interior life as the conception of a voice removed from the aura of its intimidations, and its expressions as within the context of its milieu, must involve its method of transcending its own content. This involves 'a transcending of it which renounces the mere reflection of what is given in nature, in order to regain, from a higher point of view, more fully and more deeply its reality' (Simmel 1890:179). The words, reality and essential, we take as the manifestation of 'an inner life as an autonomous, determinate and cohesive form as if from an inner core' (Simmel 1923:15).

In her Nobel Lecture, Morrison (1993) has referred to this as the retreat 'into the singularity of isolation, in sophisticated, privileged space'. It is a position of silence because, in Morrison's terms 'it is an art without commitment' (188). Here we have the individual at the edges of society isolated by subordination and prejudice, and an indication of the difficulty for the artist of creating a language which can express the particularity of humanity in a context other than the cultural space of the controlling majority. An art without commitment is one that acknowledges it cannot, because of the element of contradiction, present 'to the imagination' the essential elements of the universal 'in individual form' (Hegel 1920 [1835]:300). It remains without commitment because it is unable, in its isolation, to articulate the particularization required in any expression of independence. At the heart of this dilemma is the knowledge that, as the outsider, any claim to particularization would necessarily involve transforming the ideal reality enjoyed by the majority into an expression of the subordinate's own being. 'The beauty of the ideal consists precisely in its undisturbed unity, repose, and consummation with itself' (272-273). In light of this, and as well as disturbing the inner harmony of the outsider, any challenge to social reality would be condemned as parody, as a travesty of the real. In these terms, an art without commitment is one which seeks to preserve its internal harmony in its presentation. However, in its singular, static and isolated state as 'witness to the unrepresentable' (Lyotard 1986:82), it is able to maintain a privileged sophistication in that it harbours a consciousness fully aware of a closed society 'framed by unacknowledged power relations' (Taylor 2000:7). In its sophisticated, privileged space frozen in dramatic time, the art of no commitment is able to reserve its 'good opinion of itself' (Morrison 1993:188). The



knowledge it harbours becomes simply fuel for resentment, not only at the controlling power, but also at itself, as good opinion plus resentment turns to shame.

The questions of the young African Americans, which Morrison's (1993) story has brought to life, concern the lack of a context for their lives: 'is there nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there...no literature,...no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong?' they ask (188-9). The source of the resentment implicit in their questions is evident in the accusation that they 'stand waist deep in the toxin of your past' (189). If we place this questioning resentment alongside Greenblatt's democratically shared conception of what it is to be a human being, we begin to understand Morrison's need to move beyond simply an awareness of that which is unrepresentable. Her choice of young people for her story articulates her desire to fulfil the outsider's needs for a place in dramatic time where a consciousness, an individual sensibility, can be formed within a correlative relationship between the past and the present. It is not simply awareness, but awareness in relation to a past of 'cruelty and mediocrity...think of our lives' they ask, 'and tell us your particularized world' (189). It is evident that these young people, given voice in Morrison's story, wish to know their past in human terms, and in a form representative of that to which they are committed in themselves. Their final request is to be told about 'a wagonload of slaves' (189) for it is their conception of the past which must nourish the commitment of an art which has none. We find that Morrison's young characters are asking for the means by which they can arrive at the same conscious awareness of themselves as displayed by both Baldwin and Morrison: knowing for

themselves who they are because of knowing themselves in their ancestors, a fully human life.

It is significant that Morrison's young people are asking for a way of knowing the past which will free them of its toxic influence. Their wish is to be free of a signification that has dominated their ancestors and lingers still in every family memory. They seek acknowledgement of the unspeakable in order to overlay the horror of the past with images of individual, human particularization, a new situation for an amalgamation of the past with their awareness of themselves as individuals in their own situation. We can say, then, that this is the task to which Morrison is committed using a language which has 'the ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers' (186). It must tell a story whose intent, without context, is to express that which is present but unspoken.

We can clarify this with Morrison's views made in her memoir *What Moves at the Margin* (2008). Of the young black people she says, 'I thought we had left them nothing to love and nothing to want to know' (13). This sentiment echoes her doubts concerning her generation's ability to engage with young aspirations concerning the future, and the need to understand how to accommodate the bitter legacy of the past into the desire for something better. These doubts resonate in the extent to which the aftermath of slavery has impeded generations of African Americans in communicating any vision of a future free of the prejudice they know to exist. More revealing, however, is Morrison's perception that those who had shown interest in the past have felt betrayed by their elders' inability to extricate themselves from its toxic insinuations. This appraisal by those who 'had looked into the faces of their parents and seen betrayal' becomes modified because 'even

when they are wrong' these black children 'look us dead in the eye' she says, 'and it is as though they are waiting for us to apologise to them' (14). The expectation that the children would feel betrayed is telling as it reveals the guilt which pervades the consciousness of those who were powerless to prevent prejudice invading every part of their lives, including their relationship with their children.

Morrison's memoir is constructed to provide a vivid contrast between a generation who struggles in vain with the odious distinctions of a recent past, and their children who are unafraid, and brazenly declare their right 'to belong here on this planet earth and that it is theirs' (14). The stark differentiation between generations is readily available in this memoir because it is produced from a single voice which shares the concerns of the older generation. It uses the first person to refer to the collective whom it represents, and whose fears it feels instinctively. In similar fashion it refers to the aspirations of young people as those of a group. For both groups the issue is the same: how to exist in a void 'minus a future and a past' (14)? Presented in this way, Morrison ensures that the concerns and aspirations on view here are shared and not the result of individual reactions to moral injustices. As such, they provide strong indications of the presence of the self-awareness which has been stifled during the long years of slavery. There appears no other datum for their shared consciousness other than its survival as an instinctual response to the frustrations of subordination. Consequently, it fulfils the idea of democratically shared qualities but without the commitment to any aim or any future. It remains 'the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable...to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable' (Lyotard:81).

In this way we understand the response to slavery in human terms and the extent to which those terms are not sufficient to achieve their aim. However, Morrison's method in this memoir has as its goal the movement from the consensus and the unattainable to the production of a fragment capable of representing the existence of the unrepresentable in the individual: to express what is to be conceived in the individual consciousness if it is not to remain static in its dramatic situation. The key to this in her memoir is the change in her language when referring to the collective. The language which has repeatedly used 'they' in referring to this group now undergoes a distinctive and significant change. The 'they' remains, but they now 'watch us with the eyes of poets and carpenters and musicians and scholars and other people who know who they are because they have invented themselves and know where they are going because they have envisioned it' (Morrison 2008:14). Now the group becomes identifiable as individuals because of the infinite variety of jobs they do, and the posts they occupy. They share the spirit of endeavour and individual purpose established in the contrast made between the generations. Morrison's language is able to indicate the variety within the group as the provision for the invention of an individual consciousness for each member of the group. The ability to invent an individual is not the result of being of any one particular profession, but the variety of professions is the precursor for the concept in each individual of a unity whose other half is made up. As outsiders these individuals, who have invented themselves, are denied the unity enjoyed by the controlling group's lack of any distinction in that group between the universal, democratically shared and its particularity in each individual.

We can say that Morrison is attempting here to promote this same lack of distinction between the universal, expressive in each group member's existence, and the presentation, the particularity of it, in each individual member. The young people's universally recognised attributes are present in each individual's attainment of their chosen role. However, this is insufficient in dramatic time because that which is made up cannot be conceived by the imagination. They remain outsiders conferred in life. This means that as conferred life, the universals of thought or abstract conceptions must be revealed as 'independently contained' in the emotional life of the individual's own spirit and character (Hegel 1920 [1835]:300). If we consider the situation of Baldwin and of Morrison's young individuals in dramatic time, we find that they do not progress beyond the static conferral of life because they lack this independent particularity.

Their dilemma is present in the question they ask of their elders: 'do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroines and heroes like you have already fought and lost leaving us nothing?' (Morrison 1993:188). They are asking, here, for a context in which to express a burgeoning self-awareness and to be free of a signification they do not recognize in themselves. They seek a context defined by the particularities of their elders and relatives. We argue here that Morrison's task is to indicate the presence of a consciousness in a form which will enable the made up to be conceived in dramatic time. That is, a consciousness which is recognisable as and conducive to the worldly aspirations of Morrison's young individuals. A consciousness born out of the past, not a past as context, but a past defined by human particularities. When Morrison says that the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the imagined and possible lives of its speakers, we begin to

see that the commitment the young people ask for must begin its formulation in dramatic time as the violation of the particular consciousness present in their enslaved ancestors. This would require the loss of that singularity in isolation, and the loss of the privileged space of silence and personal harmony. The isolation of the slave and the artist has to be surrendered to the signification given it by white people. It becomes lost by expressing it. Its recreation outside the influence of the signifier is Morrison's task. This signals that the good name of the artist implicit in the language of isolation, which is also the condition of the slaves at the inn, must now find an individual voice that can resist the significations of the controlling majority, a voice not reliant on the search for a context sufficient for its promotion. They ask for the presentation, in proximity to white power, of that which they are making up for themselves as the source for an inner unity which confers individuality. In dramatic time this must necessitate the loss of that which is imagined.

However, the consciousness of which we speak and its affiliation with the past is not to be confused with that advocated by identity theorists. Mohanty claims (2000:33) that 'personal experience is socially and theoretically constructed' and, consequently, situated. And because 'social location is...closely tied to our understanding of social interests...objectivity is inextricably tied to social and historical conditions' (39). Saldivar (2001) finds Mohanty's argument 'compelling', but wonders 'how in everyday lived experiences one may reliably distinguish between experiences that produce dynamic and negotiated judgement and experiences that simply provide false consciousness' (853)? It is clear that claims concerning social relations and social reality are complex and contested.

Nevertheless, Ellison is clear that 'most Negroes recognize themselves as themselves despite what others might believe them to be', and, furthermore, 'Negro American consciousness is not a product (as so often seems true of so many American groups) of a will to historical forgetfulness. It is a product of our memory, sustained and constantly reinforced by events' (1972:124). Historical conditions and considerations, however, are mediated in present events, and because of this, we become aware that for Ellison consciousness is self-evident and simply sustained by what is repeating itself around the individual. Experience in this context is subordinated to an understanding grounded in memory. The apparent alignment here with Mohanty's theory is, however, illusory. For Ellison, such a consciousness, sustained in the events of the present, is an indication that 'the basic unity of human experience that assures us of some possibility of empathic and symbolic identification with those of other backgrounds is blasted in the interest of...political conceits' (123). Far from gaining knowledge from experience, existing knowledge becomes stifled. In its place there arises, in Ellison's argument, a clear indication of an affirmation of self achieved through its 'identification with the group as extended through the individual self'. This self rejects all delineation except that which involves 'a basic resuscitation of the original American ideals of social and political justice' (132). Historical conditions and considerations, manipulated as they are, take a back seat; any identification of African American identity is possible only in a 'depiction not of racial but human qualities' (281).

Mohanty's interpretation of *Beloved's* seduction of Paul D is an indication of the difficulties encountered when aesthetics are used to bolster theories of

situated, cultural identity. Quite rightly, we feel, Mohanty says that, in light of his seduction, 'Paul D's initial moral judgement of Sethe's actions can become subtler and deeper, more adequate to the reality they share' (57). However, he goes on to say that Paul D's experience emphasizes 'that under certain conditions personal experience yields reliable knowledge about oneself and one's situation' (57). This may be so, but a close reading of this particular section of *Beloved* (Morrison 2004:311) will reveal the difficulty for Mohanty in his attempt to provide a theoretical totality from the multiplicity of cultural identities.

We can say that Morrison's concern in this section is to devise a conception of Paul D's most intimate and intensely personal fulfilment of his independent being. There is a sense of drowning in this 'open-deep place' as Beloved insists that he embraces the full extent of that which she represents. His intimacy with Beloved offers a conception of that which he has for so long kept hidden in the tobacco tin he carries with him at all times. His 'personal shame', his 'life hunger' (311) are registered as one and the same vulnerability that he encounters in stepping from behind the veil to reclaim and express his own idea of himself. If we place this piece of writing alongside that concerning Sethe's confrontation with schoolteacher, and her murder of Beloved, we find vulnerability expressed in two different ways. Sethe loses everything in her tragic denouement; Paul D, 'beached and gobbling for air', survives in his epiphany of understanding Sethe's claim to be a human being. On show here are the feelings of two human beings as they seek to express their humanity: a self-worth which has no reference point in the world they occupy. However, Morrison's aesthetic reveals how each one becomes the other's reference point. It is notable that their vulnerability in expressing this is



established, in Sethe's case, in her singular determination to remain human in the face of her defilement; and in Paul D's, a burgeoning need to revive the same established but secretive life force. As each other's reference point, they are finally persuaded to put aside singular, individual claims on the ocean-deep source of their longing for dignity in identity. Together they form a reference point for what has been irretrievably lost or demeaned.

Mohanty finds (53) that in this particular section of *Beloved*, Paul D's relationship with Sethe is now 'based on a new understanding of his history'. However, we would point out that it is a readiness to engage with that part of his identity which is forbidden to slaves because, once on show, their masters will destroy or demean it. Together, he and Sethe share that which they dread to express in the wider world. It is not an understanding of his history as such, but an understanding of her need to engage with her own deeply personal life. There is a world of difference. His refusal to risk the destruction of his dignity and self-worth by white power, that is his non-commitment, has fabricated a void in which thoughts of the past and future become suspended. However, even if we accept as 'experience' *Beloved's* seduction of Paul D, it does not yield knowledge of himself. It activates that which he has kept hidden for so long. It is precisely this knowledge of himself, and its centrality to who he believes he is that drove all his efforts to preserve it intact. *Beloved* seduces Paul D into an almost involuntary, intuitive, conscious, correspondence with the vitality of his being, and those who came before him. Similar to the drenching of the young males in the cornfield (Morrison 2004:32), Morrison's allegorical writing presents to the reader's imagination a conception of humanity which has been quelled through intimidation

and fear. In his relationship with Beloved, Paul D learns that what he has kept hidden is that which Sethe attempted to live. It is still denied to both of them, but recognisable in their relationship with Beloved. The context, if we can call it that, is Beloved, not their community or the controlling majority. And this has to be so in order for Morrison to establish the humanity, the credentials, of those who spend their lives enslaved.

Mohanty appears to approach the slave character as one bereft of self-knowledge, when in reality it is the danger inherent in expressing that knowledge which is at the centre of Morrison's aesthetic. Her characters become bereft in any act of self-expression. Accordingly, he is able to say that the 'special kind of knowledge about the world as it affects them' possessed by oppressed groups 'is hardly a mysterious one', because 'it is an empirical claim tied to a wider (empirical and theoretical) account of the society in which these groups live' (Mohanty 2000:60). This seems to imply that experience gained in subservience and marginalization is sufficient to generate knowledge of the oppressor. These experiences may be the result of subtle or brutal prejudice and, as a consequence, breed resentment, fear, and loathing. However, we would view these as reactions to a power which suffocates human understanding. Knowledge is confirmed in a comparison of oppressive behaviour with a moral compass gained elsewhere, that is, in a place of personal or group recollection, where human understanding has not been suffocated. Perhaps it is this marker, planted firmly by Morrison in the oppressed group, which facilitates knowledge of the controlling group. It is of note that Beloved is generative of and generated by this spirit marker: a marker vital in

understanding how the expression or repression of the essence of humanity is made available to the imagination.

The call appears to be for social theory and objective knowledge to be the proving ground for any reality concerning individual experience. Ramon Saldivar (2001) suggests that 'no single map will suffice, including one claiming itself as real, for an understanding of the Real' (853); neither can there be a 'program for aestheticians, for example, that is a priori certain of its ability to render uniform assessments of what constitutes pleasure, beauty, or desirability' (853). His position is determined, he says, by the 'specific condition that the subject's reading of the topography of the real cannot occur except in reference to a nonunitary complex of social practices and symptoms of representation that have political significances and consequences' (853). Saldivar's writing here is a reaction to Mohanty's themes in the *Status of Cultural Identity* (2000), discussed above. As we have seen, Mohanty's discussion is centred on an event in dramatic time, and as such, Saldivar's observations of that discussion are too. In this context his assessment of what constitutes beauty is problematic. The beautiful, for Benjamin (1919-1920a:219), 'is multiplicity assembled into a totality', and is able to be conceived, in an aesthetic presentation, in the imagination of the reader. Saldivar's insinuation that 'the subject of real experience has access to real knowledge' (853) risks the charge that his thinking is taking place outside the realm of the workings of the work of art. The subject's position within a non-unitary complex of social practices and systems of representation remains, as ever, at the centre of his enquiry.

The main consideration is how are these revelations of value and judgement to be communicated dependent as they are on 'the reality of the real of lived experience' and 'the reality of the ground from which a subject can be a subject' (854)? Saldivar suggests that the "real" may 'be available mediately through the imaginary symbolization of real events and in our thinking about them at the margins of lived experience' (854). This may be a misunderstanding of the symbol's role in its relationship with action, in that the constancy of the symbol registers meaning and not the event. And as we have seen, without further development, the symbol is an insufficient harbinger of truth. Nonetheless, if we are dealing with events at the margins of lived experience, then these events require a unity if their multiplicity is able to be judged of value or, of more importance, challenged within the aesthetic. However, because Saldivar does not envisage the possibility of unity, and as such engages solely with the event, he is able to say that 'we are not dealing with the real as such, but in the ways in which the real presents itself in crisis' (854). In light of this, he concludes that positions of 'value and judgement-ethical, aesthetic, and political-must be made from within the context of the local cultural conditions of knowledge (854).

In order to situate our opposition to this, we can say that the novel has a relation with the philosophical problem and that the realm of theory becomes 'incorporated into ethics and language in symbolic form. We then see the emergence of ethical and aesthetic critique' (Benjamin 1919-1920a:219), and become aware that the context for value and judgement is the political and ethical within the aesthetic, which is not dependent on location or events. Literary theory, then, is mediate in dramatic time, and if, as Benjamin points out, unity and totality

facilitate truth, then, we argue, the creation of art occurs in the artist's relation and involvement with a method in which multiplicity is assembled into a totality. Morrison's fragment of a memory of a cornfield has become transposed into a symbol. This symbol, its truth, its meaning, is shattered in the tragic demise of the character Sethe. What remains is a fragment of that symbol which is able to register an experience of the world 'according to the laws of the moral universe' (224). As a 'fragment of the symbol' (225), Morrison has provided the smallest totality of semblance in order to take forward a fragment of that which Sethe has so tragically lost. As such, it is capable, in the hands of the allegorist, of transcending the local and cultural conditions of knowledge as an indication of the spirit of a consciousness seeking freedom of expression in belonging.

In Lyotard's words, modern aesthetics is one of nostalgia: 'it allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing content' (81). It is this sense of loss which Morrison conjures in order to present the unrepresentable. However, in order for it to be conceived by the imagination as the unity conducive to individuality, but denied the African American, Morrison's aesthetic must 'present the fact that the unrepresentable exists. To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible' (Lyotard:78). This requires an art which Lyotard calls the modern, and which 'can become modern only if it is first postmodern'. The postmodern for Lyotard can be thought of as modernism in its 'nascent state', but for all that, 'this state is constant' (79). We understand by this that the unrepresentable, as loss, must attain a higher regard in the imagination for it to be a true particular of human nature (Simmel 1890). Consequently, the risk of the individual appearing as one of a whole is

avoided. This is the challenge for the artist in that the nostalgia for the missing content must always and on all counts be elevated to the level of human nature.

The presentation of loss is the presentation of that to which the young people are committed in themselves; it is also the missing content of those battles fought and lost by heroines and heroes in their fight to be regarded as individuals. But this commitment can be conceived only as its presentation degrades into fragmentation. We argue that Morrison's recourse to modernism is to develop a framework in which her allegorical vision and use of imagery are able to render loss a personal experience. As loss degrades into missing content, its existence is able to be conceived in fragmentary incarnations as a response to loss, and in the individual's relationship with ideal reality. Conceived of in this way, the fragment is entirely separate from and independent of the requirements of the main group. It is the unrepresentable conceived as the universal and essential elements of the human being presented to the imagination in individual form. The fragment is conferred life conceived as independently contained in the individual, and as such it fulfils art's requirements for the realisation of a wholly human character. In Morrison's novel *Beloved*, this means that the presentation of the unrepresentable is achieved in the tragic demise of Sethe in her murder of 'Beloved'. 'Beloved's' return and subsequent intimate relationship with Sethe and her child Denver accentuate the semblance of loss, and her final disappearance fulfils Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as the unrepresentable 'put forward...as the missing contents' (81). In the loss of 'Beloved', that which is missing becomes personal to Denver and, because of the use of allegory and imagery which frame the scene of her birth, the symbol of a collective human sensibility is now established as particular to Denver.

Morrison's indication that her young people have invented themselves, and her ambition to form a language which is able to limn the imagined lives of black individuals, are both fulfilled in the language in which her novel *Beloved* unfolds. And, importantly, the self-subsistency that her young people imagine for themselves is able to be conceived in the singular figure of Denver and her venture into the world around her. Denver's self-subsistency is demonstrated in her unity with the past (with Beloved) and in her response to the world in which she finds herself, both conceivable as immanent in her own spirit and character. Denver, then, is the fragmented incarnation of Sethe's original claim for self-subsistency. That which has been made up is now conceivable in a singular visible consciousness which, in its conception, embodies the fact that the unrepresentable, the made up, exists, and exists in each individual's commitment to it.

As a fragment of that which was fought for by heroines and heroes, Denver is the reincarnation of what was fought for and lost. However, it is not that she represents loss in any way, or that she is able to register what has been lost, but that missing content as loss is the source of her wholly human character. In this way she is uniquely attached to the past in the present of dramatic time. Importantly, she is not the achievement of something desired or anticipated, but the individual in whom that which has already been imagined can be conceived as a result of the connection Morrison makes between the presentation of loss and a conscious reaction to it in the form of an allegoric image (*Beloved* 2004:99). This allegorical representation is firmly concerned with the past, which nourishes its conception; the present of dramatic time; and with the wholly human character, Denver. The sense put forward here is of Benjamin's insights into the subject as

presented in photographs of times past. In each image, he says, we can search 'for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot...where the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, may discover it' (Benjamin 1931:243). David Frisby recognises that 'out of the fragments of the past could step the future' as an 'investigation' of the 'mythical present' (1986:238). The future subsists eloquently in Sethe's association with Beloved, and in Denver we conceive of that association in the present. We can say that Morrison's intent is for the present of dramatic time to be defined in 'the context of what has always already existed' in the consciousness of the African American (Benjamin 1973:172).

Alan Rice links 'the improvisary nature of the jazz culture' with Morrison's aestheticism (2012:123). In a telling insight into Morrison's relationship with the past, Rice points out how 'jazz protagonists often seem to be working against...temporality' in their emphasis on 'the latest stage of a historical tradition in which they are steeped'. This means that a strong emphasis on the past is the staging for a creative performance that in the artist's hands becomes 'a legacy to generations to come' (125). Significantly, for our argument, Rice cites the jazz musician Albert Ayler's interview with Nat Hentoff. In this interview, Ayler describes the music of Louis Armstrong as a 'rejoicing about beauty that was going to happen', and frames his own music in these terms. The beauty that he expresses 'is to come after all the tension and anxieties', when the cries of the young 'will emerge as people seeking freedom come to spiritual freedom' (Ayler 1966). We understand, then, that the 'continual cutting back to the past that created them' (Rice:134), and the artists' improvisations, which feed off that past,



actively seek out an expression of the truth that will resonate within the perpetuating conditions of the African American historical tradition. The past is expressed in a form appropriate to the still developing conditions in which it will be played again. It is the active seeking out of this spiritual freedom that we find dominates the pages of *Beloved*.

This thesis maintains that Morrison's novel *Beloved* is set within the past to enable the experience of enslaved human beings to predominate. The past does not provide the context, but simply the situations for the formulation of a consciousness that will become robustly independent of its prescribed context of subordination under a controlling majority. Indeed, Morrison's treatment of the past is the measure of her determination to place the ideal reality of the controlling group within the context of what has always already existed. We propose that the novel *Beloved* not only establishes for its protagonist the conferral of life, but also its transition, in dramatic time, into the individuality associated with a wholly human character. In Lyotard's terms, this involves a postmodern appeal to the 'principle of a universal consensus' (77), followed by the use of the modern to 'present the fact that the unrepresentable exists' (78). This means that Morrison has taken the totality that is ideal reality and placed alongside it a consciousness unable to be subsumed in the context of white superiority. Because the novel achieves this, finally, in the presentation of a representative, individual consciousness sourced in the past, it establishes that 'there is nothing new. And what is new is always very, very old; it is always you' (Baldwin 1962:31). In elevating this individual consciousness over the prescriptions of a powerful collective, Morrison has cut across 'the empty homogenous continuum of ruling-class history' by facilitating 'a

correspondence' between the dramatic time of the present, and a redeemed fragment of the past (Eagleton 2001:214). In affecting the senses in this way, an independence is established which is able to sideline the prescriptions of a subjectivity which reigns as the measure of all things. Morrison has turned the tables on ruling-class history whose totality predominates as the 'measure for whatever is not identical with it' (Adorno 1981:5-6).

We argue that Morrison's fully human, individual character is the result of the equivalence between loss and the presentation of an imagined consciousness. Because this human being's consciousness is a result of a connection with the past, it avoids the claim that it is the product of its own privileged reasoning. Consequently, it stands in formidable opposition to judgements of subordination and differentiation which emanate from a controlling majority whose majestic reasoning is maintained within an ideological relationship with everyone else. In order to achieve this we argue that Morrison employs a tragic framework in order to bring forward a conception of that which cannot be presented. In order to trace Morrison's themes of loss and renewal within Sethe's tragic demise, this thesis employs Hegel's theory of tragedy. This may appear at odds with Morrison's cited aim of writing literature that is 'irrevocably, indisputably Black', within the 'recognised and verifiable principles of black art' (1984:389). However, on the contrary, if we claim that those principles facilitate the formulation of a fully human black character free of the insinuations levelled at him or her within the boundless scope of white signification; and also of a consciousness that is not reliant on the context in which it finds itself for its promotion, we are able to discover the appropriateness of tragedy for the fulfilment of the former, and its requirement for

the production of the latter. We argue that Morrison's novel *Beloved*, while employing tragedy to promote the postmodern nostalgia for the whole and the one, is able, in the use of the modern, to form a consciousness which can be conceived of as 'witness...to the unrepresentable' (Lyotard: 82). This thesis takes the point of view that Morrison's use of tragedy, symbolism and allegory, in writing the truth of black lives outside the context of intimidation, is vindication for the decision to devote this study to a critical examination of her novel *Beloved*.

## Chapter 2.

The role of *Beloved*, Du Bois's conceptualization of double-consciousness, *Sula* and *Nel*

The result of Morrison's chosen aesthetic, the form in which she uses language, will be to bring to her characters' situation the sense of a consciousness fettered by power. Real-world dilemmas and the duality engendered by Morrison in her characters' responses will ensure that their predicament is tangible. This thesis argues that Morrison's use of language and its forms of delivery produce a situation which is finite. This is to say that Morrison's aesthetic cannot, in a language capable of evoking and enforcing hidden signs of racial superiority, move beyond the presentation of a consciousness striving to overcome the debilitating effects of prejudice: the character's dilemma cannot be resolved. It will be argued that Morrison's response to this lies in her treatment of Sethe. However, before fully discussing Morrison's 'aesthetic status' (Conner 2000:xxii) it is necessary to investigate her approach to the problem of racial language in order to position the argument in the context of language.

This is important to consider because the only way that we can understand a particular aesthetic is through a particular author's use of it: Mary Shelley's formulation of her 'creature' (Shelley:1992) is very different from that of Toni Morrison's use of *Beloved* and, consequently, their aesthetic styles must differ in their approaches to their themes. Gates (1984:5) argues that because African-American life has been 'one political struggle after another', its literature has been

'defined from without': that is by cultural hegemony. In order to counter this, readings are required whose concern is with the 'nature and function of figurative language as manifested in specific texts' (5). This is 'precisely the domain of traditional aesthetics' in exploring a work's 'aesthetic and political power' (Conner 2000:xix). Because we are faced with various shades of political influence and ideologies, literature's relation to ideology can only be understood through a close analysis of its language (Conner:2000). In addition, it is argued that unless close attention is given to figurative language in specific texts, the ensuing discussion may centre on a construct that is not present or accessible in the language: we could be discussing something that is not really there or ignoring something that is. Morrison resists the efforts of some critics to 'place her work into an already established literary tradition' because they never go into 'the work on its own terms'. The result is that their criticism 'comes from some other place and finds content outside of the work and wholly irrelevant to it' (Tate 1983:161). In order to approach *Sula* and *Beloved* on their own terms, this chapter will consider the language in which they are formed.

The final words of the novel *Beloved* refer to the disappearance of Beloved. The narrator reveals that there was 'no clamour for a kiss' (Morrison 2004:324) and this may suggest that the community who now welcome Sethe back are not sorry to see Beloved leave. We can say at this stage that Beloved is the expression of a need in Sethe to establish for herself an idea of her place in the world and her connection with those who came before her, and of whom she is aware only through the fragments she has gleaned from her interactions with other enslaved people: Beloved as a believable image able to represent the struggle of the

marginalized and discredited in their search to live a life conducive with their personal idea of themselves. Sethe's hankering after Beloved facilitates the expression of the unspeakable: the aspiration of a human being unaccounted for within the perceptions of white people. And yet, there is a sense that the community, as a group of people, realise what Beloved represents and the futility of maintaining her presence in '124.' They encourage Sethe to join them and to break the link with Beloved. Morrison herself (1997:7) has said that the word 'kiss' 'searches for and locates a quality or element of the novel that was not and is not, its primary feature.' In the novel *Beloved* she says 'the necessity was for connection, acknowledgement, a paying-out of homage still due: "Kiss" clouds that point' (7). Because the community do not 'clamour for a kiss,' it should be considered that their presence as a group and their reservations concerning Beloved are indicative of the doubt, the 'cloud', with which Morrison wishes to regulate Sethe's claims. That to which the community refers is unreachable through language. It is intangible but discernible in the intuitions, perceptions, and sensibilities of the individual characters, but is never spoken, and any effort by the individual to express any claim in regard to it is only ever in actions that demean them. Beloved and the community appear as separate conduits for connection to a compelling but indefinable source. This is significant in that it locates within the figure of Beloved the means to express connection, acknowledgement and a paying-out of homage still due. At the moment Beloved disappears from '124,' the community are encouraging Sethe to return to them by singing, humming and chanting their expression of something they are not able to express in any other way, but Sethe immediately understands the significance of the sound and its

implication for the relationship she has nourished between herself and Beloved for most of her adult life. Sethe's first attempts to substantiate her feelings concerning her own identity are linked inextricably with Beloved and amalgamate the past with Sethe's claim for autonomy. It becomes evident that the 'community' do not clamour for a kiss from Beloved; in fact they reject her presence and the connections, acknowledgement and the homage still due that reverberate within her relationship with Sethe. The 'kiss' is withheld and its absence clouds not the worth of Sethe's endeavours but the hopelessness of her claim. Between the singing of the community and the nagging insistence of Beloved, the narrative of *Beloved* registers the yearning for a connection with an unknowable and unfathomable past and its revival as the substance of a claim by the individual for self-worth. However, this is a necessity that must be found wanting.

Walter Benn Michaels argues that instead of Morrison's work manifesting the self-regard usually provided to individuals in their interactions within the society to which they belong, her novel *Beloved* relegates the African American character to the subject position at the price of his/her subjectivity. This 'transformation of subjectivity into subject position' (Michaels 2004:149) renders the character less a person and more the possessor of an 'identity' and slavery, even if that person was not there, 'part of his or her history' (147). In order to explain the link between identity and history and the loss of subjectivity Michaels cites the reasoning of Arthur Schlesinger. According to Schlesinger, 'history is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual... [and] an individual deprived of memory becomes disorientated and lost' and 'a nation denied a conception of its past will be disabled in dealing with its present' (Schlesinger 1998:51).

Michaels develops this by saying that 'memory is here said to constitute the core of individual identity; national memory is understood to constitute the core of national identity' which means that individuals 'must have access not only to their own memories but to the national memory' (133). Personal memories, then, allied with a history that reveals what happened to them as Americans (or African Americans) provides the individual with an identity. Michaels points out that it is precisely because the relation between things that happened to and were done by Americans in the past is one of memory that 'we know we are Americans' (133). Consequently, a conception of the past is the means of defining national identity and it is in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, according to Michaels, 'that Schlesinger's identification of memory, history and national identity is given a definitive articulation' (135). This would be to maintain that for African Americans, *Beloved* is 'an antislavery novel' because its heritage provides a distinctive identity for the African American; denying slavery is to deny an identity (132). The fears of James Baldwin that the past haunts the present and the argument for the portrayal of a factual past by Margaret Mead (1971) resonate in Michael's interpretation of *Beloved*.

In response to this dilemma it can be argued that *Beloved* is important because the source of her manifestation is visible in the relationship between history (slavery) and personal development (Sethe's). However, the claim is that Sethe's experience is said to act as a testimony for African American identities in the present because it is based on events from the past in which the African American of the present time was not present. Michaels explains this as the process by which the historical past is made part of our experience and in this



respect African American history 'can have no particular importance without the ghosts' (Beloved) (Michaels 2004:139). Importantly, he believes Beloved's racial identity 'provides the mechanism for as well as the meaning of the conversion of history into memory' (136). This would imply that 'meaning' as far as Beloved is concerned is a result of her actions and not Sethe's and that as 'mechanism' she can operate on her own without her soul mate Denver; it would be to conceive of Beloved as occupying a subject position instead of, as is implied, supplying one. It is necessary to contemplate that Beloved is enjoined with Sethe and never indicative of anything other than Sethe's experience. And in this light it must be remembered that Beloved expresses that which must remain in the past because her claims must not be judged competitive.

However, Michaels conceives *Beloved* as an account of the past that 'takes the form of an encounter with a ghost' (137). He agrees with Valerie Smith that this ghost (Beloved) is 'the story of the past embodied' to support this (cited in Michaels 2004: 137). In this interpretation Beloved's purpose is not considered, only what she represents. She does indeed walk out of the past but her development is equivalent to Sethe's. This is achieved through the use of allegory and imagery in the effort to display Sethe's actions as those of a heroic character in adversity. There is a sense of the tragic in Sethe's experience which is fundamental to understanding Beloved and her experience. These opinions are at odds with Michaels's in that he insists 'the ghosts of New Historicism are not simply figures for history; they are figures for a remembered history' (139). This is reminiscent of the efforts by Greenblatt (1988) to conceive a methodology capable of discerning the perceptions of those individuals who lived their lives in a particular

bygone era. However, it can be argued that Greenblatt's motivation in part sprang from the vast differences, in his opinion, that separated our perceptions and, say, those circulating in the seventeenth century; differences, if proved, which could alter the way we remember the past. At any rate, Michaels's bracketing of Morrison's aims with Greenblatt's is a little restricting in both cases. To speak of *Beloved* in terms of New Historicism is to speak of her as the provision of an 'eternal image of the past' (Benjamin 1999:254). In these terms the image is the end result, the memory, of an event and a fixed moment in time. 'Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history' (255), and even though these moments may be separated by decades or centuries, the dead image is brought to life by association with a neighbour. Morrison's engagement with the image is to connect it to her understanding of her history and to manipulate it to provide 'a unique experience with the past' (254): Benjamin's 'historical materialism' (254). His description of this is revealing. The historical materialist, he says, 'grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one' (255). Morrison's method of putting the image first, that is within the constellation of her own memory, and then by transfer to an earlier one, not only undermines the notion of historicism put forward in Michaels's response to the formulation of *Beloved*, it also defeats the idea of a remembered history. In Morrison's hands the image provides an experience with the past and not the representation of an event in the past.

Because *Beloved* is said to fulfil Schlesinger's idea of a collective identity, Michaels is able to point out that as a figure of a remembered history *Beloved* must be understood as the 'memory' of those who were never there. Indeed, he says

that without memory no history, except the things that had actually happened to us, 'would be truly ours at all' (Michaels 2004:139). It follows that *Beloved* can only be conducive to identity if she is representative of that part of memory which revives what happened to 'us' as African Americans. *Beloved*, then, is the provision for an African American group history. In this role she appeals to the memory which is personal to the individual as well as a memory which contributes to group affiliation and identity. Without the ghosts, history is just a subject we study in school. It is only accounts like Sethe's of how other people's memories can become our own that provide the apparatus 'through which history can define identity' (139). This is the context in which Michaels's and Schlesinger's conceptions coalesce: *Beloved* as an imagined history which is carried through her to the present and capable of giving an identity to a group because her experience is that of an African American and not an individual; and Sethe's 'account' is the telling in which she remains a black slave. According to Michaels this is because Morrison insists that slavery is something to be remembered by both black and white people and as such provides the content for her work; and remembering something for readers that did not happen to them ensures that slavery continues to be regarded as something that happened to people of a particular race at a particular time. This provides the background to his reasoning concerning Sethe's pleas to Denver concerning 'rememory'.

A conversation between Denver and Sethe is cited to illustrate the argument. 'A house can burn down', Sethe tells Denver, 'but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world'. Sethe is cited further in order to establish her fears concerning, as Michaels judges it, the

risk Denver runs of 'a return to slavery' (cited in Michaels 2004:135): '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.' This establishes for Michaels that in Morrison's work 'slavery needn't be part of your memory in order to be remembered by you' (Michaels 2004:136) and 'thus makes the historical past a part of our own experience' (137). He goes on to acknowledge that from Sethe's viewpoint, 'this is a kind of threat' in order to prevent the return of the memories of slavery Sethe and her contemporaries seek to avoid (136).

However, a close reading will reveal that Sethe's concern is for Denver and Denver's chances of gaining autonomy. Because 'it's going to always be there waiting for you', Sethe tells Denver, 'that's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what' (Morrison 2004:44). This appears at the end of the conversation cited by Michaels and its omission does not do Sethe justice. If it is included it can be seen that Sethe's fears are fulfilled in Michaels's interpretation that 'Denver runs the risk of a return to slavery' (Michaels 2004:135). Rather, Sethe's fears are that Denver will remember the enslaved of Sweet Home as slaves and not as people. The location remains as the signifier of the people enslaved there, and not of those people who enslave them. Here the concept that an individual deprived of memory becomes disorientated is never more true. But this is memory of events in history, a belonging through history. For Morrison memory is conducive with people because 'when you kill the ancestor you kill yourself' (Morrison 1984:344). In this sense memory provides 'timelessness' and the sense of a continuum in the lives of ex-slaves. Sethe's rememory of Sweet

Home's memorable landscape would destroy this as it projects into the future the memory of Sweet Home as a locator of slaves. Michaels's requires the transmission of a slave heritage into history; and in this way history becomes an identity, an I.D. for everyone in America, which means that everyone is accounted for, everyone is situated somehow in history. It can be argued that Sethe's all-consuming aim is not to be remembered as a slave but as a human being, and the inhuman treatment she endured understood as a crime and not accounted for under the term 'slavery'. In this regard her own 'rememory' is a conduit through which the classification of her by her white owners returns as a persistent encroachment on her endeavours to imagine herself as the person she knows she is. Her exchange with Denver also reveals her fears that Denver, and the aspirations of the people of the future, can be affected by the 'rememories' that attach stigma to human beings. However, the significance of Morrison's stance is that her concentration on the ancestor renders memory the product of abstracted, fragmented circumstances in which everyday existence takes place. In this way history is ignored. This manifestation of life provides an autonomy, a totality, which the simple revelation of lived experience lacks.

Sethe's difficulties in avoiding the trauma conducive with her experience is indicative of Morrison's effort to avoid the charge of bringing from the past a racialized history representative of a group's perception of itself. It can be argued in light of the above considerations that Sethe's determination to defy the classification of 'slave' is a struggle to claim something which is intrinsic to the idea of a sense of self. This emphasizes that Denver and the individuals of the future are encouraged to remember Sethe as a human being who happened to be a

slave, and this is expressed by Beloved as a claim able to remain separate and free from any present day inhibitors.

It should be considered that 'rememory' is the insidious capability generative of majority and minority groups of the present to parse an individual's dignity with the events which frustrate and impair their endeavours. In this context Michael's argument has been anticipated by Morrison but the literary devices she uses to disprove it are overlooked.

Sethe's dignity as an individual is not to be found in her treatment at the hands of her owners or in her efforts to disprove their lies. It is in her efforts to re-establish it within her own psyche and Denver's and subsequently those who may 'encounter' her in the remembered past. Denver is safe from any racial twinning with the events of Sethe's experience because the allegory and imagery which form the tripartite bond between Sethe, Denver and Beloved ensure Sethe's story is that of an individual. Michaels insists that this 'warning' is insufficient to prevent the revitalization of a racial identity capable of being taken up in the present because the effort 'to imagine an identity that will connect people through history is replaced by the effort to imagine a history that will give people an identity' (137). Nonetheless, it must be remembered that Sethe's imagined history is one in which 'identity' is unattainable. Her effort, encapsulated in the figure and behaviour of Beloved, is particular to her because Beloved wanders around the watery edges of Sethe's history as an unclaimed but precious aspiration: valuable because the source of her manifestation is the visible effort to reject the categorization of others. Claims that *Beloved* is a 'historicist novel' (Michaels 2004:137) fail to address the import of the thwarted aspirations of an individual located in the past but whose

endeavours are framed within those sensibilities treasured by individuals in the present. This omission may be responsible for the idea that 'texts like *Beloved* only narrate...' they do not provide 'a meaningless or untranslatable signifier' (146). And yet the so-called ghost, Beloved, disappears at the behest of the women of the community. The signifier is Denver whose perceptions of the society in which she hopes to thrive are situated in the experience of individuals who were estranged by that same society. Denver is connected to her ancestors and fully understands the import of this in her relationship with the society in which she lives. Michaels refuses to give up the idea of history to this simple fact.

According to Baraka, 'the history of Western culture begins for the Negro with the importation of slaves' (Baraka 2009:130), and only a close attention to the 'emotional history of the black man,' which differs from that of the dominant group, enables a black writer to provide works of 'cultural relevance' (131). This is because should the black artist describe his experience in terms of the American middle class he will remain an outsider unrecognized within white social codes. Baraka points out that 'for them, the Negro has never really existed, never been glimpsed in anything approaching the complete reality of his humanity' (133). The importance of establishing this reality is emphasized by Amos N. Wilson (1993:121) who points out that 'the operative oppression of blacks by whites depends on the ability of whites to create and maintain a discrepancy between what subordinate Africans think they were and what they truly were' (121). Morrison herself has talked of this situation as confronting a reality 'unlike that received reality of the west' (1984:388). Her view is that 'confronting' means centralizing and animating 'information discredited by the west'; discredited not

because 'it is not true or useful or even of some racial value but because it is information held by discredited people'(388). In this context, as Morrison says, their 'information' will remain discredited. There is a reality unlike that 'received reality of the West' but it is the discredited individual and their 'emotional history' which must be 'animated' in opposition to a created discrepancy. It is the individual on whom Morrison will concentrate in the effort to write 'Negro life as an emotional experience' (Baraka 2009:128).

The word Morrison uses in this context is 'necessity' (1997:7) and in the choice of this word can be heard the importance to her and her novel of the connection between the present time and the experience of individual African Americans as slaves in the past. This means then that the presence and the expression provided by *Beloved* is indispensable to the fulfilment of the novel's aims but her contribution must always be subject to an element of doubt; it must always attract misgivings and a hesitancy to enlarge on it. It should always have a cloud hanging over it.

In order to challenge an unreal situation Sethe's experience, according to Baraka, must be discerned as a 'unique investigation of the soul' (Baraka 2009:126). However, this unique experience risks being discredited because Sethe is discredited as a slave and her actions become those of a rejected and discredited individual. In this situation we can anticipate Morrison's task as that of leading her protagonist to fail in the effort to obtain a status within a social order which does not recognise her. Sethe fails in her interactions with an unreal, received reality convinced it was her sole option for expression. Her failure corresponds to the aura of doubt which 'clouds' the issue but the earnestness of



her effort establishes her emotional history through the hopelessness of her situation. In this hopelessness, Morrison locates the human condition. After making a flawed but unknowing decision, Sethe's persona as a discredited individual begins its transformation on the steps of '124' as Beloved is rejected during the appeal to Sethe by the women of the community.

It is pertinent to claim that the information to which Morrison refers is contingent with the performance of Beloved. And in this context Beloved and Sethe's relationship is the method by which the narrative reveals worthy information discredited by its messenger. In a complexity of allegory and tragedy, Morrison removes the messenger in order to leave the information in the keeping of a tragic but worthy woman, Sethe. The fulfilment of this achievement, this chapter argues, is the formulation of a character's deepest but unfulfilled needs in a context which is ruinous of these aims. However, the character does not 'learn' from her experience in the sense it aids maturation or the development of a more knowing or knowledgeable self. In an intriguing fulfilment of authorial intent, within the predicament of the discredited, this very same character must remain defeated and bereft of any self-regard or self-consciousness because the substance of her claims, a hunger to validate her past and her connection with it, is impossible in the face of white power.

This is the point where the individual perceived as outside white social codes is taken by Morrison into the heart of the community. Sethe no longer interacts with the white world and her presence registers a human being defeated. Morrison has used her character Sethe as an indication of 'the experiences of the human being, the emotional predicament...as he [she] exists in the defined world

of his [her] being' (Baraka 2009:128). Intrinsic to this achievement is Beloved and abandonment.

As we shall see and in line with Baraka's claim for close attention to the emotional history of the individual, Beloved functions as an expression of Sethe's claim for a true self-consciousness. However, she is also imbued with the very precepts, principles and characteristics which serve to establish an identity: the longing to possess an intimate knowledge of the past and those people, also enslaved, who came before her, and the need to partake in those rituals valued by a community such as marriage, the raising of children and the freedom to nurture and care for family members. These are routinely denied to the individual who is enslaved. Consequently, Beloved is representative not only of the ambitions readily understood by 'everyman', that is typical human beings, but also her presence and behaviour resonate with the urge to have them fulfilled. Sethe's yearnings have been got up as a person and that person, Beloved, asks of Sethe what she cannot give, and in doing that we can say that Beloved's outward form is expressive of her inner source. That is, Beloved's instincts are consequential and representative of Sethe's attempts to establish an identity for herself and apparent in her insistence that Sethe fulfils these instincts. Sethe's 'soul is made flesh' and Beloved's body 'instinct with spirit in which form reveals'<sup>1</sup> (Wilde 1982:172); and that form is Beloved. We can say that the relationship between Sethe and Beloved

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<sup>1</sup> After Wilde, it is possible to discuss language as 'both an autonomous system and a socially established one' (Freedman 1998:7). Confounding as this sounds, it is an indication of the task Morrison faces in alleviating the presence of cultural hegemony in language. Wilde's ambivalence concerning language; his determination that 'we are no longer concerned in art with the type, it is with the exception that we have to do'; his belief that 'an idea is of no value until it becomes incarnate and is made an image'; his insight that truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself' (1982:160-182) resonate with an aesthetic quality suited to the production and critical enquiry of two opposing voices in one protagonist.

is the result of Sethe's attempt to substantiate an identity within a social order in which she is not welcome or recognised 'in the complete reality' of her humanity (Baraka 2009:133). However, as a rejected outsider, Sethe's instincts are apparent in *Beloved* and *Beloved* is the register of their influence. Pater (1888) describes this as 'the absolute correspondence of the term to its import' (122) and as an analogy uses music as the 'ideal of all art' in that 'it is impossible to distinguish' its 'form' from its 'substance matter' (122). In this analogy, 'term' is aligned fully with 'form' and suggests that language is able to facilitate the form in which its implied meaning will correspond to the essence and function of that form. This is to posit an equivalence between Sethe's effort to realise a truer, better self and *Beloved*'s actions and influence. In this way literature becomes the representation of 'facts or incidents' such as are able to be 'connected with soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, its volition and power' (106). This means that Sethe's faculty for developing her own will, or lack of it, is not transcribed as a 'mere fact' but 'as modified by human preference in all its infinitely varied forms' (106). The presence of *Beloved* ensures that that which drives Sethe remains on show and personal. It is reminiscent of W.E.B. Du Bois's (1994[1903]) formulation of the 'twoness' felt by the marginalized African American in his interactions with the controlling white society and a development and refashioning of his theory of double-consciousness.

Du Bois describes this as the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 1994[1903]:2) because the American world yields the 'Negro... no true self-consciousness' resulting in 'two souls, two thoughts...; two warring ideals in one dark body' (3). There is a sense that marginalization such as

this results in a double self which Du Bois claims is always 'longing to attain self-conscious manhood' by merging itself into a 'better and truer self' (2). That is, a self which is African but also a vibrant accepted part of American culture, suggesting an escape from 'isolation' and the fulfilment of ability and ambition. This then is his 'striving' and it is linked to a 'better and truer self' and indicates the complex nature of true fulfilment for the marginalized. Beloved's claims on Sethe, we can argue, are an indication of the 'longing to attain' self-consciousness by recovering into 'a better and truer self'.

Additionally, the 'hither and thither' experienced by the 'Negro' in his 'striving' will be perceived as a lack of power, as 'weakness' (3) by those who reject him. This contributes to the prejudice already directed at the 'Negro' but it is not weakness that is at the root of the problem: it is, says Du Bois, (3) 'the contradiction of double aims'. The struggle on the one hand 'to escape white contempt' and on the other to 'plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde', having but 'half a heart in either cause', is the source of two unreconciled appeals both of which 'his larger audience despised' (30).

Resolution, in Du Bois's opinion, would be achieved only by a unification of the 'Negro' people in which their talents and traits would become apparent to all. 'Work, culture and liberty...' would be achieved through the betterment of the 'Negro' race in... 'conformity' to American ideals (3). This would mean that two great 'world-races' would inhabit one great continent and, eventually, over time 'give each-to-each those characteristics both so sadly lack' (7). It was a vision for the reconciliation of insurmountable problems. DuBois's ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro is framed within what Anthony

Appiah (1985:25) calls a 'revaluation of the Negro race in the face of the sciences of racial inferiority'. It is not, then, the establishment of a group which is the goal, but establishing the credentials of this group as worthy.

In his paper *The Conservation of Races* Du Bois acknowledges that discussions of race have often caused the Negro to minimize race distinctions because at bottom they contain 'assumptions' regarding his natural, political, intellectual and moral status (1897:83). In this statement we can trace Du Bois's understanding of the prejudice which the Negro faced on a daily basis and the complexities inherent in pairing notions of worth with visible appearance: the fact that racial inferiority manifests itself more readily for the Negro than the social equality Du Bois sought. However, he rejects these assumptions completely as 'wrong' but continues, 'Nevertheless, in our calmer moments we must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races,' (84) and although admitting it is difficult to come to 'any definite conclusion' when enquiring into the essential differences (85), he states that 'in the world of science there are at least two or three great races: the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race' (85). Du Bois's effort to minimize the frustration inherent in his position is to point out that a 'race' is a group of people who share the same history, and in a move away from the 'scientific conception of race' (Appiah 1985:23) and its connotations of racial inferiority, Du Bois claims that eventually race must be conceived as a 'family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses...' (1897:86).

This places the concept of race in a 'socialhistorical' context (Appiah 1985:23) while preserving 'the traits and talents of the Negro' as 'racial'

characteristics: notions concerning 'race', 'common blood' and 'impulses' mean that, as Appiah points out, Du Bois is anchored in the scientific conception of race but assigns to it 'a moral and metaphysical significance'(29). This makes the claim distinctive in that it confirms that the 'Negro' race has a positive message concerning the value inherent in its difference from other races (29). This position led Du Bois to accept that notions of race, for example common blood and visible differences, are signs of a racial essence but that the 'cultural capacities' of the 'Negro' were not inferior to those of his 'white-skinned' neighbours (30). Given the opportunity, the 'Negro' would rise above his situation to occupy a position in the world conducive to his natural talents. In this reading, 'it is not that his definition of race is at odds with the scientific one' but that he allocates race 'a moral significance different from that of his contemporaries' (Appiah 1985:29). Du Bois's task in revaluing the Negro race is to undermine notions of racial inferiority while establishing the credentials of this group as worthy: an attempt to remove the inferiority from race and replace it with racial worth. However, Appiah sums up the dilemma in DuBois's writings as the discrepancy between the simple claim on the one hand to equality, 'a denial of substantial difference', but on the other 'a claim to a special message' (25). This sums up the classic dilemma of a subordinate group framed in the classic dichotomy concerned with perceptions of difference: how to foster the traits and talents of the Negro within 'a conformity with the greater ideals of the American Republic' while maintaining ' a moral and metaphysical significance' different from that of the controlling group's: a significance that can never be articulated within the framework of racial inferiority and the established 'greater' ideals of a larger group (29). Consequently, in adopting this position Du

Bois comes perilously close to affirming the existence of a hierarchy headed by a controlling white society whose self-acclaimed superiority is attained in large part by their marginalization of the very same people Du Bois is driven to uplift (Appiah 1985). It would be difficult to deny in this situation that white society would become the yardstick by which Negro progression was measured.

‘The collapse of the sciences of racial inferiority’ in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Appiah:30) was the source for a fresh approach to the complexities of prejudice faced by Du Bois. Earlier, the reasoning had focused on a difference which was not to be thought any less fruitful than that of other races. Now that definitions of race began to move away from an understanding that physical characteristics imply certain racial traits, Du Bois was obliged to alter the framework surrounding his thinking concerning ‘race’. Conceptualizing the idea of a group becomes more and more unmanageable as Du Bois is forced once more to adapt his thinking as a result of forces outside his control.

By 1911, and in light of new lines of thought, he was stating that ‘it is not legitimate to argue from differences in physical characteristics to differences in mental characteristics’ and in addition to this that, ‘the civilization of a ... race at any particular moment of time offers no index to its innate or inherited capacities’ (Du Bois 1911:157-8). Having put aside the concept of racial essence, these statements now indicate that there are other forces at work, such as the development of economic power, which are detrimental to the development of a subordinate group of people but which do not provide a guide or a measure of the controlling group’s innate capabilities or a subordinate group’s lack of them. However, this may indicate that once a controlling group has the means to promote

its own ends, it will be very difficult for a minor group to assert itself to any advantage or to prove it holds a worthy stake in that civilization. In this context, the idea that the Negro through his own development will in the end take his rightful place in the system remains a difficult proposition.

Du Bois's willingness no longer to support notions of a racial type does not remove for him the need to substantiate the claims of the Negro through the framework of a worthy group. It appears simply to transpose the problem to another area of contention not of his making. He now states clearly that the physical bond 'is least' and 'the badge of colour relatively unimportant save as a badge'. The real bond has as its essence the 'Social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult' and this 'heritage' binds together the people of Africa and all those other peoples who have suffered at the hands of white people (116). Du Bois appears sidetracked into framing his claim for unity within the idea of a shared history and experience common to all marginalized people because of his determination to prove that his group possesses innate qualities that are at least equal to those of any other group: an inhibiting prerequisite resultant of living in the shadow of an all-controlling group. However, the change in argument does not further his claim because it requires, as a basis for unity, the establishment of a 'worthy' history after the devastation of three centuries of slavery, and this may well prove as difficult to establish as the idea of a racial group who have the wherewithal necessary to take their place in society after such a 'disaster'. More than ever, the inviolable ideals of American society are twinned with ideals of civilization and because of this Du Bois cannot establish a niche in American society where the Negro can provide proof of his contribution and, consequently,



the group remains fractured and its claims inconsequential. Unhappily, returning to those notions of the group and its situation, which evoke 'the social heritage of slavery' and which substitute 'a socio historical conception of race for the biological one', leaves Du Bois with 'no more conceptual resources...for explicating the unity of the Negro race than he had in *The Conservation of Races*' (Appiah 1985:34). This fresh approach defeats the idea of any Negro 'residue' within American society of Negro contribution and as such he is left with a general claim of diminution rather than one of unification through participation (34).

His inability to define and articulate fully and finally his response to prejudice resonates in the language he uses to describe the Negro's 'striving' to merge his double self into a 'better, truer self' (Du Bois 1994[1903]:2). It is through his striving that he comes 'to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that deadweight of social degradation' (5) and which Du Bois uses to conceptualize the condition of the subordinated individual. 'In those somber forests of his striving,' he writes, '...he saw himself, darkly as through a veil' (5), providing an image of an individual who feels a veil has been drawn over his qualities as a human being and who survives solely on his ability to monitor the level of regard afforded his actions by those who shun him on a daily basis in the life he performs outside the veil. This is important because it situates knowledge of self in the striving to improve under the eyes of a controlling majority; failure becomes a personal infliction. It connotes self-worth with the attainment of those values inherent in a group who remain steadfastly protective of them. They are not meant for sharing. And in this context a burgeoning awareness and comprehension must remain a secret and this secret increases the burden of 'degradation'. This is described by Du Bois as

'looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (5), and as the double-consciousness resultant of the absence of a true self-consciousness.

The use of symbolism by Du Bois is an indication of the complexity of his task and the risks he faced in dealing with perceptions of difference. It registers his intent to conceptualize the despair of the individual rather than the group in the attempt to register the true capability of the Negro and his quest for self-consciousness, self-realization and self-respect. The enduring symbol of the veil lays to rest the notion of a group that never was. The veil, then, for Du Bois indicates the situation of an individual who is very aware and receptive of society's requirements for advancement but because of prejudice develops a separate awareness of his place in the interactions of this society. It promotes the image of an individual whose quest for acknowledgement and acceptance is centred not on those he knows best but the strangers who would rule over him, distorting the presentation of the effort to secure a better, truer self and the striving which facilitates it. It also serves as a sign that rejection is the ultimate fate of the Negro. However, it is noteworthy that this striving has taken place away from the community, manifesting itself as the reserve of a particular type of individual. Consequently, it forfeits any consideration of the strivings of those individuals in the community and as such insinuates a particular dilemma suited to a particular individual and suggests that the community is ill-equipped to initiate or sustain a commitment to the higher ideals of the American Republic. Nonetheless, it does mean that double-consciousness for Du Bois is a result of a rejection of the effort to express true self-consciousness by an individual who has become attracted to the rules of a game he/she is not allowed to play.

The capabilities of the Negro, even if they are behind the veil, can be established but the veil's subtle distinction engineered by Du Bois is that a better and truer self is a frustratingly impossible goal without acknowledgement from and interaction with the controlling group. The fault lines within Du Bois's proposal for the establishment of two worthy races giving each-to-each are now manifest in the need for the integration and acknowledgement required by the individual for his/her fulfilment. Within the symbolism of the veil, then, exist the contradictions that plagued Du Bois's attempts to establish a racially worthy group: is it the individual or the group who is paramount; and if it is the group then what are the ties, beyond rejection, which hold it together; if it is the individual, how is she/he to distance themselves from the group without intensifying the feelings associated with rejection?

*Sethe* and *Beloved* are indicative of the connection, acknowledgement and homage that animate Morrison's theme, and decades later they satisfy Du Bois's quest for the conceptual resources which would have allowed him to ground his conceptualization of the bond, shared by all victims of prejudice and insult, in an emotional and personal experience. However, his ideas concerning the group, whose identification proved so difficult, remain unfulfilled. The development of *Sethe's* emotional history entails the reluctant rejection of that group which, finally, Du Bois conceptualized as those whose experience formed the essence of the 'social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult' and a heritage vibrant enough to bind together the people of Africa whose context for development was America.

The lack of any ready emotional and personal expression behind the veil, alongside notions of a worthy group existing under the heritage of slavery, contributes to the myths generated by white society concerning those who were once enslaved. The symbol, which is meant to express the extent to which the humanity of the 'Negro' is hidden from view in his non-existence, and also the consequences for that individual in asserting his/herself under the gaze of white control becomes, when associated with the heritage of slavery, the expression for those inexplicable and intangible prejudices which are always seeking in reality an objectivity they do not possess. Unification in this sense becomes impossible because the individual conceptualized behind the image of the veil fulfils the circumstances that saw its inception. The refutation of that 'discrepancy' engineered by 'whites' between what Africans thought they were and what they truly were (Wilson 1993), according to Baraka, must be 'a legitimate product of the Negro experience in America' (2009:133). His insight makes clear the risk, for those who do not exist in the perceptions of white America, of being coerced into providing credence to the myths 'which only ideological domination can effect' (Dollimore 1988:48). Because of the failure of the veil to include comprehensively the Negro's emotional relationship with his past and present, his experience becomes shaded by the difficulty of coming from behind it. Personal experience must remain just that and not be a result of any characteristics foisted on it by prejudice. Horribly, conjoined with someone else's history, the 'Negro' becomes veiled in a prescribed heritage not of his own making but which, because of its persistent 'imposition by the dominant', risks becoming a 'self-confirming' agent of his/her own fears (Dollimore 1988:48). The ground between Baraka's plea for the

presentation of emotional experience and Du Bois's earlier attempts to unite his people under overbearing bourgeois projections of 'their America' can be delineated within the thinking of Andre Gide (1978). He understood that, 'borrowed truths are the ones to which one clings most tenaciously', and even more so 'since they remain foreign to our intimate self' (338). He compared this with the 'boldness and prudence' required if the individual was to deliver 'one's voice to an already existing party' (338). He believed above all, it is to oneself 'that it is important to remain faithful' (338). His words resonate with an appeal to the individual and the individual's own experience. Gide's most personal, intuitive instincts were classed as deviant by his society but for him this did not affect their authenticity. Dollimore (1988:46) points out that for Gide, 'deviant desire is legitimated in terms of culture's opposite, nature', which posits the personal and instinctual as 'pre-cultural' or more importantly for our argument, 'more than cultural' (46). These are the terms in which the relationship formed by Morrison in the 'twoness' between Sethe and Beloved can be understood. We can say that the rights and wrongs, the complexities and contradictions carried within Du Bois's use of the veil have, for Sethe, become very personal; and because Beloved is instinct with the effect of those complexities, they appear more than cultural.

Although this summary of Beloved's role expressed in the context of Du Bois's conceptualization of double-consciousness is not a full delineation of the language and methods used in her formulation, it does serve as an indication of Morrison's approach to those same complexities with which Du Bois was faced in the early part of that century which later saw the publication of *Beloved* (1987). This approach can be detected in her earlier novel, *Sula* (1973), and a close

reading of this novel will reveal its similarity to that of *Beloved* in the presentation of the difficulties of maturation for the individual under the debilitating effects of prejudice and marginalization. The novel's theme, as in *Beloved*, engages with the effects on the individual of the convoluted and impenetrable frustrations encountered in the African American's quest for self-fulfilment and the relationship between the individual and the community. In doing this the 'two-ness' of double-consciousness is apparent within the developing lives of two characters, Nel and Sula, and the presence of the community's conflicting impressions on them is expressed in the figure of Shadrack. However, as the novel progresses Shadrack's influence lessens to be replaced by an intimacy between Nel and Sula in which the complex nature of their expectations is played out.

Denise Heinze (1993), commenting on Morrison's attempts to transcend this two-ness in her characters, points out that Morrison has established a positive black identity and reordered racial consciousness through a 'serious exploration and rediscovery of the black community's unique cultural heritage' (9), and illustrates the demise of blacks 'who have adopted the corrupting influence of white society' (9). This confirms the importance of Morrison's theme that identity in her work must emanate from within the community. Heinze qualifies this by pointing out that Morrison's experience of the corruption of human values in the dominant society, leads her to believe that 'the rediscovery of these values is best effected in black culture' (8).

This is a telling statement in that the relationship between Sula and Nel facilitates Nel's realization that neither the white community nor her own are entirely conducive to her quest for a better, truer self, and it accepts the idea that

'the ideology of the dominant' will frustrate any attempt by the 'Negro' to contribute to it. In light of this the community is the only place left in which to develop a sense of self-direction. However, the community's reaction to those individuals who return because they have nowhere else to go is a difficult proposition. Their presence back in the community may be perceived as proof of that lack promulgated endlessly by white society during three-hundred years of slavery concerning their captives, the Negroes; their experience may be perceived as the proof that it is better to stay in the community and remain as they are in the sound belief that they do not live amongst the moral deficiencies so evident in white society. Nonetheless, in Morrison's work we will find ample evidence pointing to the decline and demise of those groups left in isolation. As we shall see, these concerns are woven into the narrative of the novel, *Sula*, as they are in *Beloved*, by representations of reflexive action and introspection engineered within the conflicting desires of the individual. These representations facilitate an understanding of the perceptions of the people who make up the community. Because her own community, and Nel within it, is seen to be deeply affected by prejudice and marginalization, Nel's efforts to assert herself become individual aspirations and not typical behaviour. Sula's ambition to integrate with white society fails and her reunion with Nel back in their community develops to underline how the 'ideology of the dominant' has interpreted Sula's ambitions as an effort by her to prove her equality with them; that her instincts are to fulfil their expectations and not her own. In this context the framework of values defined within the relationship between Nel and Sula are better effected in the 'black' community in their real lives 'in the exact terms America has proposed' for them

(Baraka 2009:133). It follows that the 'rediscovery' of those values occurs in their personal perceptions of their own situation away from anything 'white'. This is to say that the responses of Nel and Sula, each to each, demonstrate that the attainment of a truer and better self, within the social prescriptions of the American Republic and their own community, is an entirely personal undertaking.

The results of this will become clear in the experience of Helene and her daughter Nel. On a rail journey they are accosted by a white conductor for walking through the 'white's only car'. Helene is flustered and makes apologies and is addressed as 'gal'. At this, 'all her old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach' (Morrison 1998:20). She is berated and belittled as Nel and 'four or five black faces watch,' two of whom are soldiers (21). She is made to move aside, but as the conductor moved past she 'smiled dazzlingly and coquettishly' at the salmon-coloured face of the conductor (21). Helene is written as having great beauty and was conscious of its effect on the people in her community and the attention it attracted. In her community she was 'impressive' and 'held sway'. Because of her status on her own ground and the confidence it afforded, her 'smile' can be read as a familiar recourse with which to recover or sustain a faltering situation. However, along with being described as 'coquettish' she is also reminiscent of 'a street pup that wags its tail... after being kicked away only moments before' (21). These two descriptions hover between the freedom of expression learned during experience and the detachment afforded the individual who has no real connection with their oppressor other than a requirement to get what they want from the situation. The use of the 'street pup' in this simile does evoke notions of subservience, but the kicks it has received do not register with the



pup the anger we associate with the kicker. The pup simply wants food and could not care less about the ire of his attacker because he/she is way down the list of priorities of which food occupies top spot: hence the wagging tail in spite of the rebuffs.

In light of these considerations Helene's dazzling smile is not then a last-gasp gesture for approbation from white society, it is more akin to an effort to establish her own vibrant sensibilities, her own idea of herself, in a situation where they are not recognized by her persecutor. Helene's successful attempt to pull off a dazzling smile situates her in another context, that of her home ground and is the expression that registers the validity of the identity she enjoys there and her readiness to smile is a measure of the insignificance she attaches to the opinions of the salmon-coloured conductor in her quest to be herself.

If we refer Helene's situation back to the loss of place and confusion associated with the idea of the 'black' individual not existing in the world at all, then it is evident that Morrison has taken the idea of double-consciousness and altered its significance. The two-ness, which is the result of the 'black' individual's striving to amalgamate two selves within one person, is rejected by Helene in her display of a vital identity gained somewhere other than in the context of her humiliation. And if we use Helene's behaviour as the expression of her identity we see 'how well constituted she must be, how healthily built, to step in such a way among them, contorted, rattled, and yet victorious, captivating' (Benjamin 1978:480). In Benjamin's terms, the truth emanating from Helene's situation is muffled in her custard-coloured dress, and concealed in the veiled eyes of the soldiers. But it exists as a condemnation of the prejudice whose roots nourish these modalities of

behavior. Away from her community Helene transforms her experience of it into the expression of individual quality in an attempt to nullify prejudice and maintain a sense of identity and place where 'two-ness' is consumed in an expression of self-worth. It is intriguing that mention of the veil will refer to those watching and not the actions of Helene.

However, the same situation is witnessed by her daughter Nel and the 'black faces' in the segregated carriage. Nel could not understand 'then or later' why her mother had smiled (Morrison 1998: 21), and her presence and position in the carriage where 'before her were the midnight eyes' of the 'black' faces and behind was the 'bright and blazing light of her mother's smile' (21) is the conduit through which double-consciousness is delineated. She is very aware of the reactions of those watching because the 'closed faces' and 'locked eyes' of the four or five watching 'black faces' isolated her mother and refused to acknowledge her predicament. Once it was over, however, their expression had not changed but a 'veil' had been drawn over their eyes (22), and Helene's smile is now described as foolish.

It is significant that the reaction of the black soldiers to Helene's smile and her humiliation by the guard is described as 'stricken' (21). Their indifference had now turned to alarm and we can say a scene containing the humiliation of a 'Negro' was a familiar occurrence to them but the smile was something else. Morrison has chosen to make these witnesses soldiers. In this context, they would have been very familiar with the 'white world' of the army and its stringent procedures. Although they would have been expected to take many risks and make sacrifices in promoting the interests of the American Republic, this commitment would not result

in their full inclusion into an institution run exclusively by white people.

Concomitant with their commitment they would have experienced enforced discrimination and segregation in harrowing circumstances, a fact used by Morrison as commensurate with the madness of aligning oneself with the 'white world'. Their uniforms appear as an outward indication of the lesson they had learned during their entanglement with a system in which they were exploited, and their 'stricken' reaction registers their fears for Helene as they interpret her smile as a device to integrate with a group of people whom they knew from bitter experience it was better to avoid.

Mention of the 'veil' suggests that at this point their true feelings were being hidden because of Helene's reaction to the white conductor. There is 'no earthly reason' for Helene's smile, 'at least no reason that anybody could understand, certainly no reason that Nel understood then or later' (Morrison 1998:21). Nel's observations, as she 'looked away' from the 'flash of her mother's pretty teeth' are given in the third person; 'she also saw the muscles of their [the soldiers'] faces tighten' and is described as having the 'blazing light of her mother's smile' behind her and 'the midnight eyes of the soldiers' before her (21). This is reminiscent of the scene in *Blue Stone Road* as Beloved flashes a 'dazzling' smile at the community of women before her, with Denver watching (Morrison 2004:308): only in Helene's case prejudice looms large, whereas for Beloved it is finally put to one side. The truth trembles in both these situations but will never command the same meaning as before because something in the years to come, 'much as we should have liked to share it' with Helene and Beloved, 'could only happen through [their] absence' (Benjamin 1978:450).

The observations that the soldiers now looked 'stricken' and the fact that the expression in their eyes had not changed save a 'hard wetness that veiled them' are the narrator's (Morrison 1998:22). Given the subtle distinctions between what she saw and what the narrator gives us to understand about her situation, Nel's lack of understanding is confirmed and developed as she is placed in this scene between her mother and the soldiers: if she cannot understand the reasons for her mother's smile, then it follows that she cannot be seen to understand the reaction of those others to it. In this scene we have the perceptions of those who have been away from the community compared with those (Helene) who preferred it as a place to develop after their experiences in a world where white people exert control. The soldiers' uniforms are a sign of their inability to develop away from the community and the control white society exerts over them. They are described in terms of the veil which represents this condition and confirms their lack of resources for asserting or developing a 'truer self'. Additionally, the fact that the veil is described as covering their eyes suggests they are incapable of seeing and judging Helene's actions. It is noticeable that the only actions in this scene are Helen's, everyone else watches. This is an indication of the influence prejudice has on those people whose lives are lived in its shadow. Helene's smile says more about her idea of herself than it does about her relationship with white people, but because of the soldiers' experiences they cannot 'see' what is happening on the other side of the veil. Double-consciousness in this novel is beginning to be defined by those whose actions imply the presence of a truer, better self, and those watchers who remain behind the veil in a halfway house of self-doubt and frustration.

In their eyes she had behaved in a manner not appropriate to a member of the group to which they believed all 'black' people belonged. Neither one nor the other, she could not fulfil their idea of the response they prescribed when dealing with the white man. Unable to relate to Helene they retreat behind the veil which now becomes the sign of the lack of that which Helene possesses, and this scene now confirms the conflict inherent in the situation of the individuals collectively judged unworthy by the imposition of false criteria. In the most subtle of gestures Morrison reviews the veil which exists between 'black' and 'white' people. The conductor, the source of the conflict, is ignored as the veil becomes the device able to frustrate the freedom of expression exhibited by Helene. It is not that this vitality is hidden so much as Morrison's use of the veil suggests a reluctance by the soldiers to do anything other than remain behind it. The veil here registers the refusal to confront the debasement which invariably accompanies the effort to come from behind it. This suggests that it is the provision able to preserve the human dignity central to self-respect and self-awareness. Lifting the veil is to risk a confrontation where dignity is undermined by humiliation.

In a further emphasis on her view of the world and her lack of understanding of the situation before her, Nel contemplates her mother's custard-coloured skin beneath the 'heavy brown wool' (Morrison 1998:26) of her dress. She seems to equate the half-way house of her mother's colour with the full-blown certainty of the colour of her dress. Helene appears to Nel as neither fully white nor fully black. Her ruminations place her mother in both camps and therefore worthy of neither. Nel believes that if her mother 'was really custard,' then there was a chance that she was too (22). Her resolve in this situation is always 'to be on guard' and to

make certain that 'no midnight eyes or marbled flesh would ever accost her and turn her into jelly (22). Helene's smile lifts the veil but Nel cannot take advantage of the experience. Helene's vitality survives to be wondered at, misread and misjudged. Morrison's conundrum is becoming clear: how to preserve everything which pertains to that dazzling smile while isolating it sufficiently for it to survive unsullied in the minds of the marginalized people who wish to inherit it. How can human vitality be presented to the imagination as just that, as simply being there? As Nel will tell us, it cannot be hinted at, or unveiled like a statue, nor step forward from behind the curtain in triumph. We argue that the essence of humanity, the idea with which we are most familiar, for Morrison must be isolated from history, that of the character's and the group's. It is noticeable here that this scene in the railroad car becomes suspended, unresolved. Nel's determination to be free of the insinuations of white people and the constrictions of her own community become framed within the notion of double-consciousness: stay still and you are wrong, move and you are doubly so. Nel remains, but her links with the past are smothered by white people.

From start to finish this scene has contrived to establish Nel as an individual. It supplies a character whose ability to act in a natural way is compromised by prejudice and power. Gide's impression that 'a fine life is a thought conceived in youth and realized in maturity' (1978:338) is a fitting insight into Morrison's formulation of Nel as a character. As we have seen, Nel does not fully understand her mother's reactions and this can be understood as the beginnings of the difficulties Nel will experience in achieving the maturity of which Gide speaks. Nonetheless, 'a fine life is a thought' suggests an autonomy which

has its roots in private contemplation and not cultural influences. Indeed, on returning home from her trip to New Orleans she now feels 'different' (Morrison 1998). Alone, she studies her face and 'the nose her mother hated' and claims 'I'm me... I'm not Nel, I'm me. Me'. 'She had gone on a real trip' and 'leaving Medallion would be her goal'... 'alone though': Sula is not yet on the scene. There are no doubts to cloud Nel's plans at the moment. In these private moments she confesses, 'I want to be wonderful... Oh, Jesus, make me wonderful'. Her 'new found me-ness' quietens her fear that she was 'custard' just like her mother and vulnerable to the wiles of both 'black' and 'white' worlds (Morrison 1998:28-9). Whatever she meant by this me-ness we can see that she meant at all costs to remain faithful to her own self.

James Baldwin's reveals his own struggle to maintain a sense of 'me-ness' between 'social affairs' (1995:14) as he calls them and his classification as an outsider. Regarded as an 'interloper', he says, American society and its heritage would never be his. However, because he was unfitted for the jungle or the tribe (14), he had 'no other heritage he could possibly use' (14). The 'most difficult' thing in this he reveals was to admit the influence of white people in his life: the truth was, he both 'feared and hated white people' (14-15). However, this did not mean that [he] 'loved black people': on the contrary, 'he despised them, possibly because they failed to produce Rembrandt'. This environment forced him to see clearly that 'he hated and feared the world' which meant that the world had a 'murderous power' over him and in such a 'self-destroying limbo' he could never hope to write (15). We can say that for Baldwin to write is his 'me-ness'.

Baldwin's words bring home Nel's situation. She too finds herself between the social affairs of the American Republic and the midnight eyes of the soldiers. So too, if she is to develop the thought of a fine life, it has to be tempered within the scheme of the moment, whatever that moment may be. The alternative is no maturation at all and the disappearance of the chance to be 'wonderful'. The comparison of Nel and Baldwin's insights foregrounds the complexities faced by the individual living in a marginalized community and the problem of 'writing' Nel. Baldwin's 'me-ness' centred on his urge to write, but the danger for him was losing that in his struggle with his hate and fear of the scheme he knew he must join. In this context it is not enough for Nel to stake a claim for autonomy, it must be achieved within the scheme of the moment as Helene demonstrated on the train. Not doing so is to deny the truth that is inside (Gide 1978). This is not to say that Nel's efforts to be wonderful will be written similar to Baldwin's experiences within American society, she never leaves Medallion again, but her resolve not to be 'custard' will be expressed in action by someone else, and once again, Nel will watch. Nel's thoughts of a fine life will be acted out while she herself has no place in any scheme. In this way her desire to be wonderful will be played out in the terms Baraka (2009) described: in the 'exact' terms America has prescribed, and described by Baldwin as the 'general social fabric.' However, Nel's understanding, unlike *Beloved's* (1987) Denver, is accommodated and accounted for in cognitive thought, which means that the reader is knowingly informed: that is, we begin again to see things as we are. Barbara Rigby (1991:50) feels that Sula and Nel 'represent aspects of a common self, a construction of an identity in relationship' (50), and this insight clearly defines the 'ambiguity and irony' present in Morrison's



characters. However, it has to be considered that the lack of an identity exhibited in Nel's life and in Sula's return to the community and all it signifies points towards something very different. It is difficult to perceive a relationship in a lack of identity; in the frustrated effort to realize it in maturity.

Morrison's determination to persist with the development of an individual consciousness informs her development of a particular aesthetic in which cultural validation, engineered within the formulation of a social, collective consciousness, takes second place to the experience of the victim of cultural subjugation. Nel's observations concerning her mother's colour as custard is indicative of this and reminiscent of the work of Don Lee (1971). His poem *The Self Hatred of Don L. Lee* in some part expresses Nel's conscious affirmation of the worth of blackness to her through asserting it.

*after painfully  
struggling  
thru Du Bois  
Rogers, Locke,  
Wright & others  
my blindness  
was vanished  
by pitchblack  
paragraphs of  
"us, we, me ,i"  
awareness.  
i began  
to love  
only a  
part of  
me-  
my inner  
self which  
is all  
black-  
&  
developed a  
vehement  
hatred of*

*my light  
brown  
outer.*

(Lee 1971:298)

Lee's poem is emblematic of the Black Art aesthetic, the heart of which promoted a vision of black American unity (Washington 2001:307). Its poetry and plays were honed to express the needs and aspirations of Black America and the communication of a 'black nationalist consciousness' (308). Embracing the black vernacular, these artistic forms were an affirmation of cultural identity and its expression. Their potential for mass appeal signalled what Justine Baille terms 'the flowering of a cultural nationalism' behind which is the notion that 'Black people, however dispersed, constitute a nation within the belly of white America' (2013:45). Implicit within this aesthetic, labelled a black aesthetic by Baille because of its aim to articulate a black collective consciousness (46), is an opposition to those writers whose concern is the delineation of the African American experience and not the artistic expression that originates in the experiences of the majority (44), and in this we see the measure of Morrison's remove from the nationalist movement.

For Houston Baker, the potential for mass appeal obstructs the production of 'sophisticated analyses' for addressing 'expressive manifestations of Black American culture' (Baker 1980:138). Baker's point is that the black aesthetic has been reduced to a 'fundamental level' which frustrates the critic's ability to formulate a significant account of what 'compels a writer to render his... instinctual experiences in a form accessible to others' (140). Only from such an account is it

possible to seek out 'adequate explanation or theoretical insight' whose critical objective would be the explanation of how 'black narrative texts written in English preserve and communicate culturally unique meanings'. In this conflation of literature and culture the concern to articulate a collective consciousness is modified within the call for a method of explication which will provide the meaning, the reason, behind those cultural concerns unique to the African American community. The significance of Baker's remove from the ideal of building a strong black nation can be discerned in Lee's poem. Its voice celebrates 'pitch black/paragraphs of/ "us, we, me I"/awareness' in the realisation of an identity denied for so long. It registers membership of a collective where the worth of selfhood and kinship is analogous to blackness; a blackness whose sufficiency satisfies the desire for self-fulfilment. However, in an acknowledgement that the 'consequences of self-representation cannot be calculated in advance of its performance' (Benston 2000:288), the poem concedes a 'hatred of/my light/brown/outer' (Lee 1971:298). Washington (2001:311) interprets this as the result of having to reject 'that acquired self-image rooted in a white aesthetic', but the 'blindness' of line six is an indication of an inability to engage a burgeoning sense of self in anything other than pitch black paragraphs: rather the frustration of being unable to find expression for the blackness inside than acquiring whiteness. In this sense the hatred of my 'light/brown/outer' is the measure of this frustration in terms of its watered-down expression in the world of white America.

Baker (2001) asks 'for whom - or, better, as whom? – does public blackness perform' (53). He regards performativity as a 'human activity engaged in by an agent who is ... seeking to satisfy some standard of achievement' and one

that 'may not be precisely articulated' (35). Consequently, he regards performativity by 'black' Americans in the United States, in part, as a defence against 'sentencing blackness to exile from the human race'. This is to say that the black figure is pre-judged by white people using other criteria whose influences cannot be defended against adequately by language but only through a performance which belies the destructive power of prejudice. However, he points out that the body behind the veil is a body screened and 'held in mythic suspension... within the framing mind' of the prejudiced majority (58). In this way prejudice is not simply the inhibitor of a burgeoning, knowing intelligence but the insidious impediment to 'the public emergence of a modern blackness' from behind the veil (Houston Baker 2001:53-4): the impediment to the expression of humanity itself.

Because of this, blackness can be said to lack a context where its representation can stand on its own two feet. Perhaps this is the context in which Gates (1989:29) calls for the 'mask of blackness' behind which African Americans can 'talk *that* talk' in a performance chosen by them to disturb prevailing social constructions. Nonetheless, performance, even if contrived, is still a referent under the eyes of the prejudiced and that which is valued as blackness is still hidden and inexpressible and replaced only with pretence.

Benston (2000) points out the 'intricacy of negotiating between conceptual and expressive sources' and how performance is implicated or even 'mutually constitutive' with the idea of blackness: context is constitutive of a light brown outer and restrictive of the construction of a 'powerful cultural voice' which receives its authority from 'creative imitation' (249). We understand by this the risk that the

African American writer, in negotiating between convention and innovation, empowers in performance, behind the 'mask of blackness...the language of black difference' (Gates 1989:29). We can say that Morrison's work amplifies that performance is constitutive of difference because Nel's determination to be black restricts a true personal expression of her experience. Her determination to be black clings to her, claiming value at her expense. David Lawrence refers to this as the black body generating a 'self-fulfilling prophecy as blacks find themselves unable to assert an identity outside the expectations imposed upon them' (2000:233) in the quest for 'self-defined ownership' (236). Similarly, David Smith (1997:180) asks whether blackness precludes black people 'from mastering nonblack cultural modes' and argues that 'racial notions subvert ...[the] ability to produce accurate theoretical or even descriptive accounts' of the social and cultural circumstances of black people (181). Nel's feeling of being the colour of custard is an indication of a lack of consciousness or self-awareness with which to nullify the actions of the white conductor. The strength provided by her internal blackness is lost in her inability to express it or maintain it in a world dominated by white power. If we contemplate Denver's links with Sethe, her closest relative, and with Beloved, who represents her ancestors lost in an unknowable past, then the blackness incarnate in Denver is a result of a connection with her ancestors and palpable in the present of her existence. Nel is different. Her blackness is animated in a rejection of Helene, and in her inaction when 'Chicken Little', representative of all that should be preserved in the community, is drowned. His disappearance in the water from which Beloved, in another novel, will appear, registers the finality of the rejection of community values. Beloved is incumbent of

Denver's self-awareness and of her footprints down by the water's edge. The void which exists between Nel's internal blackness and its place in the world is never tempered by a conception of the source from which it emanates or its contribution to a sense of autonomy for the character. Denver achieves autonomy because in her we can conceive of the idea of what humanity is. Smith's insight is indicative of Nel's situation in dramatic time, because her final, cognitive reflection is an indication that her performance is constitutive of blackness and not with the idea on which she reflects. Because of this Morrison is restricted to writing Nel's reflections and not the formation of a powerful cultural voice. In the light of these comments and the above interpretation of Helene and Nel's relationship, it is clear that Morrison's engagement with the black aesthetic isolates the blackness written by Lee, but its existence is not written fully until her novel *Beloved*, and her mastery of 'the relation between the presentable and the conceivable' (Lyotard 1986:79).

The Black Arts Movement's 'speculative quest for a distinctly black modality of cultural assertion' (Benston 2000:251), according to Gates (1989), must redefine 'theory itself' from within 'black culture' and avoid the 'premise that theory is something white people do' (28). However, we can read into this its claim to be expressive of a black tradition supported by a black critical endeavour to assert black cultural difference and a nation within a nation. In doing so, it rejects any creative influences for its artists other than the black culture it expresses.

However, the two threads of conceptual and expressive sources remain to be negotiated endlessly, and the reality of life for Nel is expressive of the difficulties to be encountered in making the idea of her internal blackness conducive to the idea of her humanity.

Morrison has written of the 'complex struggle... inherent in creating figuratively logical narrative language that insists on race-specificity without race prerogative' (1997: 5). This acknowledges that in *Sula* (1973) race is the mythic suspension that hovers behind the veil and which is the common denominator of all individual action. It demands of the narrative a prerogative and 'intellectual weight to which it has absolutely no claim' (8).

The characters in the novel *Sula* display characteristics which are consequent of existing behind the veil. Their concerns are a result of prejudices which are destructive of intellect, independent thought and well-being. Their actions as black Americans are framed within notions of race where differences of 'morphology are correlated with subtle differences of temperament, belief and intention' (Appiah 1985:36). Consequently, at every turn, race appears as the determiner in the affairs of this group and its community. Morrison acknowledges that a narrative can provide race 'specificity' when its effects are defined and identified, in that its debilitating effects becomes '(unwittingly)' the preserve of a certain type of group (1997:8). If the concept of race, or rather the mythic suspension in which it exists behind the veil, is an impossible one, not least because of the 'easy assumptions' claimed for it (Appiah 1985:36), then the credence afforded it by revealing its effects in the performance of a 'black' character, a performance choreographed by the easy assumptions of the bigot, renders it possible. Morrison refuses to be cast as the 'worthy opponent' in her effort to define 'a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter' as 'home' (1997:3). She says that she has always known that she 'could not, would not, reproduce the master's voice and its assumptions' (4) because that would be confining herself to

his 'terrain' and to an acceptance of his rules in the 'dominance game'. For her, 'counter racism was never an option' (4). These are the considerations she thought would lead to a 'freedom' her writing seemed to promise. It would lead to the 'racial house' she lived in becoming 'an open house, generous in its windows and doors' (4) and here we feel the reach of Morrison's allegorical writing in establishing the dilemma of the individual exposed to prejudice. Yet, as Morrison points out, this freedom would at best be a freedom that would always need defending as one won from racial prejudice as we know it; it would be a freedom conditional on her intellectual ability to go beyond or rise above the easy assumptions which frame its rhetoric. She describes this as being 'tethered to a death-dealing ideology' in whose service she had 'honed' all her 'intelligence in subverting it' (5).

This type of transformation of a 'racial house' would involve 'intolerable circumspection, a self-censoring bond' in maintaining a freedom in which 'danger' lies because to 'reconceive the racial house' would mean 'forfeiting ' a home of her own (4). The use of the words 'Home' and 'house' in this allegory traces out the intensely personal nature of the dilemma as delineated by Morrison. In her use of allegory Morrison is able to trace the effects of prejudice and racism into the consciousness and well-being of the individual and into the reactions of that individual to the forces that play on him/her in the effort to resolve those assumptions, the effort which in itself forms the tether to that death-dealing ideology. 'Home', then, becomes 'me-ness', the 'body as consummate home' (5), but always in 'a race house' where race 'matters' (1) and 'freedom' is the 'renovation' which risks 'forfeiting' a home, in Morrison's words, 'of my own' (4).



Convincing oneself of this is to forfeit peace of mind, where the act of convincing subtly reifies the structure of that home. Perhaps Morrison is trying to delineate a 'Home' where self-consciousness, although in part a manifestation of chaos, must, eventually, be able to consider, measure and maintain its self-evident worth as a condition particular to a human being; not something regarded as resulting from history or from the mood of the time, but as removed from history. She describes this as her 'search for an elusive sovereignty' and its abandonment when its 'disguise' was recognized (4). We can say that the disguise is the self-censoring bond and the self-reification which appear the 'Utopia, but never home' (11). A freedom 'that could operate...on any number of sites' (4), but not conducive to the home where 'a manageable, doable, modern humanity' (4) can be expressed in actions which corroborate and support the vitality from which it sprang: self-regulation instead of self-censorship or self-reification.

The language here is strikingly different from that used to delineate the dilemma whose existence hovers between, in and around human aspiration, fear and anxiety. Nel is the vehicle through which the anxieties of a divided consciousness, in pursuit of an unrealizable dream, can be perceived through actions which are questioned within the group in which they originated. Consequently, they rank as 'doable' activities but resist being 'manageable' not least because within the setting of the group they are made to appear questionable. Hanging over the group is an awful threat resultant of a double consciousness in action whose complexity in dramatic time has to appear palpable. It is here that allegorical language becomes the device able to 'construct' the walls of the raced house, as it were, and from where a conception of a 'modern

humanity' and its 'doing' can be contemplated: the means which frame 'the politically and aesthetically unresolved' question of how 'to be both free and situated' (5). The same language is evident in Morrison's presentation of the site she calls 'Home' where 'race-free language is both possible and meaningful in narration' (9). This is a place 'where race both matters and is rendered impotent' (9). In order 'to evoke not only the safety and freedom outside the race house' but also 'to suggest contemporary searches and yearnings for a social space that is psychically and physically safe' (10), Morrison relates a story of a sleepless woman who experiences 'the concrete thrill of borderlessness'. On a moonlit walk she feels safe and secure to the extent she fulfils her instinctual responses to the world around her because 'nothing around or beyond considered her prey' (10).

In its simplicity the story avoids the perils incumbent on everyday existence instead using the affinity engendered in the nursing of a restless child to evoke the intangibly personal in language. However, it remains an evocation and the sense remains one of an 'elusive sovereignty'. As with the formulation of the triad, then, the work of Morrison takes place within a 'raced house' by an 'already-and always-raced writer' (4) whose dilemma is how to be 'both free and situated...how to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling' (5). As we shall see in the following chapter and a closer look at Nel and Sula, this question is Nel's and her final situation is an intensely personal recognition of the dilemma expressed in 'Home'. Indeed, Morrison is very clear that in moving beyond the 'dichotomous double consciousness,' it is the 'interiority of the othered, the personal that is always embedded in the public' that must lead the search for a character who can 'iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged'. Nonetheless, it is a space whose

provision 'Home' is still able only to be 'conceived' (12). Tellingly, 'W.E.B. Du Bois's observation about double consciousness' in this context is labeled as 'a strategy, not a prophecy or cure' (12); and in Morrison's work we can say that it is a strategy gifted to the writer in the pursuit of the personal in that opposing voices can be heard emanating from the same consciousness. This fulfils the demand that in all its complexities and transformations; from all perspectives and perceptions; in its reactions to a blackness it does not recognize, and its right to that which it is denied, that voice will be a human one. However, the language used and the literary devices in which it is framed are the means which delineate the dilemma, but fail to make conceivable in dramatic time that which is most sought after: 'sovereignty'.

## Chapter 3.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Hegel's theory of tragedy, and a commitment to the historical consciousness of the form

This chapter explores Hegel's theory of tragedy and its application by Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved*. Hegel's emphasis on tragedy as 'a specific and even rare kind of action and response' limits it as such 'to certain cultures and periods' (Williams 1966: 32). In this context Toni Morrison's artistic representations of events from the past in *Beloved* (1987) become significant. In particular, the relationship between Sethe and Beloved and Morrison's motivation for the form of its development, that is Beloved's birth into slavery, the brief period of freedom enjoyed by mother and child, Beloved's murder, subsequent return and final leaving, can be deemed appropriate to Hegel's theory of tragedy. Hegel's definition of tragedy is centred on a conflict inspired by contradiction and an ethical claim. For genuine tragic action, he claims,

'It is essential that the principle of individual freedom and independence, or at least that of self-determination, the will to find in the self the free cause and source of the personal act and its consequences, should already have been aroused.'

(Hegel 1835 Vol.4:308)

In ancient tragedy this principle is set against a network of beliefs connected to 'institutions, practices and feelings which have their basis in particular myths' (Williams 1966:17). In contrast with modern tragedy, the effort here to assert an independent subsistence is confronted by a fatalism which exerts limits on human

actions. The word fatalism, however, because of the complexity manifest in ancient tragedy in any comparison with modern drama does not fully convey the situation of the tragic hero. The presence of myth, for example, in Greek tragedy is significant because its expressions in the drama are the ruling and influential families from whom are drawn the tragic heroes whose suffering (pathos) is the result of a contradiction between their growing claims to self-determination and those of the unique culture in which they live. The form of this drama, then, 'embodies, in a unique way, both the history and the presence', the myth and the values formed in 'response' to it (18).

However, in ancient tragedy, the limits on individual self-validation, that is on the developing consciousness which is not yet called freedom, are not known in advance or in a general way but discovered in 'real actions' (Williams 1966: 18) and precipitate a spectacular fall. This has the effect of placing the myths at the root of this society in the present and alongside real experience and of undermining the harmony they previously provided. And yet, importantly, the feelings produced as a result of this action draw attention to a fuller sense of the fatalism/destiny confronting the tragic hero. 'What we nowadays call fate is just the opposite of this attitude of self-consciousness' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:241). Modern drama, we can say, presents fate as a condition applicable to the individual or rather as the reason for any condition affecting the individual. This reason or event can be far removed from the present but somehow has repercussions for him/her in an arbitrary link which allows the cause to be associated with numerous effects and events. Consequently, this sense of cause and effect insinuates a connection between 'that which the sufferer is in himself and that which befalls him as

unmerited' (310). It is her fate. This is very different from that which confronts the tragic hero of ancient drama.

Hegel writes of the Greek character as someone who has transformed the natural 'into an expression of his own being' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:239). Though not absolutely self-produced or self-determining, 'disposition and variety of temperament' are thought of as 'free individuality' to the extent that those universally understood properties are now conceived as peculiar to the individual; the result of 'disposition and individual constitution' and 'exertion of the will' (239). Because this developing consciousness is not yet able to be expressed, and needs 'the matter nature supplies', Hegel terms this state 'spiritual individuality' (239).

However, the concrete world, the social determinates that make up existence generally, exhibits power over spiritual individuality. Its manifestations are uniformity and equality and the power emanating from them is known as 'Fate or Destiny, simple necessity' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:239). Nevertheless, in Hegel's terms, there is a form of freedom present if considered within the realm of feeling: 'The Greek who has within him the feeling of necessity calms his soul with that' (240). This is comparable to a feeling of resignation, that there is nothing to be done about it, 'it is so', and Hegel implies that the contentment it provides the individual, in the form of a decision made, confers a freedom in that the decision itself is the product of an individual determination. 'Misfortune, discontent' in light of this simply arise as things contrary to the individual's will (240) and particular interests given up by him signal a repose into 'being' (241).

This 'mental attitude,' (240) confirming necessity's constative influence as something which simply is, results in 'a renunciation', the individual relinquishing all particular interests and aims and appearing 'in relation to necessity' (240) as something which does not exist independently. Accordingly, a finite consciousness, that is one that would remain in thrall to power without inward freedom, is here repudiated in favour of a surrender to necessity, and this 'revering of necessity' is that attitude of 'indeterminate self-consciousness... wholly devoid of the element of opposition' (241). Not yet freedom, it is visible in the hero's readiness to take full responsibility for the actions which befall him, even though in our terms, he is completely blameless. To us moderns his stoicism adds to his tragic demeanour but as Williams (1966) is quick to point out, this is not an aesthetic or technical achievement but a 'dramatic form rooted in a precise structure of feeling' (18). It produces the most notable, noble characters and is least imitable in modern drama because the ability to express personal aspiration has been given over to necessity by a 'shutting up of the spirit within simple abstraction' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:242). The grandeur of the character is a result of what fate has wrested from him and is far less a result of any cause and effect because necessity is not a 'connection of relations' but prompts a return into a freedom which stands above the 'concrete and particular' (242) of the everyday. It is still, however, of the abstract kind as it cannot thrive in any contact with that which is definite or determined. 'It is pure thought... being-within-self, the relinquishment of the particular' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:242). And, importantly, with an eye on modern drama, lacking the particular it can never demonstrate harmony with existence generally. That is, the lack of drive in asserting any particular

aspiration confines the character, but it is also indicative of a general state of feeling inherent within this unique society, which is expressed through the voices of the chorus. Their presence ensures that what is felt by the hero is not the product of individual experience but resonant of collective experience and general sentiment. What are realized here are the feelings of a particular society at a particular time, the expression of which reveals the lack of 'the self-contained human individuality' which Hegel designates as necessary for the development of character (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:311). What will develop is the embodiment in the character of this general sentiment 'as concrete individuality' (312).

The shutting up of spirit and the relinquishing of any particular aspiration is referred to by Hegel as 'simple reflection into self' (1832 Vol.2:249) In light of the role of the chorus, spirit in this ancient drama can be conceived as 'the reality of the people' whose abstract is its individuation into individuals (Taylor 1980: 85). At this stage for Hegel 'imagination is now the organ' (Hegel 1832 Vol.2:249) which will give 'outward form to the inwardly abstract'. That is, the creative artist brings the abstract forward into existence for the immediate perception of 'figurative thought' and not 'as present immediate forms' (249). Rather, Hegel describes them as products of the imagination, 'invented' but not fictitious because their content is the 'moral element peculiar to men, their morality... and essentiality' (256), and the result of man's struggle with necessity. They are, then, termed essential forms in that they issue 'in vital co-ordination with man's emotional life', (Hegel1835 Vol.1:301) his spirit, and are powerful in their exemption from contingency in that they relate to self. However, their manifestation as such content relies on their external, dramatic involvement with the tragic figure.



We have, then, external images (the gods of ancient drama) whose content is the emotional life of the character and in which there is nothing 'not known to man' or which man 'does not find or know in himself' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:241). This means that having been given an external existence by the dramatist, the intimate life of the character becomes visible to all in any action he takes and is referable to all. This must be so because this external representation is 'the universal content of that which is the stimulating energy in the resolves and actions of human individuality' (306-7). Generated in a reaction to necessity and given form by the artist, the character's separate existence is at once both the 'vital force of our human existence' and 'the vital and moving forces in the human heart' (306): both the reality of the people and the individual.

As an external development for figurative thought and also as the product of a reaction to necessity, it comes about that individuals have transferred the powers which control them in reality into feelings which in their external representations (the gods) now must be seen as the controlling forms of existence in that the scope of their influence is consequent on their separate and external configuration. These forms control humankind in that they are those principals of spiritual individuality which men and women have taken on themselves in opposition to necessity and they contradict the conditions present in the outside world. In any action resultant on this contradiction, these forms will be discernible in the reactions of the chorus, and thereafter in the perceptions of the audience. They are, then, precisely the harmony which man seeks with himself in his social conditions. This must be viewed as the accomplishment of the artist in that 'the stamp of universality' appears on man's existence 'in all its shapes and parts'

(Hegel 1832 Vol.2:252). This will ensure that the form of any creative practice will be planned in spirit, 'be produced only out of it and exist only in its mediation': a work of art (252). In A.C. Bradley's words (1950:71), the reason the tragic conflict 'appeals to the spirit is that it is itself a conflict of the spirit'.

The ideal character for Hegel, then, is one who exhibits universal traits alongside a concrete singularity: that is, within him/her a particular sensibility is evident. The unity achieved here is one of self-relation, the self-contained human individuality designated as character and predicated 'in external existence' (Hegel 1832 Vol.2:253). Man's relation to the 'gods' is in fact a relation with himself.

An example of such a character is Achilles described by Hegel as containing the wealth of substance of 'the complete and living member of society' (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:314), as well as that 'concrete individuality' which in their relatedness provide the drama with the human character. The brutal, warlike spirit of Achilles is symbolized by his readiness to draw his sword, but he calms himself in the presence of Pallas. This restraining element 'is his own prudence' predicated by Pallas. But Pallas is also the living spirit of the Athenian people, 'not an external spirit' but present 'actually alive in the people' (Hegel 1832 Vol.2:256-7). Achilles's calm demeanour in the presence of Pallas manifests the harmony between him and his society. That is, the bond now existing is a result of his own prudence and his identification with the spirit of the people and termed by Hegel as the unity subsisting in the totality of an assured character (312). Importantly, 'free action is [now] the response to what Achilles is' (Taylor 1980:169). We can understand this if we say that Achilles's action has expressed what he is, his content as adequate to his idea of himself. This is made possible by the external figuration of Pallas

whose universal content equates with Achilles's essence, his particularity. Here in 'sensuous terms' (spirit) is 'the reconciled opposition of particular and universal' in the presence of figurative thought: Pallas (Karelis 1979:xxxvi). The value of this presence is that it reciprocates a universal in its possession by an individual and only in this 'sensuous guise' can the imagination gain knowledge of this content (xl). Because in the outside world any correspondence between individual self-expression and the demands of social existence on which the individual depends is illusive, the presence of Pallas has provided a content (a spirit) in Achilles perceivable by the imagination and concomitant with his nature and that of the outside world. This resists the idea of a 'self-dependent will and brings to light its insertion in nature', his own and that which surrounds him (Taylor 1992:159). Consequently, Achilles's response is in virtue of his 'condition as a natural and social being'; the actuality of his own essence: 'situated freedom' (160).

Sethe is a figure brought from the past whose development can be seen as concomitant with Hegel's theory of tragedy, and able to fulfil Hegel's requirements for character, situation and the resolution of that situation.

If we consider the character Sethe in light of Hegel's theories concerning character, it becomes apparent that her development culminates in the possession by her of a self-contained human individuality consonant with general sentiment. However, the value of the above research is that it is able to establish that this achievement for Morrison is simply a means to an end, even if that end, in witnessing the 'essence' in the character Sethe, is the cause of her being dispossessed of it. In brief terms, Morrison's end game is to construct a situation in which a human being, fully recognisable within all that that term insinuates, is

presented in a conflict inspired by contradiction and an ethical claim. Finally, this character, in whom 'the fullness of life is completely preserved' will be able 'to unfold and express in every possible way the wealth of a truly complete spiritual life', that is, 'able to fuse together its particularity in the element of its spiritual substance' (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:317).

However, the claims made here concerning the character Sethe have to include her daughter Beloved, who, as an external presence, is able to make available to the imagination Sethe's passion, resolve and will. The inquiries into Hegel's theories concerning tragedy make it possible to bring forward the difficulties faced by Morrison in pursuit of her themes. It is notable that in this sensuous external form these universal determinations of specific qualities, Beloved included, manage to avoid the modern interest in subjectivity where the spirit they represent would appear 'merely as phases or aspects of human character' and any action become linked to personality (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:297). Conflict, in the quest to find in the self the cause for the personal act, will here appear as internal; as an individual's struggle with herself to retain the harmony she seeks with the outside world. In this, spirit loses its sensuous availability 'and becomes a working within individuals' (Williams 1966: 35). If there is to be reconciliation for the character it will be within the character, 'and often less satisfactory', because its guise may well be 'personal destiny' (34). This is in opposition to the ethical dilemma central to Hegel's thinking.

Morrison's novel *Sula* (1973), and its polar oppositions of character in a single mind as the expression of an internal conflict, can be thought of in this vein. The separation between human sentiment and society's strictures played out in

this context culminates in the isolation of the individual. This becomes evident in the character Nel who, in her determination to preserve the inner harmony she values, condemns Sula to an existence where 'life has no meaning outside herself' (Williams 1966:116).

In isolation Sula's ambitions for herself in white society fail and on her return to her own community she becomes restless and petulant in her relationships with others. Because she feels she does not belong where she is and with few options for change there appears an irresolvable opposition between the individual and society. As Williams says (1966: 138), 'what has actually happened' in this situation 'is a loss of belief in both,' the individual and society and in 'the whole experience of life'.

The result of attempting 'to create an individual person without any relationships' (138) is the character whose consciousness, their ideals, dreams and illusions, harbours a false reality, and all that is left is for Sula to demonstrate the struggles of an aspiring mind before white people prepare her for burial (Morrison 1998:172), and her fate becomes justified by her struggles. Sula's experience is now pared down to express either the personal or the public: in the place of a fully formed humanity there remains for the reader only the taking of sides and the risk of loss of belief in either. Our gaze is turned inward to contemplate the dramatic conflict within an individual mind.

Inevitably, this ideality of form strips out the sensuous content we require for the full comprehension of the richness of the human character; the emphasis now must remain on the death of the individual and the manner of that death. This is

quite different from the events in *Beloved* where it is the action in which Sethe's demise takes place which enforces her claim to humanity. It is in our efforts to accommodate ourselves to this divided consciousness that modern tragedy finds its stimulus. However, our commitment should not be to the man/woman who dies, but to the action in which it takes place (Williams 1966).

Dramatically, it appears that Sula's role and her lack of connectedness are the causes of her isolation. If this develops from an abstract condition to one that even briefly appears as a fixed position, that is, Sula's general condition typifying that of the aspiring African American, then it signifies on the inertia of her community and becomes a new alienation, a new excuse to marginalise people who the dominating group thinks should not be there.<sup>2</sup> Morrison's dilemma becomes evident. In her effort to present to the reader a human being in every sense of the word, her use of double consciousness, or polar opposition in Williams's terms, has risked presenting this internal conflict as one within 'a total human condition' (Williams 1966: 154).

Sula and Sethe's ambitions are the same. There is not so much a struggle of liberal proportions set against the backdrop of a need for moral enlightenment, a struggle to change their society, but rather a conflict arising out of a struggle to join one from which they are excluded. Morrison's Sula and Sethe bring their aspirations with them, and in neither case are they the result of any personal development, progression or change in the sense of them altering their condition contingent with their circumstances. In line with Hegel's requirement both

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the novel's attempt to nullify this situation is in line with a metaphysical approach: the community's frustrations, the result of their inertia, are embodied in the character of Shadrack as the spirit alive in the people of the community and as such invites imaginative inquiry.

characters express the principle of self-determination as one already aroused. However, where they differ is that Sethe's aspirations are embodied in the development in her of universally recognised human characteristics: the reconciled opposition of particular and universal inserted in nature. Sula's dominate her demeanour and foster the idea of a self-dependent will. The refusal by white people to allow Sula to participate in their society results in the burial of her aspirations. Because Sula has no essential relation to either her own community or to that of the larger society, her 'private self-definition' as the 'alienated individual' confirms that 'the conditions of its existence are in conflict with the demands of its perfection' (Taylor 1992: 22). Consequently, the novel has nothing left to offer her. Her death and subsequent burial amount to an acceptance of the contradiction evident in this situation. We have moved from a drama in which 'the metaphysical and social categories were indistinguishable' to one where the relation between a 'temporal power and the spiritual condition remains unresolved'. Tragedy 'has become a story' because in these terms it cannot be seen as an action (Williams 1966: 23) but 'an attempt to find reasons for an assumed general form of behaviour' (27). As a consequence, the consciousness generated by Sula and Nel in polar opposition results in the contradiction with which they wrestle becoming accepted as the dominating feature of their characters, and fated. However, ancient tragedy requires that contradiction be framed in an ethical consideration and as such as the foundation for the reconciliation of the spiritual condition with social existence.

The situation prescribed by the artist as the background to any reconciliation is not developed as the background to a particular society or world condition, it is

simply a framework suitable for 'a particular presentation, not the presentation itself' (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:272). However, it does supply 'the material in which as its appropriate medium a character or temperament is unfolded before us' (286). If we regard Sethe in light of these requirements then we find she is intrinsically linked with motherhood and the bond existing between mother and child. In this she fulfils one of Hegel's component features for the action to which the situation is the background; that is, in her the universal forces are apparent and constitute her essential content. Prior to her meeting with schoolteacher, her self-awareness and consciousness of her responsibility towards her children are indications of her vitality. Consequently, if the situation is to present Sethe as the appropriate medium for the expression of motherhood then it must involve her bond with her children. Her decision to free her children and escape herself ensures that her personal emotions 'pass into the world' as universally valid (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:249).

The centre of this situation is the 'self-conscious... personality' who is its paramount and vital force (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:251). This is not the individual person whose independence would be 'emphasized in his/her subjective life'. Rather, in being brought forward to provide an event, this character is not the expression of an 'inwardness' in opposition 'to an external world', but one whose whole vital humanity becomes evident in 'external realization'. This is important in Hegel's tragic theory because, even though the external event is one of action, it is not consequent on external conditions but on the character's 'personal volition and character'. Crucially, its dramatic significance is derived in relation to the aims and passions of the character at its centre. In our case, Sethe is placed in a situation where that by which we know her forms 'the peculiar nature of the conditions' in



which she is placed (251). Because of this we cannot say that Sethe has become self-exclusive. She fulfils her ideas of herself within these particular conditions through purpose, the nature of which is her essential character and volition. The conditions are the means for an external action in which Sethe's content is sensuously available. As a result of her action that by which we know her becomes true to her.

Consequently, any idea of self-exclusive independence is compromised. We can understand this better in the context of Sethe's confrontation with schoolteacher. In killing her child Sethe is confronted with 'a principle of necessity which is essentially self-supporting' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:255). This is Hegel's term for those forces in society whose justification is carried within them, a force which simply is. In the drama the artist chooses the action but the necessity against which the action is chosen must not originate purely in the personal passions and character of individuals. In this situation it must also 'relate to the external circumstances and relations of concrete life' (8). Sethe's actions must make discernible the true nature of this force and demonstrate fully her claim to what she will be denied and the full import of what is to follow. However, her passions relate to life and she relates to life because the artist's 'intelligence is awake to that ideal and universal substance which is at the root of human ends' (255).

There must arise a sense that as Sethe's claim is a reaction to necessity and as such, in Greek tragedy, must be available to the imagination in the form of an external, imaginative formulation, the full benefit of presenting a tragic character is not available in the situation provided by Morrison. This is to say that the presentation of external figurative thought to modern sensibilities is not thought

proper here. The form necessary for Morrison's novel now becomes clear in that her creative practice, that is the external development of figurative thought in sensuous form, will appear in the very first pages of the novel. Nevertheless, in this situation, Sethe has emerged as a recognisable, human being and the ethical situation in which she finds herself is still an indication of the external nature of the pressures of necessity.

The murder of a child by its mother is seen as unquestionably wrong, and yet in this situation who would not understand the despairing fidelity within this act of forfeiture. Even as we postulate, Sethe is unveiled as a fully recognisable human being as she disturbs the harmony provided by necessity. It is 'a rightful claim' to that which simply is, and if there is 'a wrongful misuse of the passions' they evidently, because of this situation, emanate from 'the human heart' (255). We can say here that this is 'the actual self-accomplishment of what is the essence of reason and truth' (255). The drama in Morrison's chosen situation, then, is driven by 'personal volition and character' (251) in a conflict with other forces in which 'the personal factor' is asserted 'as essential characteristics of human purpose' (251). The structure employed by Morrison in this novel to engage her readers, and to bring Sethe to this situation as a fully rounded and self-conscious character, is conducive to modern sensibilities and not those feelings generated in ancient dramatic structures. The presence of Sethe's external nature, in ancient tragedy, would signal the appearance of the gods and the triumph of moral over worldly forces. Their immediate leaving would signal the recovery of a real-world setting and the predominance once more of worldly forces. However, in keeping

with the spirit of ancient tragedy, an external imaginative formulation will take its place alongside Sethe.

Sethe's situation has gone beyond the idea of the self as an independent will and her motivations and actions appear products of her own nature. Her behaviour aided by the right or wrong of an ethical situation is, though terrible, the response of a natural and social being: infanticide was 'absolutely the right thing to do', Morrison has said, 'but she had no right to do it' (Rothstein 1987:Y19). The modern shift to self-division and self-restitution, then, is displaced in the reconciliation between Sethe's inner spirit and the universal forces which surround her. This comes about because the expression of Sethe's sentiments as universal is her children. Her decision to destroy this universally recognised essence provides the proof of its presence and its manifest centrality in the world of necessity. It is what everyone has and Sethe's actions demonstrate that that which is present in the universal forces which surround her is also present in her: the reconciliation of inner spirit and external forces. And because the conditions of this situation are peculiar to Sethe's nature we can say that the loss of her child is the loss of the universal substance which is at the root of human ends.

This absence results in a character who is bereft, but the child returns as 'Beloved' and as the external, universal and essential elements which formed Sethe's motivation for self-determination. Should they not appear in isolation, they must present as 'phases or aspects of human character' (Hegel 1835 Vol.1:297) and lose 'the simple truth that these eternally dominant powers are immanent in the identical nature of mankind' (298): if these powers are implicit, then they must be seen as such. In addition to this, the form of Morrison's novel reveals her intent

to bring Beloved into intimate contact with those other characters whose lives are closely related to Sethe's. The self-expression denied Paul D and Denver becomes a source of imaginative conception in their interactions with Beloved and the powers she represents. Paul D and Denver become recognisable human beings in their interactions with Beloved. The emotional lives of both Paul D and Denver become available to the imagination when in contact with Beloved because she is the embodiment of the powers active and dominant in their own experience. We can say that the intimacy Paul D and Denver share with Beloved expresses the life force manifest in the yearnings of Sethe. These characters and their sensibilities are imbued with the themes which Morrison wishes to project into the complexity of African American life in the late twentieth century.

At the centre of the main argument of this thesis is that Morrison's aim for Sethe is that she possesses those 'eternally dominant powers [which] are immanent in the identical nature of mankind' (Hegel 1835 Vol.4:260). This aim is achieved within a written tragic framework in her novel *Beloved* (1987). She posits the slave woman Sethe as a human being and as recognisable as such by other human beings. However, as Hegel's theory of tragedy makes clear, this involves the purposeful creation of an individual whose driving force, although recognisably implicit in human nature as human nature, requires their isolation from their community or group. Morrison's quest to provide in the self of her character Sethe the cause of the personal act must result in a discordant relationship between Sethe and her community. Because Sethe's sensibilities are identifiable within the identical nature of humankind, the dilemmas present are not as acute as those in *Sula* (1973). Notable in this framework is that tragedy on these terms implies a

stasis in which the situation of the tragic character remains exactly the same (Williams 1966); indeed her demise signals the reconciliation of the conflict and establishes in truth the root of her claim. The price for this is the emotional and physical deprivation of the character. The truth is Morrison's goal, and achieved through the presentation of a character within a tragic framework. However, this thesis extends this line of thought to reveal Morrison's adaption of ancient drama to the demands of African American writing and the resolution of the conflict arising between presenting a human being who is demonstrably self-aware and one similarly immersed in the values of their own black community. Crucial to this is her innovatory use of the separate and external configuration of Sethe's sensibilities in the form of Beloved whose interactions with Denver and Paul D communicate Morrison's perceptions on the role of community in the lives of African Americans and its historical sway. This achievement is consequent on those specific universal qualities embodied in Sethe being made available to the imagination through Beloved and taken forward into the future in the possession of a self-aware, self-conscious character, Denver. Indeed, it is the disappearance of Beloved from the porch of 124 which registers the idea of the specific qualities that Sethe is unable to express. The gods, in the form of Beloved, have come and gone, but that which has been represented, the idea of a full and spiritual life, lingers. The semblance of situated freedom, first made available within the corn symbol, now awaits the artist in the form of a fragment garnered from the past. We are not now viewing situated freedom in its entirety, but the idea of it. That means that in its fragmentation, we are concerned with only that which is offered by the artist. It is not simply a case of what you see is what you get, but rather, what you

see is all you are going to get. It is noteworthy that the fragment, although retaining the semblance of the totality of its former content, is no longer concerned with the totality of that content, accrued as it were in another time. Aesthetically inspired, the totality now offers only and exactly what it decides it wants us to have. We get the idea, but it is not a fragment of an idea, but a fragment of the truth as an idea: the result of the artist's ability to shatter the symbol she constructed.

Tessa Roynon's (2013) recent study examines 'the ways in which classical myth, literature, history, social practice and religious ritual make their presence felt' (1) in the work of Toni Morrison. In particular, her undermining of 'the classical dependent nature of dominant US history and identity' is achieved through 'a revisionary relationship with antiquity' (4) in which Morrison 'reconfigures significant historical moments' in America's past (22). This is not necessarily an imaginary reshaping of the past but a repositioning of the marginalized African American within a classical narrative whose appropriation by a burgeoning white society contributed to the elevation of its traditions, historical past and its political realities into what could be called a received national identity. In the process, the presence of the slave community was erased along with its contribution to what is now modern-day America. Roynon's point is that, using the same frame of reference, the classical world, Morrison not only reveals its use in the formulation of America's past, but adopts its symbols and themes in her own work 'to challenge the erasure of political realities that became the dominant cultural norm' (Roynon 2013: 82).

As a striking example, Roynon draws attention to the tendency for the history of the 'Old South' to be articulated in 'tragic terms' with the emphasis on 'the suffering of the losing side' (82). The old south in these terms refers to the

Confederacy whose defeat in the American Civil War saw the loss of a culture and way of life which is a source of nostalgia for many commentators within the dominant culture. However, for Roynon, 'Morrison's overall conception of nineteenth-century African American experience as tragic' unsettles this tendency, and it is in the form of *Beloved* she says where Morrison will 'insist... that the tragedy and tragic heroism in these events belongs not to the Confederacy but to the African American' (82). Consequently, not only does Morrison subvert the history that the dominant culture claims for itself, but also she deploys the same classical tradition as her own to establish an African American presence. In this way the realities of the moment will override the ideologies generated by a tragic vision of American history.

Nevertheless, Roynon's argument conflates experience with tragedy and as such, even in a reconfigured format, tragedy becomes contingent with a particular event in time. A received national identity is displaced using the same themes and symbols on which it based its claims in the effort to, in Morrison's words, 'change the past,' one that was appropriated by a dominant white culture (Taylor-Guthrie 1994:xiii). This has the effect of subjecting the events of the past to a wider scrutiny and of signifying on the present. However, within a classical framework, history is carried on Sethe's back in the form of a 'chokecherry tree' care of schoolteacher (Morrison 2004:18). The permanence of this symbol's connection with Sethe's body is, as we shall see, conducive with Morrison's adaption of ancient tragedy and not with a reconfiguration of Sethe's participation in a given event. This example accentuates the difficulties when equating tragedy with known events and the temptation to perpetuate this contingency leads Roynon to

claim that the deployment of the classical tradition by Morrison suggests that 'rather than black society having to adapt itself to suit the dominant culture, it is the dominant culture itself that must be changed' (2013:22). While this is a worthy goal supported by many critics and artists, in light of Morrison's *Beloved*, this thesis is directly opposed to such a conclusion. In the tragic vein, Sethe's expression of her escalating self-determination takes place within the culture which dominates her. However, in Hegelian terms, as we have seen, the tragic character's situation is not the background to a particular society, but the result of her volition. In her failure, the world remains the same. And the material forming this presentation must be the medium appropriate for making available to the reader the character or temperament of the individual. This means that the artist's imagination will be employed fully here in order to ensure that the action is consequent on the character's personal volition and not external conditions. The symbols of the classical condition in the hands of the artist can change overall conceptions of history, but in the formulation of a tragic character it is not the changing of an event but the making of one to suit the spiritual make-up of the individual.

Significantly, Justine Tally (2010) writes that 'Sethe's value as a human being does not spring from the terms of the masters' (3), because in the debate of appropriation the dominant culture's fixation with religion, literacy and rationality 'as definitions of humanity' are bypassed in *Beloved*. As Tally points out, Sethe is neither 'rational nor literate' and so avoids the risk that her individuality is envisaged in relation to the dominant culture. Consequently, 'her agency is determined by the deeply human concerns of a mother for her children' (3); and in compliance with Hegel's thinking, Sethe's self-determination is already aroused.



In a critique of Foucauldian theory, McNay (1994:7) challenges the idea that 'resistance is severely undermined' when the body becomes the visible marker of judgement of the individual. And in the context of *Beloved*, Sethe's immediate escape after her beating could be interpreted as the ultimate resistance. However, Tally (2010:10) takes Sethe's resistance, although 'ultimately ineffective,' as more in line with Foucault's description of genealogy in that it is an attempt to 'emancipate obscured knowledge from subjugation'. And yet, Tally's observation that 'the dominant discursive regime has obliterated any alternative meaning' is a powerful indication of the extent to which Sethe's human sensibilities have been transferred onto her body and in the process erased. It also helps to define Sethe's actions not as simply resistance but as expressions of personal volition in which she yearns to retrieve that lost sense of individuality through a connection with a past of which she is the result.

If we consider Sethe's final tragic denouement as signifying the final loss of any personal volition, all that remains after the murderous actions witnessed by schoolteacher is the chokecherry tree he ingrained on Sethe's back. This equates Sethe and whatever she becomes with the Master's definition of her. In this, her personal volition is obliterated and replaced by the sign her masters have given her. Her wherewithal is now contingent with her designation as chattel. In line with Tally's insight concerning Sethe's value as a human being, it is important in this situation that the humanity defiled by schoolteacher remains accessible to the reader if a sense of her personal volition is to be preserved. On these terms, Sethe has become exactly what schoolteacher says she is. Beaten and hounded as she is, the result will be a character formed in relation to a dominant culture.

Whether her resistance is to schoolteacher's definition or to slavery, her body will forever link her protest to the criteria prescribed by those who think her beneath them. We have to place McNay's reasoning in this framework and conclude that, even in its many forms, resistance is linked to its antagonist: in Eagleton's terms, 'oppositional identities' (2001:414). Elsewhere (1988), he writes that 'any oppressed group has most vitally in common the shared fact of their opposition,' (37) and the resultant collective identity, although formed in response to a political order, will generate eventually 'a positive, particular culture' (37). Not only this, but also the original 'deferment of selfhood' will be replaced by a strongly alternative consciousness of who they are (37). However, because this 'positive identity evolves within oppressive conditions' it will always be to some extent 'collusive with its antagonists' (37). The paradox in this process is that 'a self-confident agent would not be necessary in the first place if such self-confidence were possible,' and this reasoning leads Eagleton to declare that without the consciousness developed in oppressive conditions, 'one would not even know what one lacked' (37). And in this logic, which posits the marginalized as somehow lacking in self-awareness or self-consciousness, we gain a full sense of the mark on Sethe's back. Even Eagleton's (2001) valiant attempt to water down the effects of this narrative ends in more complexity. He points out that 'the more fundamental question is that of demanding equal rights with others' in order to realise what 'one might become' and not of 'assuming some already fully fashioned identity which is merely suppressed' (414). However, this places the beginning of development in two different places for the marginalized and their oppressors because the universal of which he speaks, containing as it does the 'individual particular' (414), cannot

contain the human characteristics common to all if somehow they have been developed in opposition in an assumedly fully fashioned identity that comes from somewhere else. In the light of this argument Morrison's imperative to develop the inner self of her characters becomes acute. The tree on Sethe's back marks the refusal by schoolteacher to recognise any of her qualities as human. She is not allowed to possess or claim those sensibilities he thinks of as the elevated characteristics of his 'race'. Those same qualities have been beaten out of her and his mark signifies this: 'they took my milk,' she says (Morrison 2004:20).

Marking Sethe in such a way has facilitated the transition of a fully recognisable human character to one bereft and deficient and the opposite to what is usually expected of transition and the idea that 'a subject that thinks itself complete feels no need to revolt' (Eagleton 1988:37). But Morrison has written Sethe a self-consciousness whose form is her relationship with her children and her wish to express herself through the rituals of a Christian marriage and a will to belong. However, the challenge to her self-awareness in the form of schoolteacher is the motivation for her escape. Morrison rejects the idea that revolt is consequent on a diminished awareness or lack. Getting her children 'out of there' signifies the agency they represent and which drives her awareness to preserve herself. For Eagleton, oppositional identities 'are in part the function of oppression as well as resistance to that oppression' (2001:414), and because of this the individual cannot be judged on what she is now but only when that identity gains expression, equal rights, in the wider community. It is through expression that a true identity is formed and through a common process that it is achieved. Morrison has ensured that Sethe's children have achieved this already for her, but that expression is

denied to Sethe in the 'community' of Sweet Home. The lack of a common process for Sethe, then, in this topsy-turvy world, is the lack of a proper identity and the completeness that accompanies it. Completeness equals universality in this context because the universal is simply 'every individual's equal right to have his or her differences respected' and to take part in the 'common process' where that can be achieved (Eagleton 2001:414). But who is different from whom and how? This question may sound trite and overly simplified but in relation to Morrison's work it is a valued query. It cannot be the case that to be like everyone else, the individual must first have their perceived difference from everyone else established in the acceptance of it. The marks on Sethe's back register Morrison's rejection of this delineation of universality.

In opposition to the argument expressed by Eagleton (1988), Sethe resonates with human qualities while a slave because her deeply human concerns for her children are discernible as universal human sensibilities. Sethe's resistance is a result of her understanding that the greatest threat to her humanity is schoolteacher. This is confirmed when she is beaten with the resultant loss of her milk. The scars imbedded in her back now represent who she is. They do not register his inhumanity but hers and her difference. This difference is an imposition but it prevents the acknowledgement, as human, of any expressive action she may wish to take. It must be stressed here that this imposition by white people is a measure of the fabricated superiority they enjoy and the extent to which they are protective of that position. Almost indestructible, its influence is so powerful because the people responsible for it do not see things as they are but how *they* are. The hiatus opened up between this abstract superiority and the particularity of

individuals is, then, immense. This would imply that difference is imposed in order to preserve a notional superiority manifest in a group's recommendations of itself. It indicates a dearth in the marginalized of those sensibilities thought universal, and a dehumanizing of the particular. Difference in this respect is a one-way system whose criteria are the arbitrary derivations of ascendancy. We can say that Sethe's chokecherry tree is the image chosen by Morrison to indicate the deprivation inflicted on a human being in these circumstances, and the impossibility for that individual of regaining that lost self-worth. On Morrison's terms the functions of oppression result in no identity at all, not as the means to the achievement of a true identity. Morrison provides us with a character whose self-consciousness becomes vital in a desire to live a fully human life. Her subsequent rejection and flight to preserve that self-consciousness, in opposition to the mark she carries, result in a growing sense of individuality which yearns to develop on its own terms, and knowing its own history.

The difficulty of presenting the essence of humanity in those thought of as different and in a form and context available to the imagination is a formidable task when the claims of progressive thought cannot move from the single significant tenet of the centrality of whiteness. In dealing with this, the idea of a reconstituted past is quickly taken over by the symbols and images provided by the author for a considered presentation of the human psyche.

The narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (2002 [1952]) is similarly marked. However, it is within his briefcase that he carries the classification handed him by the central power, and one which he finally manages to jettison. Stepto's (1991) thorough inquiries into *Invisible Man* (1952) and James Weldon Johnson's

*The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) consider the situation of the individual in relation to stigma. Although the narrator of *Invisible Man* has been coerced into seeking development within white society on its own terms, when free of those terms, his survival results in isolation. Notably, he learns that his history is only properly represented in the articles he has found which relate to his own particular past and he fills 'the empty briefcase with what are in effect "protections" or "passes" from his own hand' (Stepto 1991:174-5). Consequently, Ellison's narrator is making his own past on his own terms and in his isolation, his cellar, he attempts to be free of the insinuations of the master. Stepto terms this 'his removal to a fresh space, the "warm hole"' of the narrator's frame (174). In this space, 'Invisible Man' is now 'outside the boundaries of what others call reality (an imposed fictional history)' (45-6). And Stepto points out that the writing of *Invisible Man* has advanced the 'authorial posture beyond that which mistakenly attempts to control two texts-the author's and the one imposed' (45-6). In order to control his own personal history, the 'trap before the African American writer...is that his texts will never do more than challenge the content of the exterior authenticating texts surrounding them' (45-6). In this context, Roynon's (2013) classification of classicism as somehow and nonsensically white and, as universal and European, 'the ultimate fabrication beyond which we must move' (184), must now include an engagement with the form in which this content is delivered.

The narrative of *Invisible Man* is moulded, as is its narrator, by interactions with the white world. Much of his experience is gained in refuting the myths the white world has woven around him. And although Addison Gayle (1976:255) has described Ellison's novel as 'rich in imagery...and infused with the wealthy

language and life-style of a people,' he criticizes Ellison's choice of 'individualism as opposed to racial unity' and the use of a European existentialist 'image of the faceless, universal man trapped in his own ego' (258). Morrison herself has said that she 'always missed some intimacy' in reading *Invisible Man*. 'I thought they (Ellison and Richard Wright) were saying something about it or us that revealed something about us to you. Just in the style, I missed something...' (Ruas 1981:96). And yet, Ellison (1972) has said how he felt morally obliged to write about the African-American experience to communicate the full extent of its range and fluidity. However, at the same time his motivation was to express in universal terms a larger concern with the 'tragic struggle of humanity' (Ellison 1972:169). Nonetheless, in light of the criticism above the failure to engage with the notion of a collective consciousness or to achieve a true intimacy with his readers resonates in African American responses to his work. It is worth considering here Morrison's achievement in providing Sethe with an agency which avoids a relation with the dominating culture. She enters Morrison's narrative as the bearer of an 'essential individuality' which derives from an 'inner essence rather than to the empirical selfhood of everyday life' (Eagleton 2003:43-4). We know Sethe by heart because, as Eagleton has it, tragic circumstance 'here is imminent rather than accidental, flowing from the inner logic of action rather than commonplace contingency' (43). Here is the provision of intimacy so important to Morrison and its lack in *Invisible Man*, registered by Gayle (1976) as the image of man trapped in his own ego, can be contemplated now more as the condition of a character whose modern subjective state is derived from 'sheer extraneous accident' (Eagleton 2003:43). The result is an individual personality whose contingency with everyday life

produces a private internalized battle. Ellison's motivation to express a concern with the tragic struggle of humanity is now channelled through the individual whose struggle in the present is framed within a resistance to the burden of history given him by his oppressors. Unlike Sethe, 'Invisible Man' has succeeded in finding a space where he is free of his burden. However, similar to Sethe, the burden he has carried is an imposition whose intrusive criteria, as myth, have no basis in fact. Their powerful hold on him is evident in his decision to destroy them. He realizes that he has no control over them whatsoever; and replaces whiteness with 'protections or passes from his own hand' (Stepto 1991:174). However, if his quest began 'in imposed configurations of social structure' (168), where is the alternative structure to be found in which a full consciousness can be written?

It is this difficulty which so inhibits the writings of those who suffer stigma and prejudice. The problem involves presenting a transition whose final structure is sufficiently malleable to provide a protagonist's 'final posture outside the realms' of the dominant culture and the claims of community (Stepto 1991:164). In this context Stepto offers the example of Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) whose form is capable of evoking, but not advancing, the 'historical consciousness' at its heart (164). The form, then, although to a large extent answering the calls for intimacy and a collective consciousness, is not able, fully, to project a transition in which they are both able to be fully sustained. Stepto refers to the conflicts inherent in the African American's quest for freedom of expression in a larger and dominating culture as a narrative of ascent and immersion (1991:167). Originally envisaged as a ritualized journey into a symbolic 'North', the ascent narrative developed a character for whom this journey signified a new beginning free of the constraints of



a 'South', which although familiar, implied prejudice and poverty. However, the alienation and rejection experienced by many African American men, women and children in the North resulted in a narrative structure which saw the 'South' in turn ritualized as the place of community and one which offered the benefit of immersion in group identity and a collective consciousness. Stepto points out that the quests of immersion and ascent 'conclude as they began, in imposed configurations of social structure' (168) and asks, can the 'literary history' of these narratives become 'the basis for a narrative form' (168)? In the context of *Invisible Man*, this would depend on a narrative's ability to establish his history, prior to his hibernation, as a fiction while preserving the individual at the centre of that fiction. Stepto points out that the 'protections' which are now the new contents of *Invisible Man*'s briefcase 'assert a marvellous and heroic concept of self-willed mobility' where his 'hibernation' is a secret preparation for, eventually, a 'more overt action' (174). The goal as ever is the presentation of a knowing self-conscious character in a space in which she or he is able to express this as a fully recognisable human being.

Most certainly, it can be claimed that 'Invisible Man' is outside history: that is, outside the history foisted on him by the machinations of the overbearing society in which he finds himself. In his hibernation, his free accommodation and free electricity place him, within the text, uniquely unfettered by the myths that influenced every part of his life subsequent to his reappraisal of his situation. Nonetheless, his transition does not result in a form where his position in the human race is realised through his personal volition. The symbols within his briefcase gesture toward a collective consciousness which reverberates, as with

Gayle and Morrison, with the bitterness felt at the wrongs done to generations of Africans. But if as Stepto believes, *Invisible Man* is the beginning of an expression which will advance the form of African American writing beyond the posture of hibernation, we must ask who was the man who took shelter in the cellar, because in transition he has become invisible not only to white people, but also to his own people and to the reader.

His removal of the mythical perceptions of him generated by white society has given way to a space of repose. However, it also serves to register the slipping away of any connection with the sensibilities of the man whose life force has been so sorely threatened. Stepto points out that the African American narrative in the future will advance 'the historical consciousness of the form beyond the posture of hibernation' (Stepto 1991:xvi). But, it must be considered that, as in the case of 'Invisible Man', the character who does not already retain, fully, the historical consciousness around which African American writing has developed, will be perceived as a subjective individual whose true self is yet to be realized. Not only this, but how is a form to be structured in which such an enigma will develop the necessary self-consciousness of the fully developed character. We can perceive in this dilemma that the reason for Sethe remaining bereft is for the commitment to art to be realised in another form.

Both W.E.B. Du Bois and Toni Morrison have experimented with a form in which the attempt to fashion a transition is situated in the 'Jim Crow' section of a railroad coach. Du Bois's version has the segregated 'Jim Crow' section occupied by white as well as black people, although the white only section must always remain white. The train here travels South into the 'Black Belt' (Stepto 1991:75)

and presents the unchanging degradation of segregation within a structure of movement. Significantly, the white people include a nurse with her charge, (DuBois 1994[1903]:70) 'a little white girl'. This prompts ideas of a future where white people, especially white women, who were perceived as particularly at risk from black males, would accept integration between white and blacks as a natural condition. Stepto (1991:94) considers the scene as an effort by Du Bois to suggest that a journey 'of immersion' into the Black Belt of the South undertaken by a group of blacks and whites would 'be a moment in and out of time' as an 'occasion of *communitas*/a ritual transition'. Stepto uses the term '*communitas*' as defined by Victor Turner where it is used to 'characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual transition' (Turner 1978: 274). A ritual transition in these terms is a situation in which 'egalitarian and cooperative behaviour is characteristic', and where 'secular distinctions of rank, office and status become irrelevant'. These distinctions, for Turner, contribute to a social structure of 'mutually dependent institutions' in which 'alienation, distance and inequality thrive' (272). Transition, then, becomes an 'Anti-structure' and 'something positive' where the forms of structure are unpacked in a 'generative' situation where individuals seek to know and communicate' (273).

These situations, however, are still classified as 'ritual' because the putting to one side of the secular distinctions which alienate individuals can take place between persons who are 'deeply divided' from one another and cannot be termed *communitas* (238). They are ritual in the sense that they lack the spontaneity associated with *communitas* as interaction may be influenced by learned rituals. They are said to possess 'temporal structure and to be dominated by the notion of

time' (238) and are, therefore, contingent. All the same, within this ritualistic world there arises a close cooperation between individuals in what Turner believes is a noticeable effort to maintain 'a cosmic order which transcends the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the mundane social system' (238). This, we can say, refers to an awareness of self which sees the mundane structures of society as a hindrance to the fulfilment of the desires which lie beneath the individual's commitment to his society. In the manner of seeking it out in other individuals it takes on a universal aspect but remains personal. In this context, Turner can define 'the bands of *communitas* as anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, non-rational, existential relationships' (274). The structures of society which keep people apart are here neutralized in a 'sentiment for humanity' (274) which represents a relationship in which uniqueness is safeguarded and which does not merge identities' (274). It is a place in which the demands of society are recognised for what they are, as individuals communicate on a level where the sensibilities implicit in human nature generate values above those in evidence in the structure which is society, but these values will never be represented in a form which is available to the imagination. In this sense *communitas* is directly opposed to the forms of ancient tragedy in that it liberates the individual from conformity to general norms in a separation of the personal life from society, whereas in tragedy the essence of humanity recognisable in the tragic figure's demise is seen to fail as the structures of society assert themselves.

However, although the individuals safely settled in the 'Jim Crow' car do present an image of harmony, their destination once arrived at will render the

structure of movement null and void; in Stepto's words, the 'spatial image of destination, not simply the interior of the black belt, but more profoundly in communitas itself...is not forthcoming' (1991:75). Notwithstanding this, it is notable in Du Bois's passage that although he points out that the car is 'fairly clean and comfortable. The discomfort lies chiefly in the hearts of those four black men yonder', and in his own (Du Bois 1994[1903]:70). This implies that where integration cannot flow back into the white car, the consciousness prescribed by colour will inhibit even the most tenuous attempts to situate transition within any spatial image. It is as if Du Bois has anticipated Stepto's criticism by referring to the one thing that is not on show in a text perhaps directed more at white people than is first thought: the interior universal content that is the stimulating energy in the actions of human individuality, the heart of the black men yonder. In Du Bois's vehicle of transition his central theme is that he and his companions remain unknown to us.

As we have seen in Morrison's novel *Sula* (1973), a similar situation is played out in a railroad car. On a journey 'South' Helene and her daughter Nel are accosted by a white conductor for walking through the 'white's only car' (Morrison1998:20). What is noteworthy here is the dazzling smile she gives the salmon-faced conductor. In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison uses the same adjective to describe the smile Beloved gives to the women gathered outside Sethe's cabin prior to Sethe and Denver's abandoning of her: 'her smile was dazzling'. As the women of the community 'make a hill' together, the single white man present looks only at Beloved (Morrison 2004[1987]:309). In the novels *Sula* and *Beloved*, both women are described as beautiful but maintain their distance from their respective

communities, and both women suffer rejection and disdain: Helene (*Sula*), by the gaze of the black soldiers and to a lesser degree in Nel's opinion of her, and Beloved (*Beloved*) by the vocal efforts of the women of the community. If we add to this the gaze of the white man, Edward Bodwin, transfixed as he is by Beloved, we begin to sense that the dazzling smile represents something better forgotten because it cannot provide a facilitation with the material conditions of the present moment. We can say that both women though rattled, and in Beloved's case fleeing, remain captivating. And in the case of the white man, we can register his gaze as shock as he watches Beloved, 'thunder black and glistening', contemplating the scene before her (308).

We find in Morrison's *Sula* that within this framework of movement, Helen's vitality is recognized but found to be misplaced, out of place, in that she is ignored and reproached from all sides. However, her disposition registers human sensibilities which are able to survive this reproach and maintain traction within dramatic time. Bodwin's reaction to the figure of Beloved registers the concentration of a gaze confronted by a vitality not recognized before. The context for his visit to Bluestone Road is to retrieve boyhood treasures and memories he left behind. His search for old certainties places him within the discourses surrounding transition, and we read his gaze as the shock of recognizing in himself the boundaries which frame his self-consciousness. The lure of Beloved startles his self-immersion in his idea of the not me he has not let himself become, or rather the limits to which he clings during his loss of the givens he relied on. We become aware of the sensory stimuli activated in Helene and Beloved's interactions with Nel, the black soldiers, the white conductor, the women of the

community, Sethe and Bowden. However, as a result of the white gaze directed at Beloved, we find revealed the register of an uncertain and flawed consciousness. Bowden's inattention to the community and his fixation on Beloved, standing 'thunder-black and glistening' while contemplating the scene before her (308), determines his role as representative of the dominance of white people as the main contributor to the events unfolding in this scene.

In Morrison's novel *Beloved* we find the truth of both Helene and Beloved's sensibilities cannot survive in the world they occupy. We contend that Bowden's convoluted consciousness represents the material world, in dramatic time, in which this truth becomes threatened. The observations of those around these two women are a result of the demands of this situation. Consequently, the truth that they have carried with them in dramatic time must now be transposed into a form in which it is able to survive. We can say that in this context, the sounds emanating from the women of the community are a call for exactly this. In Benjamin's terms, as Beloved 'almost unrecognizable- flees from us to other people', she remains 'victorious' (1928:480) because, although the context of prejudice and marginalization will change little, the truth and not the context will be adapted. Morrison's work acknowledges this in facilitating an exchange where the vitality of Helene and Beloved is replaced in a character consciously aware of the boundaries in which Bowden operates and, consequently, that her own (Denver's) vitality is not a trait of black individuality, but is characteristically human.

It is noteworthy that the interactions of Sethe, Beloved and Denver could be appraised as the difficulty for them of extracting themselves from the cling of someone else's lies. In order to appreciate fully the extent of Morrison's aesthetic,

we can point out that the enigmatic quality of the solution to this dilemma is now determined by its availability as a concept in that it has become transposed from its original setting; that is the perceptions of those who observe. The truth in the absence of Helene and Beloved remains because of the doubt that was cast upon it.

Closely aligned with Benjamin's insight, Adorno points out that 'the unexpected promise of something which is highest, cannot remain locked in itself but is rescued only through the consciousness that is set in opposition to it' (2013:102). This is in opposition to Ziarek's (2012) reading of the enigma as 'a constitutive feature of aesthetic beauty and a source of fear in the world of white supremacy'. Her argument calls for the preservation of 'foreignness' in literary form as 'a challenge for the hegemonic values of aesthetics in complicity with white supremacy' (184). In order to support this she cites the figure Clare in Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1992), and her friend Irene's stream of consciousness in which Clare's eyes are 'mysterious and concealing', and 'surely! They were Negro eyes'. In addition, Clare's 'beautiful face...was unfathomable, utterly beyond any experience of hers' (191). However, what is not cited is Clare's sudden death and the suspicion of Irene's involvement (271). Similar to the women of the community who reject Beloved, Irene's thoughts concerning Clare are that 'she couldn't have her free' (271). Clare is also rejected by her white husband on his discovery of her Negro roots. The truth concerning Clare threatens his idea of himself as she was central to it.

The point we argue here is that Clare's beauty is a little by the way. It is the misperceptions of others, male and female, black and white, which become



undermined in relation to it. The truth concerning Clare is that the perceptions of others are set in opposition to it, and it survives because of this. To claim foreignness as a challenge to white supremacy avoids acknowledging the source of that foreignness in supremacy, and also Irene's enthrallment to white supremacy. It is not that foreignness is on show, but that the perception of it allows the indeterminable, in this case the vitality of life, to be determined by the idea of it. This has the effect of locking away the essence of humanity which is the source of Clare's vitality. Larsen's purpose as artist is to provide the shock able to shatter this perception and its opposition to Clare's vitality. In this way Clare's carefully crafted demeanour, in the artist's hands, becomes the vehicle through which the concept of a fully human character is rescued. Clare's white husband and black friend, although blind to life, summon its presence as a concept where it was not before, and bear witness to it. (Ziarek's views on the aesthetic are further developed in Chapter Four of this thesis.)

Irene's opposition to Clare preserves her anonymity in a world dominated by white people, or rather her ability to navigate that world without commitment. The rescue of the truth in Clare's demise remains a concept and not conceivable because it has no equivalence in Irene's consciousness. For Morrison's women of the community, the truth transposed is conceivable in their pleas for the ex-slaves to love and value themselves in the here and now, and to reject their longing that affirmation be reflected in an unknown past. What until now has been perceived as foreignness, mysteriousness or as particularly Negro now becomes conceivable as human vitality in its demise set against perceptions whose opposition is fixed in the material world. The permanence of this opposition in Larsen's novel means that

what has become an idea is never given form. The perceptions of Clare's husband and her friend Irene will now appear invalid but inviolable. In the sense of truth rescued, Irene, and Clare's white husband now exist within a framework of negotiated difference as indicated in the work of Homi Bhabha (2005).

The promise of Clare free of foreignness exists only when we realize it cannot be kept; then it becomes longing and will remain as such until its loss is recovered in its projection in another form. Unfortunately, the figure of Irene is incapable of this. In *Beloved*, Sethe's demise is at the hands of white people, but framed in her own volition, and the rejection of Sethe's longing in the form of Beloved's exit, is replaced by the sounds emanating from the women of the community which encourage pride in the self. In Larsen's novel we experience the postmodern presentation of the unattainable without the modern expertise for making what is longed for conceptual, that is, that it exists.

Compared to Du Bois's Jim Crow car, Morrison's contains both a fully recognisable human being as well as a group whose humanity is hidden in the presence of whiteness. It is possible to discern here the beginnings of a situation in which, because of the complex nature of transition, those who are inhibited or repressed by whiteness must remain as such in dramatic time while the interior life is brought forward in someone else.

The writings of James Weldon Johnson provide valuable insight into the reasons for this. His *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* provides us with a protagonist for whom whiteness is an all-pervading inhibition: it is

'The dwarfing, warping, distorting, influence which operates

upon each and every coloured man in the United States.

He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being but from the viewpoint of a coloured man. It is wonderful to me that the race has progressed so broadly as it has, since most of its thoughts and all of its activity must run through the narrow neck of this one funnel.'

(Johnson 2004[1912]:15)

The inference here is that everything he does or says carries the implication of a consciousness imposed on him by white people. He may not be marked as Sethe is but his development as a character enables a clear image to appear of a self-awareness frustrated by whiteness. Although perfectly deserving at school, he is not awarded the scholarship his achievements warrant, and this is because of his colour. From then on he says, he was limited by 'one dominating, all-pervading idea' (Johnson 2004[1912]:15) and we can say this idea is 'whiteness'. The idea of an imposed consciousness is necessarily a conceptual misdeclaration but it must be remembered that it is accompanied by force. As far as Sethe and 'Ex-Coloured Man' are concerned, whiteness and force combine in one powerful idea. This is to say that the myths which contribute to white ascendancy generate at every turn a reaction in those who are thought incapable or unworthy of owning them. This reaction in this context must also be false but in the context of white ascendancy it is judged a true and trusted indication of a lesser being. The contention, then, is that in the context of ascendancy, any reaction becomes the mark of a

consciousness prescribed by difference by those who believe their own recommendations. In the case of 'Ex-Coloured Man', the consciousness prescribed for his colour does not match that generated in his early years and made available to the reader. Notably, this form is in opposition to one that depicts a transition where black women and men must be shown in actions which displace a consciousness made up for them by white people.

We can say that in all 'Ex-Coloured Man's' travails, he behaves as an individual whose colour does not define him. Stepto's response to this is that it is the development of a 'race consciousness' where none existed before (1991:112). The description of the episode at school is deemed 'frivolous' as 'Ex-Coloured Man', as a child, learns, as all African Americans do, that he 'was black and therefore different' (112). However, the point of Johnson's narrative is that the child does not feel different, either to the reader or himself. Johnson's development of his character is a clear signal that difference is imposed from without and as such forces those who come into contact with it to adjust her or his bearing in relation to a fixed point, in this case, the idea of whiteness. Once established, this imposition will mean that everywhere and always, the characteristics of those thought different will be judged on the extent to which they are made separate by society. Unfortunately, it also exerts huge influence on the validity of their perceptions of themselves. Throughout, we can say that in any discussion on transition, interpretations concerning the presence or not of 'the soul or spirit of Afro-America', its 'genius loci' (Stepto 1991: 114), will ricochet between a character's successful projection of an innate African American consciousness and one fashioned for undertaking the perils of a transformation into ascendancy. 'Ex-Coloured Man' is

valuable in this context in that he never doubts himself in his judgement of his own people. This makes him a 'chameleon' or 'seer' (116-7) in Stepto's eyes, as Johnson's protagonist displays at every turn an awareness which is unabridged by the effects of a prescribed racial consciousness. However, the fact that a racial consciousness is not present is a source of frustration for Stepto as he searches in vain for a place in dramatic time where he can say 'Ex-Coloured Man' renders it inert but, because it does not exist, it cannot be perceived in loss. Nevertheless, this means separation from, even abandonment of, a past whose literature and history resonate, as they must, in a culture within a culture. This is evident in the criticism of 'Ex-Coloured Man' as a 'seer of surfaces' (116): in other words, a man of shallow perceptions and 'deficiencies of vision and character' (114). The point to be made here is that the inhibiting force of the imposition of difference is never more toxic than in the desire to have its passing writ large.

Herman Melville's sense of transition writing is central to this form of reasoning. His method of moving from an inhibiting past into spatial images of free expression is accomplished through the movement of a vessel: 'Foremost through the sparkling sea shoots on the gay, embattled bantering bow'. However, this sense of striving is qualified by the presence of Ahab: 'but only to drag dark Ahab after it, where he broods within his sternward cabin, builded over the dead water of the wake' (Melville 2001 [1851]:184-5). This most striking piece of writing captures the exciting and energetic momentum of a journey rich in promise and the *communitas* accompanying it. But it is the presence of Ahab, unable to move from the prescribed knowledge of his past, who renders most the significant void between the bantering bow and the dead water of the wake. It must be asked how

would this most powerful character make his way forward and in what new situation would we be happy to see him rid himself of the 'whiteness', which it has to be said, feeds off him? The true force of this 'whiteness' is only ever visible in Ahab's determination to be rid of it, and Ahab only ever Ahab when in full awareness of its power over him. The strife with which Ahab battles is always visible as an external threat, and his personal commitment to this battle remains the obsession of a human being who cannot prevail in such a situation. Consequently, we are witness to the debilitating power of 'an inner essence rather than to the empirical selfhood of everyday life' (Hegel1807:144). And with this in mind, we can say that Ahab embodies, in opposition to an individual personality, historical forces which overpower him. His motivations are neither the products of subjective states or contingent with commonplace activities. He shares with Sethe a permanent mark of his brush with 'whiteness' and I would like to suggest that Ahab's wooden stump and Sethe's mutilated back are the impositions which register the limit of the form which has created them. The permanence of these marks indicates the presence of an implacable force and the impossibility of their bearers ever being free of its power, but they also indicate the presence of a human being who has been denigrated. We can say that because of their personal commitment they are more subject than subjective, pre-formed and subject to no change. In this form of writing, the central influence is the humanity of the character and its availability to the perceptions of the reader. A loss of subjectivity is to be free of the implications of the moment and simply, masterfully, to be simply who they are and recognised for that. This finality, as it were, is the end game,

resultant of the form of its telling. Because of this, it cannot undergo a transition; it is simply there in its loss.

Unlike Sethe and Ahab, 'Invisible Man's' briefcase is something whose contents can be changed to express the source of the new self-awareness cultivated within a new persona. This is significant in a discussion of Morrison's creative practice and its implications within African American writing. If as Stepto (1991) claims the form of African American writing is conducive to the immersion and ascent dilemma, then *Invisible Man* is the hope for a narrative voice which will express a consciousness fully aware of its rightful place in American society. However, this new sensibility will have to retain a good deal of its earlier self as it moves away from itself. Melville will never allow Ahab to make the journey forward from the stern to the focsle to join 'individuals jointly undergoing transition' (Stepto 1991:75) because his quest is generated by a volition recognisable in the form of its presentation as a human being; and there is little to be done other than for him to continue as he is: his 'embodiment is both the condition of his existence and the expression of what he is' (Taylor 1992:37). Indeed, that is the whole point.

The above discussion of African American writing, its themes and forms has shown Toni Morrison to be acutely aware of the inhibiting nature of imposition and the flaws inherent in writing a transition from the position of a subjugated consciousness to one vibrant and self-aware. There lingers around the idea of transition 'the development of a liberal consciousness' where 'the point of reference [becomes] not a general order but the individual', and who at this point is seen to inherit 'this separation between ultimate human values and the social system' (Williams 1966:68). In this development, 'conceptions of a permanent

human nature and of a static order' become steadily eroded. Consequently, the idea of 'human and social transformation' finds traction in the idea of revolution, and the most important human values become associated with 'development, progress and change'. Its comparison with the stasis of the tragic form could not be starker. The idea of rebellion or revolution suggests 'the possibility of man altering his condition' (68), but in the effort to proclaim a truth, tragedy leaves things just as it found them. Morrison, then, uses tragedy to call a halt, as it were, to the proceedings in the segregation car in order to facilitate an adaption to the conditions in the present of dramatic time by a consciousness born out of the past: that is, to manage loss in the context of signification. Implicit in this consciousness, as a result of the idea of loss, will be an awareness of the boundaries in which white superiority operates.

This is significant in that adapting to marginalization is a rejection of the ethos on which it is founded, and not acquiescence to it, adapting not to real-world situations but to the falsity of the idea that fosters belief in the myth of white superiority. The idea of development, progress and change is bound up with selections from history, and in its conditioning framework for future aspirations otherwise impossible to predict. Morrison's claim is not to be moving forward, or aside, but to provide an awareness of the false claims which history regurgitates around the lives of black people and, importantly, the debilitating drag they produce on the human condition. Her position can be understood in the light of Benjamin's deliberation that the 'oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge' (1950:251). Morrison's characters are indeed an oppressed class, but with little historical knowledge. However, historical knowledge, someone else's, is



deposited with them in order to substantiate it in the minds of the people who selected it. In the context of this new appraisal in dramatic time, in a questionable white world, the white man approaching Bluestone Road is in fact moving backwards in search of old certainties. These include the physical symbols of the boundaries in which this search must take place; locked in the past as they are, the only place where it can take place. For both parties the past must give way if a true, conscious self-awareness is to be achieved: one forced by prejudice; the other to relinquish its need for it. The fact is that 'because white men can't police their imagination black men are dying' (Rankin 2015:135).

Johnson's writing (2004[1912]) of 'Ex-Coloured Man' is indicative of Morrison's approach. Because not defined by a racial consciousness, his observations are those of an outsider whose influences were formed elsewhere. His blackness, then, is shown to be an imposition and its criteria are alien to him, but his claim to be ex-coloured is the acknowledgement that avoiding a prescription of blackness has forced him to nullify his intuitive and most personal ideas about himself. The power of imposition in this sense has not prevented 'Ex-Coloured Man' living a full life but it has prevented him living it fully. In a most revealing passage he admits a 'dread' he cannot explain, 'unfounded, but one that never left [him]' (Johnson 2004[1912]:126). And this was that his wife, who was white, would at some time discover in him 'some shortcoming which she would unconsciously attribute to his blood rather than a failing of human nature' (126). She never did. But here, his innermost fears register the permanence of imposition and its debilitating effect on human beings: not defined by it, but plagued by it. And this is precisely the place in the human psyche which Morrison seeks to preserve in

calling a halt to transition. At this moment, the character's humanity is evident and his contact with his people animated. At the end of the passage the loss encountered in avoiding prescription becomes evident when 'Ex-Coloured Man' regrets 'selling his birthright' as he puts it as an ex-coloured man. He salutes the work of men such as Mark Twain and Booker T. Washington in elevating the worth of the 'coloured man', and with regret claims, 'I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious' (127). Her wish to avoid regret, and to preserve a racial consciousness and a recognisable humanity while resisting prescription, are the motives for Morrison's adaptation of ancient tragedy.

Her creative practice involves an engagement with the complexities of immersion and ascent and the necessary transition this involves, but now two characters will reciprocate to express a mutual desire for fulfilment. Transition, in Morrison's hands, will formulate a link, a relation, between the present and the past able to nullify the influence of signification.

## Chapter 4.

Toni Morrison's aesthetic presentation of self-expression and autonomy in a group designated as an undifferentiated mass

Carole Anne Taylor (2000) writes that 'both tragedy and comedy become inseparable from the closed nature of a moral universe necessarily framed by unacknowledged power relations' (7). Nevertheless, in a Hegelian sense tragedy thrives on an ethical situation rather than a moral one, that is, what appears to be a rightful claim is also a misuse of the passions, (Chapter 3 of this thesis:15-16). Taylor's conclusion placing 'the individual protagonist as central to reaffirmations of values only temporarily in jeopardy' (7), is a telling insight into Morrison's purpose of erasing difference in order to reveal the relations of power it hides.

Morrison's use of a tragic framework reveals the unassailable values temporarily unveiled in the killing of *Beloved*, and exposes a twofold challenge. First, the hidden unacknowledged powers which designate African American people as a subordinated group distinct in themselves, and 'foster the development of an essentialist theory of identity by making invisible the processes constituting groups as a social category' (Juteau-Lee 1995:18). Secondly, the same theory of essentialism fuels the attacks on the 'supposed essentialism' (18) of those African American artists who wish to reveal the fact that dominated groups 'are constructed in the context of a social relation of domination and dependence' (17) where the use of difference perpetuates the ideologies of race and notions of inherent and existing categories. An investigation into the hidden social relations which render African Americans a social category will clarify Morrison's use of Du

Bois's (1994[1903]) symbol of the veil. In Morrison's hands it becomes a device to symbolize the extent to which the power and influence of their masters compelled enslaved individuals to appear as a stereotypical mass, and whose existence as such denies us an unobstructed view of the true face of white supremacy.

Introducing Guillaumin's (1995) theory concerning the imposition of difference, Jutean-Lee (1995) points out that notions of race engendered by skin colour and physical appearance are constructs and significant because they apply to existing 'real' groups; and these groups 'are constructed in the context of a relation involving the appropriation of their labour power' (9). This is fitting to the situation which Morrison writes around Sethe whose labour as a slave is unpaid and whose very survival depends on the discretion of her masters. Her membership of the slave group entails continuous subjection to an overriding power. However, in light of Guillaumin's insights we can say that it is not because Sethe is black that she is appropriated, but 'because [she is] appropriated' that she is black (9).

This means that the slaves' colour has become significant as the sign of a designated and 'distinct social collectivity' (Miles 1989:74). Guillaumin's revelation of the material circumstances of appropriation also undermine the idea that the individuals of this group possess a specific nature. That is, it is the circumstances of appropriation which establish the conditions for racial groupings and where, in a 'representational process... social significance is attached to certain human phenotypical human features' (Miles:74).

However, essentialism is avoided in Morrison's writing of Sethe and her situation at Sweet Home. The owners of the farm, the Garners, although slave owners, are minded to instil, along with their authority, a degree of autonomy amongst their slaves without, however, harming the economic well-being of their farm and themselves. Sethe's role in the kitchen and Mr Garner's attitude towards his male slaves is illustrative of this (Morrison 2004:165). It is notable that Morrison's writing in this section of the novel acknowledges Garner's awareness of the human forces at work in his slaves as he attempts to provide the conditions where their cultivation aids his business. This compliments, at this stage, Morrison's endeavour to infuse her character Sethe with the human qualities necessary to her tragic role. Also noteworthy is that the human qualities that Garner wishes to promote in his slaves are those which he finds most valuable and the result of his own ruminations on the world he is a part of. In light of this it is possible to claim that Garner considers his slaves of the same ilk as himself if only in their childlike, primitive way, and it is for him in his elevated position to improve them.

As readers we know that Sethe's mother carried her owner's mark branded into her skin and that Sethe's plea to have the same mark is violently rejected. 'This is me' her mother tells her, and this 'me' will be her identity even in death: 'if you don't recognise me when I die, you can see it's me by this mark', she tells her daughter (72). Guillaumin considers this the mark of possession, purely functional, and in which there is 'no endogenous implication and which is no different from the marking of livestock' (142). As such, we can recognise this mark as the consequence of a relationship between captured individuals and their masters, and

in Sethe's development in the context of Sweet Home, as that of a slave and member of an appropriated group who are considered, by their captors, to be underdeveloped and naive. Nevertheless, the persistence of the mark in death registers its capacity to be remembered and the admonition of Sethe by her mother is an indication of Morrison's mistrust of bringing marked bodies into the present and will be intensified when Sethe receives her own mark. It is also a sign of the doubt Morrison develops around individual efforts to establish an identity in relation to a past stolen from African Americans. Morrison's development of Sethe's human sensibilities in this situation is juxtaposed to the Garners' conceptions, but wholly personal to her in that they are centred in Sethe's overarching role as mother. Her development is quite different from the male slaves who, it can be argued, although enjoying a certain amount of autonomy, are still defined by their master.

Sethe's position as an individual who is not defined by her masters is, in part, the result of not being marked. Her mother's admonition of her for wanting to be seen as 'belonging' is clearly an indication of the horror of being labelled as property, and not human. Here is the indication, highlighted in her mother's stance, of the importance of remembering the person and not slavery. Within her mother's statement is the horrible fact that she has no recourse to any self-expression, and that she knows that, somehow, her loss in that must survive the memory of her as a slave. Sethe's characterization as an independent, conscious human being takes precedence in this, firstly, because she is being prepared for the tragic situation which Morrison has planned for her, and, secondly, because her instinctual and natural inclinations must reveal the extent to which they have

become corrupted in her owners. Mrs Garner's reluctance to acknowledge Sethe's appeals concerning her marriage to Halle is an indictment of her interpretation of the values her society promulgates (Morrison 2004:31), and enhances Sethe's claims as valid, human aspirations. Sethe, we can say, is the walking configuration of that which has been denied to her mother. We see here repeated Morrison's determination to avoid the suggestion that Sethe is in any way a character other than one whose appropriation is the cause of her situation. Unlike her mother, her appropriation is signalled in the stifling of her burgeoning self-consciousness.

Harding and Martin (1994) argue that even 'the more politically sympathetic views of classic Marxist criticism' would still tend to believe that 'the resistance of dominated groups is pre-defined by the ruling class.' This results in a situation where any self-expression by the slave is judged within the framework of 'the underdog's subordinate status' (88). With reference to the cornfield symbol, they point out that Morrison avoids this dilemma in her text by 'surcharging the oppressors' words, deriding them by subverting their most offensive strategies... rather than ignoring them or obliterating them' (94): similar, they say, to how 'ivy supports itself on another plant that it devitalizes in order to thrive' (95). This thesis would argue that this is achieved in the formulation of Sethe's consciousness at Sweet Home prior to the cornfield scene. Indeed, the Garners' interpretation of their own guiding principles is severely undermined in their attitude towards Sethe's requests; and as we shall see, their restrictions on Sethe's ability to fulfil her instincts are prerequisites for the events in the cornfield. Much like Tessa Roynon's (2013) take on the same theme, the idea that Morrison's work survives on established structures, and the dichotomies they attempt to resolve, can only be

of value if we ignore the fact of Sethe's self-consciousness and her eagerness to develop. An insight into this is Harding and Martin's response (96 note 6) to Guillaumin's (1972:90) quote concerning minorities: '... they cannot define themselves according to internal and independent references, they must do so on the basis of references available within the majority system'.

The use of this quote appears as support for the claim that 'the minority writer has the possibility only of fictionalizing the very terms in which the dominant class wants minorities to see themselves' (Harding and Martin 1994:88). In light of this concern and the risk 'difference' holds for the writer, their argument centres on the use of the corn symbol as the opportunity to undermine and redress the complex dichotomies spawned by slavery in the throwaway space secretly appropriated by the slaves. This thesis argues that this is an inaccurate reading in that at its heart it carries a flawed understanding of Morrison's attitude to difference. We would argue that Sethe's request for a marriage ceremony, a place of her own befitting a married woman, and a chance to express her contribution to the workings of Sweet Home's kitchen (Morrison 2004:31-2), are indeed the very references mentioned by Guillaumin. However, Sethe's aspirations are established as characteristics of her humanity. They mirror those of her mistress and become more definitive of Sethe the more Mrs Garner controls and appropriates them. Sethe's internal and independent references are recognisably human and conducive to human aspirations. In this sense, they conflate the independent with the majority by establishing a common humanity as the common denominator. This means that Morrison has established that the references available within the controlling system are associated with and accommodate the



internal independent references of the enslaved individual. They are present within the system because that system is made up of human beings, and they exist as the conduit through which human beings define themselves. They attract Sethe because she is a human being. This provides the opportunity to point out that in Morrison's work, the terms jealously guarded by the dominant class are exactly those which they refuse to acknowledge exist in those they dominate. Morrison has no wish to fictionalize these terms, her aim is to accentuate them. Sethe is not different, it is simply that her internal references are forbidden expression by a controlling majority unable to contemplate their embodiment in anyone else.

A failure to recognise this is to misread what is a focus on the 'subject of a group socially constituted in the context of a relation of appropriation' (Juteau-Lee 1995:13), as an effort to subvert the complexities which have grown up around the effort to hide that relation of appropriation. After all, it is not Sethe's values which are flawed in their presentation, but the system in which they are rejected. The presence of Sethe and her new husband and the remaining male slaves in the cornfield is a result of this rejection. The space they occupy is not economically essential to their owners and as such the wild animals which stray there are tolerated, and so for the slaves it is a haven; and although forbidden them, the risk of retribution is a small one. Consequently, Morrison's construction of this space acknowledges that the actions of the slaves are a result of the power and control of their masters. However, the subsequent events in this space are not contrived by Morrison to undermine or redress the reasons for their presence in it, but to illustrate how quickly, naturally and instinctively the emotional vitality and zest in life returns to these individuals: 'the jailed up flavour ran free' (Morrison 2004:33).

Montagu's description of myths as 'most effective and perilous when they remain unrecognized for what they are' (1997:41) is an apt illustration of the mythical structure which underpins the myth of white supremacy. This thesis argues that Morrison's wary aversion to these myths has resulted in her construction of a character-based system where the purpose of the symbols chosen by her, and in their progression through the various contexts given them, is to provide the senses a continuing marker for Sethe's situation as a self-conscious human being in the context of slavery. It is a device in Morrison's hands able to complement the instant and vital willingness of human beings to be resurgent in the face of degradation and adversity: humanity is simply present. More important, the strength of this marker is as the unmissable sign of what has been lost in the individual's subsequent demise.

It is clear that in the context of ownership, of unacknowledged power relations and their detachment from the universal, the structure which Morrison uses does not replicate an original structure framed in its own image, 'that newcomer which has taken the place of the gods' (Guillaumin 1995:211), but one formed by tragedy in order to make visible that which, in the absence of the gods, has become the preserve of dominating individuals who believe they form a group whose recommendations of itself constitute a central, superior position.

What is difficult for Royon, and Harding and Martin, is that Morrison's use of symbolism reverberates from Sethe and is perpetuated at length throughout the novel but remains consonant with its *raison d'être*. This is at odds with the 'ambivalence' that Harding and Martin find in the increasing 'complexity' of the symbol in its transition from Sweet Home to Bluestone Road, an ambivalence

founded in the slaves' 'entrapment in the system and resistance to it' (93).

However, there is ambivalence only if we concentrate on the entrapment and not the system. As we have seen, the system is one of appropriation and power and does not acknowledge the individuality of those it captures, which is precisely the reason for the corn symbol. Harding and Martin's conception of an interface between the system and resistance to it as a site of fresh inquiry shifts the onus onto 'the slaves' distinctive experiences of the shared icon' (93) as they put it, when in fact those experiences would be of the system.

The difficulty of sustaining this site of inquiry within the corn symbol becomes apparent in the movement from a site of slavery to one of freedom. As Harding and Martin point out (1994:93), the slaves decide to escape 'when the corn is tall' (Morrison 2004:261) and 'to meet in the cornfield,' and there is plenty of corn still to ripen even after the feast celebrating Sethe's escape is over, which Sethe 'could see from where she stood' (162-3). Because the cornfield becomes for some slaves a place of escape, and for those recaptured a place 'where the whites redouble the repression' (Harding and Martin 1994:93), the ambivalence of the symbol, for Harding and Martin, increases in a 'double-edged irony' which assists 'the symbolism of the interface' in promoting 'narrative development unrecognised by the sequential, problem-solving model conventionally applied to texts' (93). The irony, they say, is evident in the attempt to burn Sixo which reflects on the white men responsible because the fire they build is 'only enough for cooking hominy' (Morrison 2004:266). Once more, they ask the symbol to address actions for which there is no reference other than the system, because they consider it a shared register of experience and not as a constant within experience.

Clearly, hominy, as a derivative of corn, ploughs the same furrow and in its coarsely ground form it is reductive of the natural vitality of the corn itself, and its failure to quell Sixo is heard in his determined, shouted affirmation of his identity, 'Seven-O!,' which belittles the attempt to destroy it (266). It registers the vitality of the symbol and the paucity of the white man's ability to destroy it. Here we see the symbol able to reference the extent of Sethe and Sixo's involvement with the idea of a singular, independent consciousness that is not, in its possession by them, dependent on community or group affiliation. This means that the icon is responsible for the representation of a self-conscious vibrant humanity as the central, constant and established fact in this part of the novel, while the system, because of this fact, becomes increasingly repugnant in its all-knowing complexity.

The culmination of Harding and Martin's site of inquiry is that the 'parasitic' principle favoured by them would engage with 'a process of mutual and conflicting occupation of one common cultural field' (1994:95). There are two points to be made in opposition to this. First, the singularity this thesis argues for, and second, the subsequent marking of Sethe. Recognition of the singularity that the corn symbol promotes is to acknowledge that the only thing separating the singularity developed in the corn symbol and the self-centred singularity alive in the perceptions of the Garners is the system and the relation of appropriation it spawned. Existing within the corn symbol already is the 'common field' and any conflict arises out of questions of appropriation of that field.

Indeed, this match, so to speak, is the qualifier which rejects any modification of its presence. If this were not so it would mean that slaves are defined differently from other human beings, and must take the blame for their

appropriation. The grounds for these claims are found in the use of a symbol which, in its aesthetic reach, reveals to the senses human qualities which are, on the one hand, sullied and misappropriated, and, on the other, vital for life, but eternally and irrevocably possessed of everyone. The power inherent in the system will have a marked effect on this situation as schoolteacher prevents any recourse to a common ground between slave and master, but Morrison's need for the individual is cast here in the single entity she uses to achieve her aim. And this is, at this stage, to show that her characters belong to a 'real' group which is 'constituted in the context of a relation involving the appropriation of their labour' (Juteau-Lee 1995:9): subordination not difference. The problem for schoolteacher in his central position, in the effort to sustain relations of power, is how to hide this fact.

This thesis argues that, in relation to this group, Morrison's concentration on the individual is to provide a manifestation of a consciousness of a class of people in opposition to any 'spontaneous belief in themselves as a natural species' (Guillaumin 1995:234). In this aim, the development of consciousness is dependent on the development of an individual through fulfilment and despair. However, before Morrison's substitution of schoolteacher for Garner, and the movement from a collection of individuals who, sustained by their economic success, are now 'laying claim to power' (58 note 20), Morrison's presentation of individual qualities within an oppressed group requires clarification.

Sethe's individualism, framed within universally acknowledged characteristics and the vital self-consciousness of the corn symbol, although refused the chance to thrive, will seek to protect itself in escape. In this, it signals

once and for all the danger inherent in any association with the controlling white power. Notwithstanding this, an awareness of the origins of the values espoused by schoolteacher will illuminate Sethe's situation in relation to power and the guilt she expresses when saying 'I made the ink' (Morrison 2004:320). In Guillaumin's terms (1995), unlike the individual unconscious which becomes visible only in 'transpositions', for example Garner's transposition of concerns for the development of his slaves' characters into strategies for economic gain through appropriation, 'the social unconscious shows itself at face value'. This means that 'ideologies, like uncensored dreams, literally speak the obsessions and magic imprecations of their culture' (58 note 20). The face value that Guillaumin describes can be said in Morrison's work to be the behaviour of schoolteacher: what you see is what you get. Schoolteacher sees to it that Sethe's 'human characteristics' and her 'animal ones' (Morrison 2004:228) are written down, and in doing so positions himself as 'both a biological being and a thinking subject...the measure of all things' (Dumont 1972:44) in his superiority over Sethe. Regarding himself as an 'individual, elementary man' in his particularity, he 'incarnates the whole of mankind' (44). In this sense, 'values are turned upside down', because 'what is still called society is the means, the life of each man is the end' (44). This implies that for the individual, his society's characteristic spirit and aspiration are fulfilled in his elevation of himself. Consequently, constituted in notions of liberty and equality, society cannot deny him those very same notions, that is, it cannot 'thwart the demands of liberty and equality' (44). We can say that the character schoolteacher, in his individual actions, literally speaks the obsessions of his culture which are fulfilled in its ability to mediate his actions into the free expression

of the individual which it preserves: society as an irreducible 'datum' of the claims of its members (44). Dumont's summing up of this situation is that the 'ideal of liberty and equality follows immediately from the conception of man as an individual' (46). Dumont's observation offers a framework for the context of Sethe's subsequent marking by schoolteacher, because the system incarnate in schoolteacher 'grants real existence only to individuals and not to relations' between them (1986:11).

Dumont offers two alternative aspects to the individualism discussed here which go some way to unravelling the violence perpetrated against Sethe by schoolteacher. The first is the idea that society consists of 'individuals prior to the group of relationships they constitute or make more or less of their own accord' (74). In this reading society becomes an associated body of individuals in contract. Secondly, in contrast, and to stress his idea that individualism is a form of 'ideology', he registers the idea that society with its institutions and values is prior to its 'particular members, the latter being human beings only through education into and modelling by a given society' (74). The first of these two, where individual essence and interaction separate 'the individual from the relation', is deemed essentially modern (Dumont 1972:77), and the second, where the individual appears the product of a network of relations, appears to be the system overturned by the modern and one where, in Dumont's words, 'the interdependence' of the individual elements is so great that the relations between them all but disappear as 'they become the product of that network of relations,' undermining the notion of the individual element (78).

In light of these considerations, it becomes possible to spot schoolteacher within the modern framework, where the individual incarnate of the whole perceives the system in which he thrives to be consonant with his own idea of himself. In other words, in one consciousness there are joined the material values of society and the ability to 'spiritualize matter' into human sensibilities (Ziarek 2012:141). And of Sethe we can say that there is not, because 'white bodies erase their materiality in the reflection of social values' from which black bodies are excluded (141) in a lack of relation. Morrison is bent on revealing that schoolteacher's refusal to accept this human being is because, as a human being, she is unrecognisable to him. For schoolteacher, Sethe is there to make real the dream he lives; not to share the 'peculiarity' of what he 'regards as normal' (Macfarlane 1993:4).

In the attempt to resolve these difficulties, Sethe's admission to Paul D that schoolteacher 'couldn't have done it if I hadn't made the ink' (Morrison 2004[1987]:320) is an indication of Morrison's insights into white power and the appropriation of black individuals. It was 'Mrs Garner's recipe' Sethe tells him, but schoolteacher preferred how she 'mixed it' and this 'was important to him' because 'at night he wrote in his book' (44). Sethe's admission is an indication of the mistake she felt she had made in allowing schoolteacher a glimpse in her of that which is expressed in the corn symbol. His personal preferences are now satisfied by Sethe which means she is now a part of the system of means which fulfil the ends of the individual in a relationship of power. And it is this relationship which is foremost in the structure of this stage of Morrison's method. Sethe's position as means would run concomitant with the subordination of Mrs Gardner in the context



of the patriarchy at Sweet Home, if it was not for her recipe. Because of it, she remains superior to Sethe and in this underlines Sethe's position as a person who is forbidden any self-authorization at all. In this Sethe's subjugation is maintained as the novel establishes that the best use is made of her within the perceptions of her owners. The corn symbol supersedes the lack of any mark similar to that branded into her mother, but it is not visible to schoolteacher, and as the measure of all things he is able to record and thus objectify his superiority as an individual over her as stereotype.

Her attempt to be free of him is a promotion of her consciousness and a rejection of the 'kingdom of ends' (Dumont 1972:44) which provides him with his. It is a rejection of the very man himself. Her escape establishes in her a quality for which the modern world 'grants real existence only to individuals and not to relations' between them (Dumont 1986:11). Sethe does not exist in any terms appropriate to schoolteacher's consciousness and she must remain a means to his ends. Her punishment is the imposition of the mark which classifies her finally as non-human and whose role as chattel is finite, inviolable. And in this her outside does not represent what she is but what he says she is. In making the ink she has promoted his view of her in the process of demeaning herself. Her humanity is hidden in this imposition and this means she is now unable to articulate who she is. It is preserved inside her but not available to any symbol other than the tree which schoolteacher opens up on her back. In this situation there can be no self-authorization for Sethe because she is considered as something outside the system of values where value is self-regulated and self-referential.

Schoolteacher regards her as chattel and not as a subject being. The practical everyday sense of the conflict between oppressor and oppressed is superseded by ideological considerations of consciousness. The oppressors or dominators deny a consciousness to the oppressed 'because they take them to be things' (Guillaumin 1995: 215). In their elevated state the dominators see themselves as having moved beyond the natural state they perceive to be present in those below them, who, they believe, are 'precisely... the pre-programmed elements of this nature' (211). Schoolteacher wishes to write this down as the signifier which will, along with the mark on her back, register Sethe as forever inferior to him. Theweleit points out that 'the language of man is governed and the thinking of the (male) theoretician ruled by the signifier' (1989:51). He describes it as 'an instrument that etches order into meaning – a pointer, a prescription' (51). It certifies that appropriation by a certain group of people 'is what makes the world function properly' and things should remain as they are as 'this will avoid disorder' and preserve 'true values and eternal priorities' (Guillaumin 1995:217). As a pointer and an indication of a common absence, it is able to register that between the individual slaves there is a common lack of humanity.

In Sethe's tragic denouement she kills the best of herself to avoid the contamination of the signifier; to avoid the contamination which is schoolteacher. In this act Sethe the human being is on full show, but for the last time. The signifier provided by schoolteacher hides the human essence of the slave, and brings to mind, any mind, the base nature he prescribes for her. In its attention on the individual it is able to hide the relationship in which she is constituted. The practicalities of appropriation can be seen as giving way to an ideology which

provides confirmation for the actions of the masters and makes real the dubious nature of schoolteacher's prescription. In the distance Morrison opens up between writing tragedy and the written signifier, we can understand how the masters' narratives have become confined to writing either the confirmation for the order their position provides them, or the 'apocalyptic turmoil-from castration to the end of the earth's rotation' (Guillaumin: 217) should that order be undermined.

Writing of this Goldman (1990) says that the ink is 'the evidence of the labourer whose work would articulate her own authority' (326). This implies that her beating is designed to remove this authority and to reassert his control, but his use of the ink she made has enabled him already to consolidate his own opinion of himself in writing and as a reference for others, and makes his elevation a fact. However, her escape is to prevent the continuation of this; to prevent it being a fact of her life. In this line of thinking we can find Morrison's motivation for establishing Sethe's guilt in the ink she made. It is in the context of Sethe as a loss of means that Morrison wishes us to contemplate her beating. Goldman's positioning of Sethe's subjectivity as the ground of the conflict flies in the face of this. Her beating is a result of her bid to escape because his consciousness measures her as a means and exercises its right to be the measure of all things. Schoolteacher is measuring in ink and establishing in writing the distance between Sethe and the datum of himself, and the sign of his findings will remain on her back forever as a lie in which she played a part. It is as if Morrison is recording the recording of difference measured and plotted in relation to power. She has not written schoolteacher simply as an appropriator, but to reveal that this means the appropriation of everything and all sensibilities in his elevation within power.

It is important to keep this idea of power central in order to gauge fully Morrison's intent. As we have seen in the work of Harding and Martin, and Goldman, the line between form and content can become blurred and result in a lack of clarity surrounding the character Sethe. In Morrison's work, Sethe, as a member of the human race, is a fact, and non-negotiable. It is the expression of this essence which registers conflict after conflict because once it is in the open and visible, it belongs not to her but to someone else: appropriation. This is the true ground of the conflict acknowledged by Morrison. However, it would be a mistake to think that the essence so vibrant in the slaves of Sweet Home will be contested. In conjunction with this is the hint that, unlike Mrs Garner and her refusal to consider any self-authorization for Sethe in her kitchen, the ink made by Sethe is a contribution in these terms to her sense of achievement. She has, in its making, allowed a brief glimpse of an aspiration to dignity formed through doing something well. Unlike the corn symbol, the ink provides a momentary or partial view into that which is covered by the veil, which is the slave's self-expression. Aspiration is now visible in its separation, in the form of the ink, from the whole defined as slave and we find it to be, in this state, at its most vulnerable. The corn symbol expresses something singular to each slave, but the ink is something expressed in a relationship of power with the hint that it may have been better kept to itself. In these terms it is expressive of the modalities adopted by those whose body and soul have been appropriated. However, if it goes unrecognized as such because of the power relations in which it takes place, Sethe's spirit will be seen as conforming to schoolteacher's judgement of it, not least by her. It is noteworthy that her admission concerning the ink is in the concluding part of the novel, and in

a period of introspection in which she contemplates the effect on her of appropriation. It is the realisation that she acted as she did out of ignorance, and changes her memory, the reality, of what happened to her. She blames herself for what was her appropriation by others and still feels the measure of schoolteacher's ink against her most human of actions. But we only truly know her by the human actions which are her downfall. In a quirk now evident in the most complex of themes, the importance of distinguishing between form and content in Sethe's denouement is finally surrendered when the effects of slavery are made plain. In the final pages of the novel her guilt becomes the measure of the character she has become; in effect she is now modern in that her demeanour is now a reaction to the events around her and she will be judged on her ability to deal with them. Unfortunately, as the result of the most awful circumstances, she is unable to configure those circumstances in relation to her: the mark she carries now hides the real reasons she has become the person she believes she is. The result of power is that the modalities of existence under power are regarded as individual traits by the individual concerned as well as their oppressor.

Ziarek (2012) acknowledges that 'the activity of the spirit, in contrast to... racialized sensibilities and passive matter, has been associated with the self-determination of the subject and the constitution of meaning'. In this context, 'the self determining spirit of both idealism and materialism is illusory and violent' (178). This means that 'when separated from the sensuous, the spirit of freedom reverses into the domination of materiality and otherness' (178). Consequently, we can say that if the spirit of freedom is not available to the imagination then it appears nothing more than the expression of sensibilities peculiar to a racialized object, and

as passive matter that is as tainted as the criteria imposed on it by power. In Adorno's words, it signals 'the concretion of the aesthetic structure' (2013:127).

Ziarek also confirms that a spirit available to the imagination 'preserves the traces of expressive capacities in the remnants of materiality reduced to waste' (179), which is to say at the hands of the controlling power. Ziarek points out that the struggle between form and content simply transforms the subject into 'a mere reflection of the hegemonic subject' (181). The Hegelian aesthetic, she says, 'underscores the struggle' in that it 'preserves the alterity of the material' (180). The conflict for Ziarek, then, is between the continuing presence of the form which, 'despite the labour of spiritualization', still retains traces of alterity, and the Hegelian aesthetic which 'defines the perfection of classical art as a harmony of form and content' (181). In Ziarek's reasoning, the contradiction between 'the interior and exterior', that is the lingering insinuations of difference perpetuating in the spiritualized form, characterizes all art in the 'different modalities' of that contradiction (181). The modalities of difference identified by Ziarek, in opposition to the Hegelian aesthetic, can she says, provide 'a feminist trans-valuation of aesthetic values associated with the devalued feminine, blackness, and materiality' (180); and not least in their ability to produce, in the form of the enigma, an 'absolute blackness' capable of 'exceeding comprehension' (184). This is in opposition to Hegel's vision of the self-knowledge gained by the individual resultant of experiencing the power which dominates materiality, bodies and nature.

The knowledge gained in this new state facilitates the recognition and contestation of the power which perpetuates this domination: in Kaminsky's words (1970:23), 'a full awareness of the place and role of man in the world'. Essentially,

the individual recovers 'a conception of free activity' in a response of her choosing as a natural being, or 'in virtue of some inescapable vocation or purpose' (Taylor 1992:160). This means that her response, although accepted universally as a human response, is that of an individual existence. First and foremost it must be peculiar to her before it can be recognised by the imagination of everyone. This must be so because the unity achieved between form and content is appropriately available to the 'spiritual interests', the imagination, of the observer (Hegel 2004[1886]:44). Consequently, the representation before the observer is not conducive to an external inquiry into internal essences because its form is the semblance of that which resides in each observer: their private claims as separate, individual, human beings. The universal as particular to the individual is revealed in an action where form, because it is harmonious with content, predominates. There can be no appeal otherwise. She is the essence, but for the watchers she resembles something they always knew to be true. As Taylor points out (1992:159), this goes beyond the notion of 'a self-dependent will' because of 'its insertion in nature', and whose choice is free of desire. This, then, is the Hegelian spirit situated within the 'free subject' which will progress to 'enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a mere external reality of himself' (36). This level of perception we can say links the individual to her environment as the possessor of an understanding relative to the human condition. However, this is the contradiction to which Ziarek draws our attention: the recognition of humanity in the denouement of the individual, and the disappearance of that humanity in the form which survives; and of course the artist's ability to revitalize that spirit at will.

A necessary part of this argument is the visibility of the modalities of difference which survive the tragic denouement, the remnants associated with the enigma: absolute blackness and a capability for 'exceeding comprehension' (Ziarek 2012:184). Ziarek regards as 'a unique accomplishment...art's relation to traces of materiality and alterity, to what remains non-identical: remnants of non-symbolizable matter' (183). This implies an interaction with the non-conceptual, and Ziarek's argument is that the enigma is capable of making an intervention into hegemonic structures of power and control: the possibility of 'political transformation' and of 'new embodied forms of life' (189). The idea that the unknowable can replace the essential and prevent the individual being representative of the mass is a powerful argument. However, if the enigma is to be disassociated from any known beginning, it must also deny any association with appropriation. And in this, it must take full responsibility for itself and look to itself for its reasons for action. Unfortunately, there is no reason for absolute blackness other than in opposition to whiteness.

Along with this, it is difficult to resolve the idea of the enigma with the remnants of materiality, the alterity which brings it about. The doubt remains that the enigma is not possessed of any semblance of that to which it aspires. What is not mentioned is the origin of this difference. In light of this omission it is necessary to consider that if the sensuous presentation of the particular fails, then what is the equivalence of that failure in dramatic time? A failure to ask this question is to misappropriate or ignore altogether the motivations for alterity. The result of this is a mistaken concentration on the form which is now bereft of any content whatsoever as a result of its tragic denouement, as the spotlight moves



from the tragic figure to the claim it lost. It then becomes clear that the lost claim of the tragic figure is shocked into becoming the remaining semblance of that required by the artist. Essentially, in believing that the demise of the tragic figure is partial, ideas of alterity can only survive as a contradiction in terms. The Hegelian aesthetic is not preserving the alterity of the material, but signalling the complete demise of the tragic figure. This is a contributing factor in the emotional reach of the tragic denouement when the character strives for recognition of that which, incarnate in her actions, can only defeat her. Tragedy in its success plays in two spotlights, that of the tragic figure and the claim it loses.

For a centrality not conceived in any recognisably human terms, and, therefore, unrecognisable to itself, the enigma becomes the means by which this central datum of self-aggrandizement is able to locate itself in its own prescriptions. The enigmatic form risks appearing as the effort to present free activity within the prescribed schemes of the controlling power: schemes which it must account for. In this context, we cannot say that one is resultant of the other because of the regression of human distinctions in both. They simply share equivalence in a relation of power and repression. Morrison's presentation of tragedy avoids these pitfalls through employing a tragic framework whose essential principle is the humanity of the tragic figure and its loss. Essentially, her character enters the tragic scene as human and leaves defeated and bereft, because losing that which is treasured above all else means losing everything. Because of this, any remnants of materiality would be those prescribed by power onto this defeated figure. This is vividly expressed by the marks on Sethe's back which become, in Morrison's aesthetic, the permanent expression of that which replaces what she

has lost: the mark which says she is anything her masters wish to say she is.

There can be no recourse to expressive capacities in remnants of materiality in a loss so great, and a signification so overwhelming.

Goldman (1990) confirms schoolteacher's and other slave owners' economic motives for their brutal repression of runaways. But the gist of her argument is that 'schoolteacher's appropriation of milk and ink marks the origin of his control' (326), and his indebtedness to her. However, it is the appropriation of her labour that is at the heart of the argument. Goldman's insights are really aimed at the effect on Sethe of her appropriation. Both Goldman and Ziarek consider that sovereign power is dependent on the subjugation of slaves, when it should be pointed out that the subjugation of the slave is as a result of a power which in its operation obliterates any understanding of the individual, human sensibilities of its captives.

This is evident in Hegel's master-slave narrative. Applied to Sethe's situation it would entertain the idea that she is seeking, in her manufacture of the ink, a 'recognition' by schoolteacher of her 'independence', something in this discussion we have referred to as self-awareness. However, the recognition she may seek, for Hegel, must be reciprocal in that the development of self-consciousness is dependent on a meeting between two separate beings. The self-consciousness of each individual consequent on this meeting is constituted in the recognition by them of the other as a self-conscious being: recognition by each of self-consciousness in the other person establishes a self-consciousness for each.

'The process of Recognition' described by Hegel involves the supersession of one independent being by another in order 'to become certain of itself as the

essential being' (Hegel 1977[1807]:111). Sethe would be conscious that she had done something significant in making the ink, but also able to register that schoolteacher recognizes her actions in precisely the same way. As a consequence, Sethe would not consider him as essential because, in this reciprocal moment, becoming certain of herself, in Hegel's words becoming essential, she would supersede schoolteacher and her own self in this acknowledgement of her own conceptual self from outside. Recognition of the self in another is an elevation in reciprocity: each independent being becoming an essential being and self-contained by seeing 'the other do the same as it does' (112). Her idea of herself is now established and she no longer needs affirmation for this, which is another way of saying she no longer needs him or the person she was a moment before. In this new context, she possesses a true knowledge of herself, or a spirit, which, in the extent to which it is 'for itself', and 'out of itself' (112), renders her truly independent in the face of an independence she no longer recognizes as determining her. As independent beings in this 'play of Forces' (112), 'they are for one another like ordinary objects, independent shapes, individuals submerged in the being (or immediacy) of life' (113). Although the product of a process involving two people, independent being in this sense is now extremely private and selective in its certainty of itself, or rather in remaining certain of itself.

Brandom (2008) frames Hegel's theory within a social context. He points out that 'the judgements that potentially express knowledge and our intentional doings are things that we are responsible for' (3). The intentional things for which we are responsible are classed by Brandom as normative notions. A normative

notion we can say is a perception that an action relates to or derives from existing standards of behaviour within a particular society. Our commitment to them is recognized in our gaining responsibility for them. It is this commitment which allows us 'to bind ourselves by concepts' which become normative statuses (30). Brandom argues that these are 'essentially social statuses' and, in line with Hegel's insights, he points out that those individuals who become self-conscious as a consequence of being 'able to bind themselves to conceptual norms are synthesized by reciprocal recognition' (3). Reciprocal recognition in these terms means that the individual can attain responsibility by doing something which is recognised by others as sufficiently fulfilling social norms for them to hold her responsible. Responsibility, then, is manifest in a situation where others can hold the individual responsible. In Brandom's words, 'I have to be recognised by them as doing something that has normative significance, and I have to recognise them as able to recognise me in that way in order for me genuinely to be responsible for anything' (3).

The significance of this is that the individual becomes bound by conceptual norms in the process of forming a self-consciousness within reciprocal recognition. This enlarges the idea of the context of recognition by pointing out 'the social character of that normativity' (3).

Reciprocal recognition is, then, 'a social achievement' which 'happens between ourselves' (4). In these terms Sethe would have the authority to be able to believe in herself. This would be a singular achievement in that it is 'for itself' and not society. The for itself is accomplished in recognition of its responsibility for normative statuses but rises above this to achieve authority in itself, an authority

outside the normative concepts which provided it. However, reciprocity involves normative beings committed to 'how things are' or to conceptual thinking concerning 'how things are to be' (4): normative status as a derivative of normative attitudes. Once again we are reminded that autonomy is a result of the individual committing herself to and acknowledging the authority from which she derives her status as a self-conscious being. This is implicit in the recognition of her normative status she sees in the other being.

If we are to be satisfied that the relation of Sethe and schoolteacher fits this framework, 'authority and responsibility' must be 'commensurate and reciprocal' for the 'actual normative statuses' to be instituted (4). If we consider Sethe's production of the ink as something she is forced to do then its significance for her must be tarnished. Additionally, she has to recognise in schoolteacher his ability to recognise in her the normative significance of her action. This cannot be, because her action enables him to signify her animal characteristics in writing. This argument, it is true, is closely associated with Morrison's attempts to disprove a master-slave relationship between Sethe and schoolteacher, but it is also indicative of the lack of social appropriateness involved in slave actions, and, consequently, in their conceptual normative quality regarding reciprocal recognition. Brandom's assessment is that in these circumstances recognition is actually 'asymmetric' recognition, producing on the master's side 'authority without responsibility', and on the side of the slave, 'responsibility without authority' (4). This means that the slave is unable to bind to others by fulfilling normative concepts because as a slave she will never be recognised or accepted into the social world which appropriates her, body and soul. The extent of this appropriation is evident in its ability to

encumber the natural recognition of one human being by another. The slaves' appropriation takes place within a society of masters whose conceptual norms are closely guarded to the extent that the slaves will become visibly marked to show their common lack of them.

The argument put forward here is that although arranged and presented as arising naturally from a real-time situation, Morrison's treatment of the slave experience in a recreation of the past is a fitting and critically valuable exposition of the appropriation of the self and not its constitution. We can support this by using Brandom's insight that 'Hegel's discussion of the dialectic of the master and slave is an attempt to show that asymmetric re-cognitive relations are metaphysically defective' (4). He points out that 'no actual normative statuses are instituted' unless authority and responsibility are 'commensurate and reciprocal' (4). In line with this we can say that Morrison's choice of the ink is to indicate that wherever she is or whatever she does, the appropriated slave's relation with her master is framed within his signification of her as anything he chooses: all or any of her actions are considered appropriate to this aim. The ink as a signifier is appropriation incarnate. This is the horrible truth that forms and ferments in our contemplation of Sethe's ability to make good ink, escape, or to be a good mother to her children.

Morrison's choice of form for *Beloved* ensures that the reader is unaware of Sethe's production of the ink until she is alone with Paul D in the final moments of the novel. We must assume that the making of the ink took place, unknown to us, sometime before Sethe escaped from Sweet Home. This would mean that the motive for her escape, schoolteacher's recording of Sethe's animal characteristics,

and her making of the ink for that recording, remain unconnected in Sethe's mind as she hears schoolteacher's instructions to his nephews. The moment in which she regrets making the ink is kept separate from her previous experience in order to preserve and prioritise the sense of self-awareness, the best of herself, she exhibits at that time. This is an imperative for Morrison in order to be able to express in her narrative exactly what will be lost through appropriation, and the full extent of the role of appropriation in this loss. Tragedy provides the framework able to bypass the inclusive and all-encompassing influence of the signifier: Sethe destroys herself as the only way to avoid contamination in an act whose depth of despair is the measure of its full impact on her.

Schoolteacher's nephew's 'What she go and do that for?' (Morrison 2004:176) is a result of two things: an ignorance of the presence of another human being and of an absolute, omniscient power which is the source of that ignorance. We would take issue with the hidden dependence of power in Ziarek's (2012) argument. The power which is the backdrop to schoolteacher's behaviour enables him to register his needs in his characterization of Sethe in writing and in her physical appearance. The aim in this is to endorse a consciousness derived from unlimited powers: that is to make tangible the individual's dream world activated by power. It would be more fitting to establish damaged flesh as the behaviour manifest in unlimited power; not as the mark of dependence. The recording of Sethe's human traits and her beating go hand in hand in this sense: the proof of who he is in writing and the marking of her body. It is not that he wishes to

appropriate her subjectivity, but that he is the sole measure of it as irreducible datum: he will judge what is and what is not.

The expressive capacity in Morrison's work is preserved in the content and form used to develop it. The separation of matter and form is not partial but complete in that it is Sethe prostrate on a pink headstone, and *Beloved* elsewhere, which signals her surrender to power and its omnipotence. If we write of remnants of materiality, that is, that which remains after the rejection of a claim to life, then we must write about that which has been rejected as if it no longer existed, and as if it did not exist to the extent we were claiming. We must write, instead, the exodus, the leaving of life if it is to be preserved for recognition. Perhaps what Ziarek is really calling for, within the remnants of Sethe's potential, is the return of the personal and emotive longing which filled the vacuum created by appropriation and expulsion, but which has nothing to do with materiality at all.

The arguments put forward here concerning Morrison's themes inevitably move the onus for action onto the slave to prove her humanity in the context of its denial. And yet this would lose sight of the difficulty, with schoolteacher in mind, of speaking the unspeakable. If we remember that it is for her to decide the very best she can be, then how could she speak? This gives a sense of the immovable from which African American writing must disengage if it is to rid itself of the need to prove its critical faculties. This is the disengagement we find in Morrison's work, and factored in by her engagement with the sensibilities of her characters. For a true sense of the context in which any claim must take place we must remember that the system of power relations within this type of society is 'a signifying system whose key characteristic is the irreversibility which it confers on such a society's



rending of reality' (Guillaumin 1995:30). Not only is someone else the judge of everything, but that judgement cannot be changed by any appeal because it is founded in signs which have no bearing on any reality other than power. It is a judgement delivered in vindication of itself whose consequence is the difference it imposes on the others. Sethe does not make a claim to this majority group but she and those like her will be marked as different from a majority who regards itself as universal and as incorporating the norm. What her group does have in common is their subordination to the system but this is hidden by their supposed difference. Difference labels this subordinated group as a category, a type 'existing of and by themselves' when in reality 'they are constructed in the context of a social relation of domination and dependence' (Jutean-Lee 1995:17).

The use of signifiers is the result of individuals being appropriated to a specific category. In the case of the slaves, it is the appropriation of their bodies, their labour, 'as well as the products of their bodies and of their labour' (5): their physical, material individuality. In this context, signifiers are not chosen 'haphazardly' (6) but are the result of an association between an economic relationship and physical attributes. Hence, the assertion that the slaves' colour is a result of them being slaves: 'slavery as a system was not built on the appearance of its agents' (6). However, colour as a sign is permanent and lasted as long as the social category of slavery existed, if not longer. Consequently, the labour of black bodies came to be associated with their modes of behaviour and with their subordinate position. This meant that individuals of colour were interchangeable in their appropriation, implying that all black people were suitable or proper in their circumstances for field work, domestic work or any activity their owners devised.

The chronological order provided by Guillaumin, that is, first slavery and the appropriation of individuality in a social category, then the invention of an ideology of representational processes, culminates in the signifier becoming the sign of a specific nature.

The slaves, then, are appropriated as a class and their individuality denied. This means that collective appropriation has taken place before private appropriation (Guillaumin: 217-8). If an individual is appropriated, that person's qualities are judged on their performance of the tasks they are obliged to perform under the influence of power. In this case the overriding consideration is that the acquired individuals 'were not previously explicitly and institutionally destined for appropriation' (218). This is in contrast to the slave population of whom Guillaumin writes as being appropriated, 'logically ordered... and then characterized by a constant symbolic sign' (218). Here, then, are the beginnings of the idea of nature, developed with a group of people in mind. Power is no longer present, other than to control those already symbolically signed, as nature is assumed to be the measure and measurer of everything and accompanies the group and all its individuals from birth to the grave. The class of the marked, so to speak, has at its foundation a signifier which refers to a class born out of a social relationship of power, and without this relationship it would not exist. The signifier, then, can be seen to emanate from the relationship, and as a concept born of the powerful. In the bizarre ordering of this situation, the dominant group are not representative of nature, as that belongs to black slaves, but must be assumed as having developed a sophistication out of nature which is then a mark of their superior status above and beyond their economic requirements. For the slave it means the possession

of a nature absent in everyone but them. They alone can be defined as floating in 'a universe of eternal essences which completely encircles them' and from which there is no escape, and where, 'enclosed in their beings' they fulfil duties that only nature assigns them' (220): they are seen as programmed from within for the life assigned to them. Consequently, if black African slaves are internally programmed with natural predispositions, each member of this group becomes simply a fragment of the whole.

This is the peculiar idea that 'the actions of a human group or class are natural; that they are independent of social relationships, that they pre-exist all history and all determined concrete conditions' (217). Nature has now superseded a certain type of social relationship in the enslavement of people. We can see that the perceptions of reality of the dominant group have been developed by Morrison through the presentation of the Garners' attitudes to slavery, and the culmination in schoolteacher of Guillaumin's idea of the superiority which spawned 'the ideological form of a certain type of social relationship' (146). And this ideological form is the belief, in perpetuation, that there are natural groups: an ideology that insists that its appropriated individuals each possess the identical characteristics by which the group is recognised en masse. That which we see here is a transition from the traditional, functional mark of ownership to a 'deterministic system which sees in any object whatever a substance which secretes its own causes' (142).

The situation developed by Morrison has as its protagonists two characters who represent, by one means or another, an independence in nature, of thought, which resonates in the modern consciousness as possessing in itself its own cause. The most powerful of the two is convinced of his elevation through, we can

argue, having developed a natural (no less!) sensibility as a superior being representative of his group. The other one is expressive of recognisable human characteristics which have been appropriated by the power of superiority. It is pertinent in this context to consider that both characters are representative of their respective groups in the eyes of any casual observer and in each one's consideration of the other: as a black group or as a white group. What is not visible is the relationship on which their considerations are based nor the criteria each one is assigned. We are left with colour. If whiteness equals superiority expressed through power, then blackness is the subordination resultant of that power. And with the use of colour the real reason for this situation becomes increasingly hidden. Nature is everything, but if your appearance and actions are thought to be different, anything can be said of you and your natural disposition, especially in relation to a central datum which adapts the vanity of its wishes supremely well to situations such as those in this discussion.

In this system, the subordinated individual is observed as practising, developing or trying to conceal those traits which are his by the will of those over him. The individual and his/her behaviour is always closely assigned to the group because of its signifying mark. Because of this, the notion of 'essential nature' and 'biological specificity' (31) becomes 'the necessary ingredients' in a signifying system of racism. The specific and essential nature prescribed for the individual will, in its irreversible readings of reality and the gift it has for hiding the relationship which constituted it, become the ideological ingredient for signifying the inferiority of whole populations thought to be different.

Sethe's escape from schoolteacher is closely tied to preserving the best of herself signified by the kicking 'fawn' in her womb. This is presented in two ways: by the fawn of the future in her womb, and the scrape in the ground provided for it by schoolteacher, prior to her beating, meant to preserve her white master's wealth and power. We recognise her beating as the evidence that they are determined to keep the best of herself within their jurisdiction. They feel this to be the right and proper order of things of which they are the cause, the proof of which is the society they represent and which represents them in perpetuity. Because their nature has become the measure of everything, it must continue to measure everything or else it would become invisible and its *raison d'être* opaque. The mark given to Sethe clarifies or rather makes real an ideology. Because Sethe's true situation is hidden within the ideological opaqueness which surrounds it, the need to reveal it becomes essential to the African American writer at the risk its development will be construed as the base nature schoolteacher believes he has left behind.

The argument put forward here is that in the presentation of this most awful of situations, Morrison ensures that the imposition of difference, the mark on Sethe's back, is schoolteacher's doing and, more important, that its presentation is within the concepts which make up his own false reality. Her writing here torpedoes a reality whose sustenance is appropriation of the individuality of others. In this, colour has played little or no part at all because its signification must give way to a mark which, consonant with Morrison's aim must, finally, be put to rest. Colour would be something brought to the situation by the slaves themselves and would provide an instant and direct conduit for the concept of race, and its signification as essentialism. Morrison's method is to refuse this and to insist on a

presentation of difference which avoids the emblem which race has become. Her use of a mark instead is to underline that the notion of race is founded on a majority group's 'belief in its own naturalness' (Guillaumin 1995:50). In Morrison's work this means that the relations between groups 'are governed by the definition which those who institutionally control power give of themselves', and 'value is derived from those same characteristics' (50). According to Guillaumin, this type of system has as its referent, race, and this can be based either on the doctrine of appearance or its successor, nature: race remains ascendant but 'it can be either auto-referential or altero-referential' (50). The auto-referential system is centred on the self, and Guillaumin's for instance is the defunct aristocracy and its 'pre-eminence', and for whom its race symbolism was specific to them. Socially, everything emanated from this group who saw themselves as different from those people who made up the other groups. Race referred to them and their superior position but not to their 'naturalness': they were simply different, and race signified difference as superiority, a race apart.

Conversely, altero-referential racism is centred 'on the other group or groups' (50). It manages entirely to place the dominant group outside any frame of reference and, consequently, the individual within this group has little awareness of belonging to a specific group. Guillaumin calls this the 'occultation of the self' (50), which is able to sustain a reality in which the dominated are different but where the principles of superiority remain unknown. This group, in opposition to an auto-referential group, is blissfully unable to 'recognise' or 'define' any 'self group' at all to the extent that while 'designating others as belonging to one,' its belief in its centrality prevents it from seeing or specifying itself a race (52). The common

factor here is still race, but this time it presents as 'the signifier of perceived difference' (51) in a subjugated group and is characterized by 'blindness about oneself' and an 'obsession with difference' (52). Because difference makes an appeal to biological criteria, it heralds the complete disappearance of the individual, and physical appearance becomes the singular visible sign which he/she has in common with everyone else in the group. The individual is reduced to 'a mere actualization of the species' (53), a species whose obscure origins are now hidden in an unknown past, in contrast to the aristocratic group, who sustained themselves through ideas of a knowable past stretching back into a history of titles and the accumulation of property: the 'type' of 'race' which signifies the slave group reduces them to a degree of closure in which they are frozen in time, having no recourse to the past or the future. In this situation the significance of skin colour as a basis of classification becomes 'transformed into the expression of a specific nature' (Jutean-Lee 1995:6). As a contributor to the opaqueness surrounding the situation of the slave, it posits the signifier 'as preceding the classification, as causing the classification', and, eventually, as a sign of the slave's position, or lack of a place, in society (6).

In this context, Morrison's choice of the mark, and the avoidance of colour, is the device able to reject notions of an essential nature. It resists the closure dictated by colour, and which identifies black slaves as one 'undifferentiated mass' (Guillaumin 1995:53). It is important, in avoiding race as a referent, to establish the presence of individuality. However, if the central cause, appropriation, for the formulation of the slave group is hidden, how is it possible to present the men and women of the group as individuals whose reactions to their situation are diverse?

The sub groups within the group, we can argue, are male and female slaves; field slaves; farm slaves; and house slaves whose domestic duties entail a close proximity with their masters, his family and the nuances of domesticity.

As we have seen with Sethe, her ink-like qualities are contrasted and recorded along with her animal characteristics in a construction which specifies her essentialism rather than 'escaping it' (Juteau-Lee 1995:17). The point here is that the signifier which registers her essentialism will activate, reactivate and dominate given even the smallest opportunity. It is the active ideology which hides the truth, and the opaqueness it generates intensifies its ability to disseminate individual expression, regarding it as simply a fragment of the permanent and fixed nature assigned to the whole. This will be the situation for all the individuals in the sub-categorizations in operation under the heading, 'race'.

Placing these considerations alongside Morrison's methods we find that her character Sethe's experiences and her reactions to them are examined in terms of the modalities of her appropriation. Their distance from accusations of fixity and closure is increased in 'their articulation alongside other forms of subordination' (18), especially in their contrast with the experiences of Paul D. Significantly, in order to avoid 'fragmenting the subject into multiple identities' (16), Morrison's method is not to dismiss the signifier as a common denominator of group behaviour and fixed properties, but to preserve it in another form. In this way the chokecherry tree remains forever the sign of the appropriation of Sethe's human sensibility and translates into an expression of the subjugation of a member of the human race. In this way Sethe is marked as different, but only in the sense that she is different from that which schoolteacher says she is. His incarnation of the



norm is suspect because it cannot embrace anything outside the centrality which is its foundation. Finally, because of this, Sethe's effort must fail in Morrison's effort to sustain the debilitating power of the mark as the background to her demise.

The result is that, in terms of method, we have a character who is not different in any way at all from any other human being, but is marked as different at the behest of a power so great it is impossible to do anything about it in practical terms. Following Jutean-Lee, in this situation to claim the right to be different, 'be it ethically, racially, or sexually', would simply reinforce the perceptions of the dominating group (17), who may pander to these claims to establish them as givens, and absolute. In this sense the marginalized individual would be asking for what she/he already has: the controlling power 'will not take away' that which makes the slaves different (Guillaumin 1995:255). Not making a claim, then, has resulted in the social relations between slave and master, under the arbitrary signifier of race, being seen less in terms of fixed categories and more as the revelation of the conditions of appropriation. Underlying the use of a mark at all times is Morrison's refusal to theorize the relations between master and slave, and her determination to promote the relationship between master and slave as a facilitator of a signifier and not a consciousness. The mark carried by Sethe, it is argued, is Morrison's device for facilitating an understanding of the relations which constitute and construct the categories which signify enslaved individuals as a natural species. For Morrison, 'identity is the construction of a unity resting not on a common substance' but on an awareness of an individuality which is manipulated and classified within a relationship of power (Juteau-Lee 1995:21). Morrison has succeeded in compressing the prejudice of a misguided people onto Sethe's back.

Manifest within the provision of this symbol is a sense of the reality it provides that group for its imagined superiority. Intriguingly, in Morrison's aesthetic, their scrape in their ground will preserve what is best in Sethe for future contemplation, minus the mark: a future consciousness fully aware of the appropriation of millions of individuals and the subsequent modes of consciousness it generated.

A unity, at whose heart is the individuality of the subjects who make it up, suggests a unity in time not achievable in a novel which, it is argued, produces from the past a fragment of that time conducive to the 'concerns' of the present (Benjamin 1999:247). The sense too that this individuality has been manipulated and classified by others, lends itself to an introspection not able to be fully realized in the singularly motivated character operating within a tragic framework. The point to be made here is that this unity in awareness is expressive of a frame of mind desirable in African Americans in real time. Identity and individuality in this sense become interwoven as a characteristic of a group in real time who are cognizant of the prescriptive nature of its classification by others, but not confined or defined by it. Morrison can be said to be bent on establishing a class consciousness at whose centre is the amalgamation of the exceptional with the universal: a condition lost and found as it were in the distance this novel travels from a person who, in self-consciously adjusting to experiences, sifts and monitors them in relation to a received idea of herself, to one bereft.

Seth's final confrontation with schoolteacher at 124 is the presentation of the limitless power he exercises over his slaves and their children. It is the confrontation between a group classified by itself as beyond nature, and one 'immured in it' (Guillaumin 1995:230). We find that the more limitless the

domination 'the more insistent and "obvious" will be the idea of the "nature" of the appropriated ones' (234).

This situation is particularly difficult for the artist to circumscribe within the confines of a themed narrative. As we have seen, Morrison's use of the tragic form brings to the situation a recognisable, human being, but also one whose behaviour exceeds accepted or reasonable limits. Many interpretations of this scene comment on the extent to which Sethe has been driven to commit such a crime as the murder of her own daughter by the circumstances of slavery and inhuman treatment. However, Sethe declares that if she had not killed her herself, Beloved would have 'died' (Morrison 2004:236). In a statement redolent with dramatic irony, Sethe registers the sixty million and more slaves who died leaving no trace of their loss. However, Beloved survives as the incarnation of Sethe's personal loss, and as such, registers loss. Rodrigues (1998:155) points out that 'Sethe's ordeal is told in pieces that are scattered through all sections of Part One', and implies that the unbearable intensity of the scene is relieved in this way. This is certainly the case, but the repercussions of this scene and its aesthetic reach attach themselves to other voices and other concerns in a style formed to mitigate the views of its observers. During their comments, Guillaumin's quote above reverberates among the rights and freedoms of those whose recommendations of themselves are confirmed by their perceived lack in others. Schoolteacher confirms Sethe's animal nature by berating the nephew for ruining a useful slave who makes 'fine ink', 'irons his shirts' just so, and has '10 breeding years left': beating a horse or dog 'beyond the point of education' will cause the animal to 'revert' at the most unexpected time and bite 'clean off' the hand who reared it

(Morrison 2004:176). The domination, or rather over domination, of a captive slave and her reactions to the most debasing circumstances is here shown to reinforce the nature prescribed for her by her knowing owners. All the 'efforts' to educate this 'base' native had failed because, 'you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success' (176). This last comment is schoolteacher's, ironically delivered through a stream-of-consciousness technique developed, we argue, to provide insight into the 'inner being' of the modern character whose actions, to be significant, can only ever relate to a flaw in character or fate. This line of thought allows us to add to Guillaumin's quote, 'the more insistent and "obvious" will be the idea of the "nature" of the appropriated ones' (1995:234), the words, 'in the eyes of the dominators'. Morrison (2004) has succeeded in damning schoolteacher within his own consciousness, and his nephew's repeated 'what she go and do that for' (176) only adds to the sense of isolation in which they exist and which contributes to their inability to relate to anyone else save themselves. For him, to murder her child is an extreme reaction to the beating Sethe received, when in his own experience he had received the same if not worse: 'Hell, he'd been beat a million times and he was white' (176). His reasoning that for white people a beating is more degrading than for someone who is black speaks volumes for the centrality he feels he occupies in the world of slaves and masters.

The full necessity of Morrison's designs becomes apparent when we register the brief sentences which delineate Sethe's reasons for the assault on her children. The main point here is that whether it is this scene or others distributed throughout the novel, *Beloved* cannot survive in the presence of the white, controlling power. She will also be rejected by members of her own community.

Sethe's account of the return of schoolteacher, and his intention once more to enslave her and her children, is given as an explanation to Paul D for her actions that day; taking place two decades after the event, it nails down in a conversation between two people scarred by slavery, the extent to which those scars are able to dissemble and destabilise any effort to establish a sense of self-awareness for themselves. Distanced from the event, it brings into consideration, during her conversation with Paul D, an awareness of the devastating isolation which follows the decision to come from behind the veil.

In these terms, it is argued, coming from behind the veil expresses the will to be free of the chokecherry tree on her back and all that it insinuates about her in the eyes of those who manipulate and marginalise her. As we have seen, her own opinions of her worthiness remain to be spoken elsewhere, preserving meanwhile her actions in the woodshed as her response to losing 'every bit of life she had made' (192). What is at stake here is personal to Sethe, and her response to losing 'all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful' is to carry, push or drag them 'through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them' (192). At the height of her tragic denouement Sethe, marked forever as base and animalistic, proves the existence of her precious and fine humanity by killing it. In modern literature it is a surrender whose magnitude is cognizant with the complex emotional or aesthetic influences at work in the novel. It signals a void where previously a burgeoning individual consciousness had become visible but which now registers a nothingness engineered by the demands of the controlling power. It means there can be no individual aspiration or self-awareness beyond the veil or its tangible sign, which is the mark of imposition Amy Denver calls a

chokecherry tree. But it leaves behind an individual who seeks, incessantly, to disprove its insinuations by attempting to reform what has been obliterated.

In these terms, Morrison's avoidance of colour with the use of the mark on Sethe's back becomes the means which not only registers the source of the imposition she lives, but which also serves as a permanent reference to the difficulty of expressing any human sensibilities other than from behind the veil. Guillaumin's insight (1995) that the result of the 'natural' label is that single individuals will be seen as representative of the whole is an apt description of Sethe's fate as she steps out from behind the veil. The comments of schoolteacher and his nephew register their view of her actions as simply expressing the nature of an undifferentiated mass. This makes us keenly aware of the dilemma faced by the African American artist in their relationship with the community, and the desire to write what each member of it has lost at the behest of an imposition which disassembles what individuality actually is: imposition and power transposes, we argue, the right of free expression into a claim to those human qualities possessed only by those in power. Speaking the unspeakable becomes for the slave a parody of white supremacy, a travesty of human qualities.

Sethe's aim is to express her humanity within the world in which she finds herself. Schoolteacher's is to express his superiority in practising it. The consensus within a vilified group is for each member to regain their self-respect without the means to do so other than contemplating a confrontation with those forces responsible for their demise. Implicit in their group awareness is the vulnerability manifest in who they are thought to be, and the measures to take in opposition to this. Shared humiliations can only be managed behind a veil which at

the same time confirms, in this silence, their continued existence. Expression by the individual without means in this situation is to reject the behind-the-veil consensus for recovery and the means to which the majority turn, that is, an acknowledgement but not recovery of a past conducive with the pride and moral sense the people have lost. Free expression in the shadow of the veil becomes individuality. And although coveted and recognised by members of all groups, it is denied to those deemed as the possessors of a base nature, whose pride and purpose can only become them in their enforced isolation. In those circumstances individuality has no reference points, no indulgences or recognitions within those social rites of passage which profligate in other groups. Refutation of the mark is impossible, and tearing aside the veil is tantamount to destroying, knowingly, the precious idea at the heart of us because the encroaching, permanent mark says it cannot be otherwise. The tragic framework within which this happens is enhanced by the reference to the veil which secures for Morrison the full import of the loss suffered by Sethe.

Its inclusion leaves behind an individual who seeks, incessantly, within the void in which she exists beyond the veil, to reform what has been obliterated. Morrison's strategies allow her to differentiate between a consciousness formed in human aspiration and one formed in recovering from its loss. Schreiber (2010) refers to the void existing beyond the veil as encountering 'one's own nothingness' (17), and as the result of attempting to create 'a sense of self' (16). In this argument, a sense of self becomes an impossibility because its 'imaginary wholeness is a virtual one' in that the subject has constructed it herself. This construction 'crumbles' in the face of the gaze of 'outside forces' (17), and,

consequently, in Lacan's terms, that which determines the subject 'at the most profound level...is the gaze that is outside' (Lacan 1979:106). Any imaginary wholeness at this stage disappears as it is confronted by others outside itself, and the reaction of the individual is to attempt to establish a 'coherent sense of self through recognition from the outside world' (Schreiber 2010:17). For Schreiber, Lacan's (1979) analysis of subjectivity quickly becomes an 'identification with whiteness' which 'results from the desire to be recognized as an authentic self' (17). Pecola and Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison 1970) 'exemplify this phenomenon' (Schreiber 2010:17). On these terms, the black character's idea of herself crumbles because of the 'lack of any' recognition from white culture and is replaced by an attempt to become white 'because blacks must identify with whiteness' if they are to avoid nothingness (17).

In the sense that Pecola and Pauline (Morrison 1970) can be said to fulfil this argument, Morrison's *Beloved* moves away from this position, markedly. Sethe's sense of self is intricately woven into the presence of her children and when it is challenged by schoolteacher's instructions to his nephews to write down her human and animal characteristics, this does not fragment her understanding. Her reaction is to escape from Sweet Home in order to preserve the best of herself. That which determines Sethe is her personal and intimate understanding of herself, and is immune to outside forces. Prior to her escape there is an authenticity constructed within her which resonates within the outside world of the novel's presence.

Frantz Fanon (1967) endorses the idea of the gaze and points out that the 'self-esteem' sought by the 'black man' can only be provided by the white man: 'the



other (in the guise of the white man)...alone can give him worth' (154). However, this is because the claim for self-esteem is made from a position of inferiority. Fanon claims that in 'the man of colour there is a constant effort to run away from his individuality, to annihilate his own presence' in order to become white: 'whenever a man of colour protests, there is alienation', resulting in, we can assume, the need to seek verification and acknowledgement in whiteness to 'compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human' (98). Morrison's character, Sethe, appears, then, to be authentic only in the sense that she seeks confirmation of her own image in whiteness as a matter of course. However, it is worth pointing out that Fanon's comments reveal that he is very aware of the extent to which an African American would seek identification through whiteness, and the difficulties which arise for the individual in doing this, or in avoiding it. As a consequence, we could posit that if authenticity is an illusion, then how do we account for the presence of self-awareness within this conflict (Webster 2002)? We argue that the act of annihilation in Morrison's *Beloved* is far removed from Fanon's presentation of individual consciousness. In Fanon's (1967) reasoning, the 'discrimination' imposed on him by the white man results in an 'inferiority complex' which debilitates to such a degree that the superiority driving its imposition becomes greater the more severe the imposition becomes. In this situation a 'dependency complex' replaces an inferiority complex as the individual seeks authentication in the method of his detractors as the only way out. In opposition to this, Morrison's aesthetic response indicates that annihilation follows the will to establish a presence, and her purpose in denying the individual the ability to recover into whiteness or anything else, is the fulfilment of Fanon's wish to

present 'the problems or the potentialities' of men and women of colour as recognisable concerns of the 'present time' (108).

In Morrison's tragic framework, far from asking for her humanity to be acknowledged, Sethe destroys herself, the best of herself, as the response to the power which overwhelms her. In both Fanon and Morrison the humanity of the oppressed is not the issue. Rather, it is in the reaction to whiteness of the oppressed in which they differ. Fanon points out that prior to any white presence, men and women of colour 'live' out their idea of themselves within their communities as human beings. With the arrival of the white man, or in the presence of the white man, this idea of self is challenged through discrimination and marginalization to the extent that men and women have to account for their humanity as people of colour. In Fanon's words, from this position of 'brute beast' (98), the appeal to be human must be addressed to white superiority from black inferiority. In order to have his humanity recognised, Fanon says 'I will quite simply try to make myself white...will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human' (98). Fanon's conclusion is that this is a 'society that proclaims the superiority of one race' (100), but we must add to that and call it a society where humanness is coloured white, and a wish to be human is transposed into a wish to be white.

Morrison, likewise, presents her character as fully human. However, as a tragic figure, Sethe's appeal is not delivered from a position of inferiority but from a highly defined character in a highly defined situation. Her act of self-destruction in this context ensures that her claim is seen as one emanating from a human being and not from a black figure seeking fulfilment in whiteness. Intriguingly, it is

Morrison's choice of a tragic framework which will advance Fanon's desire for a 'conclusion applicable to the situation, the problems or the potentialities' of people of colour 'in the present time' (108). We argue that for her, 'the image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' (Benjamin 1999:247). The words, 'its own concerns', shift the emphasis onto the images through which human beings will be able to interpret their situation and that of those around them in human terms. The point here is that the image cannot express in the present its own concerns other than in the human concerns of that particular time, or rather the image is to be constructed with the human concerns of the present in mind. This will mean that, in Morrison's terms, the events which occur at any given time are not the result of that particular time but examples of how human beings behave and of what human beings do. It is not a case of history repeating itself over and over again, but simply human behaviour: that is, behaviour which remains constant in different contexts. Benjamin warns that 'the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule', and argues for a 'conception of history that is in keeping with this insight' (248).

Consequently, when we refer to the concerns of the present time, Morrison wishes us to see them as the symptoms of the human condition, and to be addressed in line with human interests. In this sense, the attempt to seek verification in whiteness is transposed into the presentation of human sensibilities. In effect, Morrison has moved away from the idea of a subject seeking 'the establishment of a coherent self through recognition from the outside world' (Schreiber 2010:17) to the ability or inability to recognise other human beings. The

common denominator in Sethe's successful or unsuccessful attempt is Sethe. What does this say about those, who in their rejection of her, fail to recognise her? Morrison is pointing out that where there is prejudice and marginalization, the presence of human interests will be misread as an appeal to the powerful. This is borne out by Schreiber's feeling that Morrison's characters are 'searching for a coherent self that the mirror and the symbolic structure do not provide' (18): reference to the mirror here is Schreiber's use of Lacon terminology for the individual's construction of an imaginary self which fragments on contact with the wider world. This would mean that, in Schreiber's terms, human concerns and spiritual concerns are imaginary, and that once this phase is over, a new sense of self emerges conducive to the conditions in the wider world, all at the expense of the individual's lost humanity. It can be argued that individuals, in this hegemonic society, prioritise their sense of belonging over their spiritual concerns. Morrison is pointing out that this is the situation which fosters the impression that, because human concerns are not recognised, any claim made by the outsider is a plea for verification in whiteness. The site of this situation is the hegemonic society whose interpretations, concerning the claims of the outsider, mirror the extent to which the symbolic structure has replaced its ideas concerning individual spiritual interests, and inflected its own writings. Alongside Morrison's tragic framework in *Beloved*, Schreiber's claims concerning the search for an authentic self appear to have developed within the logic of a symbolic structure which has forgotten its own role in this situation. An idea of the sea change that has taken place during Sethe's flight from schoolteacher is the vision for the future formulating and incarnate in Denver. This is expressed in a remarkable piece of allegoric writing following

immediately on Denver's birth, and worth repeating in full. In it is Morrison's presentation in the past of the problems and potentialities of men and women of any colour as recognisably human concerns of the present.

'Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the river bank float towards the water in silver-blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects-but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one-will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself.'

(Morrison 2004:99)

The centre of attention here is the bluefern spores observed by the speaker who is situated at the water's edge. This is significant in itself because we can argue that the presentation of water in this novel is equivalent to the unknown past which figures prominently in the slaves' perceptions as they struggle in vain to recover a sense of dignity. The spores float on the wind involuntary towards the water, but cannot be seen if you are not among them. The water, here, appears as an appealing but solitary option for those not recognised by anyone who cannot share their concerns. The water waits for the inevitable arrival of the seeds which contain the dreams of a whole generation. The inference is that, immersed in the past, each seed will be fulfilled in its yearning to live out a future concomitant with its potential. However, something that is easy to believe is to be challenged and the message is brutal. For this reason, this piece of writing absorbs, allegorically, the bitter truth that the past must be abandoned because it cannot deliver those

expectations which have no other means of expression or fulfilment. The certainty it offers, the remedy it claims for emptiness, lasts no longer than a moment. This is the voice of one whose humanity is denied, but in an awareness of her situation realises that her dream is the result of something which has been lost already, a replacement for it. For her, the past can no longer substitute for the present, she must live in her present the way her ancestors lived in theirs. Past and present simply represent the identical ground of an unchanging human conflict, and rejecting the significance claimed for them is the expression of a consciousness born out of human considerations of the human condition.

The introduction of the bluefern spores marks precisely the moment of Denver's birth and Amy Denver's determination to make it to Boston to become the woman she feels she is. Arriving at the water's edge, 'Sethe couldn't think of anywhere to go but in', but Amy berates her as 'the dumbest thing' and hauls her and the half-born baby out of the water before they are both drowned (98). This is significant because it is narration which precedes the interruption of the bluefern episode and which returns to the water's edge only to look back as 'two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue' (99) to keep the baby Denver alive.

Throughout, Amy is cast as the estranged white girl who readily and determinedly, although saving the lives of Sethe and her baby, fulfils the spirit expressed in the bluefern section in her determination to move on to Boston. With this in mind, she is the given example of the consciousness Morrison seeks to express in the character Denver as she eventually takes her place in the wider society. Because the narration of past events is framed within a tragic framework which necessarily leaves things as they are, as humanity revealed in its loss, Morrison has to gesture

towards a consciousness which can only be verified in its becoming. The requirements of the tragic mode fit precisely the claims for humanity visible in the tragic form, but those same requirements prevent any inquiry into that form whose motivation was 'in virtue of some inescapable vocation or purpose': Taylor's free existence (1992:160). Essentially, the content in the presentation of form and content is finite. The interruption of the bluefern section is Morrison's method of expressing that which is yet to come at the expense of that which is soon to be lost in Sethe's final confrontation with schoolteacher across the other side of the river. Morrison's 'voice' facilitates the verification of self-verification in a move which, in replacing the spiritualized form, prepares a consciousness in advance of its form. This ensures that traces of alterity and materiality are displaced because Denver and Amy are the forms able to allude to that which is conceivable but 'which cannot be presented' (Lyotard 1986:81): consciousness honed to the human condition.

Present here are two oppressed beings who have a vision for themselves other than that prescribed by the powers they live under. Their rejection by those powers does not lead them to seek verification but to escape. They seek recognition elsewhere in a growing understanding of the false reality inherent in that rejection. Neither Amy Denver nor Sethe are co-opted by the gaze of others. Amy's presence prevents Sethe's immersion in a 'before today' which would mitigate the awful challenge of being true to herself. Morrison is pointing out that what is imagined here is not a self that cannot bear the light of day, but an imaginary sense of history constructed to dispel the machinations of those whose power generates an imaginary reality. And so we argue that the bluefern voice is the voice of a knowing consciousness that is not available to the imagination but is

represented in allegory. Tambling points out (2010:94) that Mary Shelley and Emily Dickinson 'use allegory as a way of evoking what cannot be represented, or has no identity which can be publicly validated.' We argue that this is the sense of Morrison's use of the allegorical in her need to evoke that which Sethe can never achieve because of the signifier on her back which facilitates and sustains schoolteacher's story telling. This knowing consciousness, then, is an acknowledgement that the humanity visible in Sethe's tragic demise ends in that demise. It is a consciousness born out of this realisation and one whose knowledge is a product of Sethe's loss. It perpetuates this sense into a future where, even though verification will be misread or unrecognised, it is known to exist: unrecognised it cannot ask or claim, but can only remain the hidden essence of the marginalized. And this is the singular evidence for the knowledge apparent in the bluefern voice. This knowing refers to the coming refusal of the humanity the individual recognises in itself when its humanity is denied. We are moving from its representation by Sethe to its ownership by Denver; from the harmony of form and content to loss of harmony, hidden content, and silence. When Denver walks into a world dominated by white people, we are aware of the knowledge she owns. And reflecting on Fanon's concerns with the present time, her presence is the presence of the consciousness from which Fanon draws his own telling insights. They reciprocate each other's knowledge in their experience of marginalization, and because of this their knowledge is applicable to the presence, at any one time, of the vagaries of human behaviour. They become a class of people who are aware of their worldly situation because their knowledge is reciprocally validated in the difficulties of the now, not in a before now. Fanon's wishes for the future are here



now in a consciousness prepared for him which is not available to the imagination, but in a moment of reciprocation. The future becomes now in that moment.

Ralph Ellison (1972) has said that 'the great clashes of social history no less than the painful experience of the individual' are given meaning through the imagination and personal vision of the writer 'who transforms them into art'. Meaning is provided, he concludes, because in this transformation they become 'imbued with human values'. The events become, then, 'what the writer makes of them' (145). In a different approach, Houston Baker (1980) provides a contrast to Ellison's insights by referring to the theoretical and critical assumptions which 'regard the question of artistic function as one occasioning an analysis of the content in which works of art exist' (142). Because this implies a relationship between literature and culture, there has grown up, he says, 'a sense of an essential reciprocity between black art and black culture'. Consequently, the 'evaluation of black art is a reality' (142). However, pointing out that 'white America has spent billions of dollars and a great amount of repressive energy to ensure the dominance of white meanings' (130), what if, he asks, 'the webs of meaning' established in the relationship between black art and culture, different as they are from those meanings 'conceived within' white creativity, 'escape the white critic altogether' (154). And because of his emphasis on the context in which the artistic function takes place, he can say that 'a case can certainly be made for the cultural specificity of meaning' (154). However, along with the risk of isolation of meaning in relation to white critical inquiry, an art whose meanings are derived from its production within a collectivity could be described as the expression of a group engaging with itself as the possessor of one pervasive, unchanging consciousness.

In its particular situation it would be ignored and its individuals defined by their chosen sense of expression.

On the one hand we have meaning as emanating from the artist's personal vision and imagination, and on the other meaning emanating from an essential reciprocity between black art and black culture. Alongside both of these hovers the power of the controlling group whose meanings, we have argued, are sustained, as a result of that power, through signification. Considering Ellison's comments on the artist's ability to imbue painful experience with human value, cultural meaning becomes sidelined by the reciprocity between human experiences whose human value is communicable across a range of concerns. As we have seen, Morrison chooses to accentuate in human terms the meanings she wishes to represent. When we contrast this with the idea of a relationship between black art and black culture, which is warped to the machinations of the controlling power, we find that it is able to facilitate meaning through a projection of individual knowledge of that warping and the million dollars spent. We have, as it were, a consciousness imbued with human values projected into a group whose adoption by its individuals generates a unity between them. Black art then becomes a presentation of a worthy human condition in the presence of its detractors. Instead of deriving meanings from a cultural context, it validates human awareness which is able to signify on black culture, making it something which is lived and not inherited. In this sense, the provision of worth for the individual validates her as a member of a class, and as a contributor to culture in her own right. We can say that Morrison's projection validates the individual in the cultural situations that must be addressed, and in those occurring in the wider context of the controlling power.

Fanon's sense of the anguish generated in the need to survive in a world of white power is an indication of the subtlety Morrison must engage with in order to delineate the true situation of the individual character whose disparagement is more complete the more human her expression. Sethe's attempt to express and preserve the best of herself results in the imposition of a mark whose power disassembles everything. Simply to speak out is unthinkable and yet verification in whiteness is rejected to preserve, outside the veil, a most singular humanity. Sethe does, in Fanon's terms turn away from her own presence to face nothingness, but as the price of preventing its disintegration and to signal the boundless extent of white power over her and the horrible consequence for human kind active in the grounds of its source. In a framework of tragedy, symbolism and aestheticism, the murdered Beloved verifies the humanity within a subjugated human character.

In attempting to maintain the centre of interest and activity on the slave as an individual and to write the unwritable, Morrison's chosen ground is the void beyond the veil and not the individual's situation behind it. Living outside the veil in Morrison's terms is to have to live bereft of any worth. This, of course, hovers around Du Bois's presentation of the prejudice afflicting the African Americans of his own generation, and their attempts to mitigate its severity. However, in Morrison's hands the distressing effects of living under the gaze, that is, of developing behaviours which suit a white presence, are now replaced by a life in isolation which is the result of declaring a life force unfettered by white influences or one implicated in white centrality. The images procured through Du Bois's (1994[1903]) veil signalled the condition of a whole people, and their response to

marginalization and degradation. Now, Morrison takes up the veil to discard it in order to present an individual who becomes bereft.

Although marked and measured as representative of the mass of people she is leaving, stepping from behind the veil confirms a refusal to contemplate life on white terms. This means that rejoining the community, as the one option left to her, is to replace nothingness with the modal behaviours consonant with life behind the veil. Because the mark on her back and the veil will now be linked to a nature imposed from outside, the singularity of her action distances her not only from the manipulations of white people, but also from the collectivity developing among her own group who, seeking to preserve their self-respect behind the veil, will not or cannot contemplate existing in a void of their own choosing. Implicit in their group awareness is the vulnerability of who they are thought to be, and the measures to be taken in opposition to this.

Refusing to contemplate or deliver any fragment of human sensibility complicit with white demands is to lose, through lack of expression, that which the individual seeks to preserve. In Morrison's use of the mark and the veil, this refusal is enacted as self-inflicted in a sign that the individual concerned has no wish to exist as anything other than that which they seek to preserve but lose. In a context reminiscent of *Nel and Sula* (Morrison 1973), this means that in rejoining the community, the knowledge gained in any experience cannot be communicated to individuals in the community who find it impossible to imagine themselves on the outside of that community. Morrison's choice of narrative technique means that there is no substitute for the expression of a life force stifled within a system where humanity and animality are transposed. Morrison's requirement in expressing a

most personal loss is for the precise delineation of a most personal individual, one in whom the extent of that loss must be displayed in action. Within this requirement, the chorus-like urgings of the community cannot provide a sufficiently personal conduit through which the individual can communicate her desires, nor any indication of the consciousness required in any relations with the white world. Morrison's use of 'veil' imagery provides a comprehensive understanding of life without its cover. Instead of the veil facilitating the notion of a double consciousness in which the marginalized individual is fully aware of the life force which must remain hidden in order for her to survive, Morrison's imagery implies that because there is nothing it can be replaced by, either it is or it is not, it requires an act of will for it to be realised. In existential terms, (Flynn 2006) the individual can only know herself in her humanness and, consequently, there can be no sense of being in denying it expression. Sethe's act of will is Morrison's aesthetic response to the horror inflicted on the individual who is considered as chattel. Because the slave's response to her master's measuring can only be the expression of a life force of which she is deemed unworthy, she can only live in a moment of willed expression which lasts no longer than that. The conflict we are faced with, in the contrast between Morrison's and Schreiber's reasoning, is the difference between an imagined self not surviving in real time, and Morrison's expression of a vibrant sense of self which is stifled by controlling imagined selves finding their reality in the machinations of their own powerful group. In refusing to have our cake and eat it too, we must acknowledge that any reality whose vital interest lies in its subjugation of others is at heart seeking confirmation of the recommendations it awards itself. This is not the result of the individuals

concerned finding their expression in an adjustment to an existing structure, but the opposite; that is, the manipulation of reality to confirm an imagined superiority practised in the subjugation of others as the natural right of those for whom their superiority is self-evident.

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